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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Gerhard L. Weinberg. *Germany, Hitler, and World War II: Essays in Modern German and World History.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995. vi + 347 pp. $27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-47407-8.

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Published on H-German (September, 1995)

For historians, students, archivists, and the general public, it is good to have at hand this compact volume of essays by one of the great experts on the history of Germany and the Second World War. While the author was working for fourteen years on his magisterial history of World War II, *A World at Arms* (1994), he also found time and energy for a series of widely varied and very challenging essays, each of which gives a novel and non-hackneyed point of view on an old and familiar problem. In fact these essays are so illuminating and have been so well received that copies of the volume disappeared immediately after its initial appearance and a new printing had to be arranged.

Though most of the essays have appeared as articles and conference papers over the past three decades, the author has revised them to reflect both new scholarship and new access to archival sources. References are sensibly provided at the bottom of the pages and are therefore easily accessible. Weinberg divides the volume into four parts: "Background," "The Nazi System," "The Background for War," and "World War II." Surprisingly all of the essays fit nicely into these categories despite the fact that the author wrote them at different and nonsequential times. It would go beyond the limits of this review to comment individually on each of the twenty-three essays in a meaningful way, but several particularly seminal ones deserve extensive mention.

The first group of essays includes a discussion of the German defeat of 1918 and an assessment of the Versailles Peace Treaty, which has been incorrectly maligned in the author's view. Weinberg does not consider the treaty to have been particularly harsh or unreasonable; instead he reasons that the parochialism that gripped Germany persuaded its inhabitants that they alone were suffering and that an unjust peace had been imposed on them. Since the Germans had never envisaged the possibility of losing the war, defeat came as an especially bitter shock. Also included in this group of essays is "The World Through Hitler's Eyes" which originally appeared in *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany* (1970) and which contains the author's considered opinion of Hitler's world view. "In 1933," says Weinberg, "Hitler's ideology consisted primarily of two related systems of ideas, acquired and developed in chronological sequence. The doctrine of race took form first and is clearly delineated by 1923; the partly derivative doctrine of space came to be defined, in the formulation to which Hitler subsequently adhered, in the immediately following years "(31-2). Hitler's aims thus included vast agricultural settlement areas in Eastern Europe – enough to satisfy a growing German population for ages to come – along with the racially-inspired elimination of the original inhabitants. To expand and consolidate the position of the German *Volk* for all time, Hitler envisioned a series of wars. Germany would first attack the decadent West in order to eliminate all future threats from that area. After France and possibly Great Britain had been defeated, Germany would attack the Eastern European states, particularly Poland and the Soviet Union. Finally, Germany would confront the United States. This argument forms the background to all of the subsequent essays. The chapter "Propaganda for Peace and Preparation for War" in Part II explains Hitler's foreign policy ideas at greater length, showing that they were closely linked to internal policies, which in turn were based on racial principles. These racial principles manifested themselves against Jews and Poles while also fitting together with the unending campaign against the Versailles Treaty.

"Germany, Munich, and Appeasement" in Part III deserves careful study. In the space of ten pages, Weinberg outlines the background of Hitler's decision to seek Czechoslovakia's complete destruction through arms in 1938 and describes Hitler's fury when the Munich negotiations deprived him of his war. Compromise over Czechoslovakia resulted because the European powers dreaded the possibility of a conflict for which they were unprepared. Hitler had to settle for the Sudetenland, which was to have been the pretext for war. Closely allied with this piece is the chapter entitled "The Ger-

man Generals and the Outbreak of War, l938-1939." It describes the German command's basic assumption that war would be "an acceptable instrument of national policy for Germany, as well as for other countries" (131). It is striking to contrast this idea with the fervent present day assurance that a war will never again be started from German soil. The German generals do not rank highly in the author's esteem in any case. In Part IV (289) he takes them to task for smokescreening the truth in their memoirs and for accepting large bribes from Hitler in the form of landed estates and cash gifts. Of special interest in Part IV are also the chapters dealing with the German perception of Pearl Harbor and a wrap-up chapter on "Global Conflict" where the author discusses the interaction between the European and Pacific theaters of war.

The final essay reflects on the fate of the sources for twentieth century history and contains admonitions dear to the hearts of historians, archivists, and librarians. The poor quality of twentieth century paper condemns it to decomposition. Stringent and for the most part nonsensical security classifications thus need to be changed. Government departments must institute proceedings to do their own screening and classification and they must also foster a spirit of much greater accessibility. The rush to store information on computer disks combined with the constant demand to upgrade computer software and hardware will, moreover, bring about a state where such source materials will be unreadable on current state-of-the-art machinery. To preserve precious source materials, the author recommends the tried and true method of microfilming. It is interesting to recall in this connection that Gerhard Weinberg was the first director of the American Historical Association's project in the 1950s which microfilmed the so-called Captured German Records – a project which has been a boon to historical scholarship ever since. This thoughtful essay provides an appropriate conclusion to this volume, which as a considerate, carefully reasoned, and well-documented fiftieth year assessment of the World War II era will be consulted by scholars for many years.

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Citation: Agnes F. Peterson. Review of Weinberg, Gerhard L., *Germany, Hitler, and World War II: Essays in Modern German and World History*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. September, 1995.
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