H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Redles. *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation.* New York: New York University Press, 2005. x + 261 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-7524-0.

Reviewed by Peter Petschauer (Department of History, Appalachian State University)
Published on H-Genocide (March, 2007)

The Search for a Final Solution: The Nazi Millennial Program

David Redles informs his readers early on of the purpose of his book *Hitler's Millennial Reich.* "What follows, then, is a study of myth. In particular, it is a study of how the apocalypse complex helped shape Hitler's messianic self-perception, propelled the formation, growth and success of the Nazi movement, and ultimately gave impetus to what the Nazis termed the Final War and Final Solution–World War II and the Holocaust" (p. 13). From this clear articulation, Redles moves through six equally clearly delineated chapters.

In "A World Turned Upside Down," he speaks of the earliest steps of the National Socialist movement in the context of the post-World War I economic, social, and cultural chaos. He continues with "The Turning Point," in which he shows how the early Nazis found inspiration in the chaos of Weimar Germany when they identified Jews as the originators of Germany's difficulties. They also determined that Germans and Jews would face each other in a final struggle and told themselves that the Jewish Bolshevik menace would end in defeat. In the third chapter, "Seeing the Light," Redles offers detailed accounts and quotes of conversions of some of the earliest Nazis to the cause. "Hitler as Messiah" is the logical next chapter and Redles here illustrates how Hitler became the "Drummer," Messiah, and Prophet–really the leader–of the movement. But since leaders need followers, Redles rightly offers this link in the fifth chapter, "The Messiah Legitimated." Particularly fascinating in this discussion is how he shows Hitler's ability to express Nazi followers' thoughts and desires in his speeches. Redles concludes with "Final Empire, Final War, Final Solution," a careful analysis of how Hitler and his immediate following arrived at the Final Solution as a direct outcome of the earliest moments of the movement when they anticipated the struggle between Germans and (Bolshevik/Communist) Jews.

Having personally known a number of Nazi officials and having read–over the last twenty-five years–more than the usual information about National Socialist ideology and its various horrid activities, as I sorted out the role of a number of SS members, I applaud Redles's thesis and its defense. Very importantly, he maintains that the National Socialist (NS) elite and followers believed in what they said, and not just about Bolsheviks and Jews. Some recent scholars, maybe because of their own cynicism or their reaction to more current leaders, doubt that NS leaders believed their own rhetoric that ultimately allowed for multiple heinous human rights violations. Redles is right on target. To be specific, my father, as a member of the diplomatic SS, felt betrayed by the regime he had served and admired America's past accomplishments in a number of areas, especially culturally; this following the loss of World War II and three years in American camps. Nevertheless, to the end of his life, he retained his fear of Soviet-styled communism and believed that it would take over the West; he was certain of this outcome because, according to him, the West was in an irreversible cultural decline at least since the 1960s.

As early as the beginning of the 1920s, National Socialists wanted to create a millennial state that would, as the term implies, last permanently, and be free of the chaos that surrounded them in Weimar Germany. As they reflected on their world and read various tracts, they determined that Jews were the principal reason for the loss of World War I, the calamity at Versailles, and the disruptive postwar environment. While Redles's discussion of the emergence of NS's apocalyptic belief is clear, and its appeal to men of the time makes immense sense, I do wonder why he did not make more of Hitler's early life in Austria, where his earlier hatred of Jews was learned; the contemporaneous suspicions of Jews in the upper levels of the Weimar government; and the awareness of Jews in several prominent positions in the early Soviet Union.

Equally admirable is Redles's willingness to disassemble the issue of the Final Solution's first steps. As indicated, he shows that this idea had its beginnings in the

1920s and discusses how it became a key aspect of the NS ideology. He amasses convincing evidence that the so-called Final Solution was not decided at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, as is commonly taught; the purpose of that conference was simply to determine how to most efficiently carry out the details of this goal. The overall goal was decided earlier and–as we now know–carried out ruthlessly. The reality is that as soon as areas were taken over by the Wehrmacht (regular army) in Eastern Europe, the SS followed with the systematic killing of Jews. In Vilna, for example, the Jewish leadership was eliminated in early July 1941 as the first step to the systematic murder of almost the entire Jewish population.[1] The idea of an all-out war on European Jews, that is, not moving them east or to the Middle East, or even into labor camps, but murdering every last one of them, thus goes further back as well.

Especially interesting for scholars is the appendix entitled "The Hitler Gospels and Old Guard Testimonials: Reconstructing a Mythical World" (pp. 919-201); it is an excellent discussion of the use of sources pertaining to the NS doctrine.

I recommend Redles's *Hitler's Millennial Reich* to the general reader as well as graduate students and scholars interested in NS ideology. I also recommend it as a lesson in how an ideology is used by shrewd leaders and their believers to overtake a society legitimately, then turn it on perceived enemies, and, finally, sadly, turn it on itself. Anyone who thinks that such an apocalyptic belief is the exclusive domain of Germans, or Germany of the 1930s and 1940s, is unfortunately mistaken.

Note

[1]. Michael Good, *In Search of Major Plagge: The Nazi Who Saved Jews* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Peter Petschauer. Review of Redles, David, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation*. H-Genocide, H-Net Reviews. March, 2007.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12999

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.