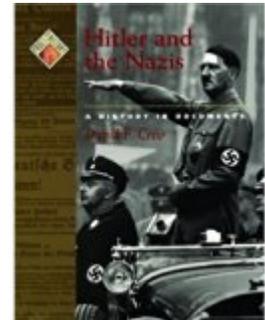


David F. Crew. *Hitler and the Nazis: A History in Documents.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 176 pp. \$36.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-515285-2.



Reviewed by James Konecke

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"If a prisoner attempts to escape, he is to be shot without warning.... If a unit of prisoners mutinies or revolts, it is to be shot at by all supervising guards. Warning shots are forbidden on principle" (p. 97). This directive, taken from the SS Service Regulations for Prisoner Escorts and Guards in 1933, encapsulates the attitude of National Socialism and its leader. From the moment he entered the political arena to the moment he thrust his nation into war, Adolf Hitler increasingly fired verbal warning shots alerting the world to his desires for territory, ethnic "cleansing" and war. But the horrors of World War I still reverberated throughout Eurasia, drowning out Hitler's warning cries. Consequently, when Hitler repeatedly violated the Treaty of Versailles' sanctions, rather than confront him, the Allies sought to appease him in hopes of averting a repeat of the First World War. By the time they realized Hitler's true intentions, it was too late. Germany had grown far too strong during the interwar years to be defeated quickly or easily. The result: a global conflict responsible for claiming the lives of nearly sixty million individuals begun by a racist regime that ruthlessly repressed, incarcerated and eliminated

communists, Sinti and Roma, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, POWs, the "biologically" unfit and Jews. In his most recent work, *Hitler and the Nazis*, David Crew provides a concise and vivid history of this ruthless regime from its origins in German defeat in World War I and in the failure of Weimar democracy to its downfall in World War II and its evaluation by the world in the post-Nazi era.

Seven short chapters make up *Hitler and the Nazis*. Chapter 1 lists and describes the events that allowed National Socialists to come into power in Germany: German defeat in World War I; the failure of Weimar democracy; the economic troubles of the Great Depression; the Nazis' ability to garner the favor of citizens unhappy with the chaotic political situation; and the overwhelming desire of leaders in business, agriculture, the military, and the government (as well as ordinary voters) for a strong authoritarian leader. These factors all contributed to Hitler's meteoric rise to power.

Chapter 2 details this ascent, focusing on Hitler's oratorical gifts, the strength of the SA and

the youthful, forceful image of the Nazi Party. And as soon as they came to power, the Nazis wasted no time in attacking their enemies. In February, a Dutch anarchist with ties to German communism set fire to the Reichstag. The Nazis deemed this event the start of a communist uprising and used it as an excuse for the SA to round up political enemies (communists and socialists). Within a year and a half, however, the power of the SA was making army leaders (upon whose support Hitler relied) very nervous. Hitler chose to purge the SA of nearly two hundred of its leaders during the "Night of the Long Knives."

Once firmly settled into power, the Nazis sought to cement their image in the public mind. They saturated the Reich with propaganda, much of which used Hitler as its focus. Chapter 3 describes (and gives several visual examples) of how Goebbels and the Propaganda Ministry flooded Germany with images to create the myth of Hitler as a statesman, a champion of justice, a military hero and a guardian against political and racial enemies.

Once the Nazis silenced their political enemies, they set to work eliminating their "racial" and "biological" foes as well. This effort is the focus of chapter 4. Realizing that the public would not immediately condone full-blown extermination of such peoples, Hitler set out to alienate such groups, particularly Jews, in the minds of the people. However, the Jews were not the only targets of Nazi oppression. They also singled out Afro-Germans, Sinti and Roma ("gypsies"), homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and anyone else not considered "Aryan." Even "full-blooded" Germans were not safe from the Nazi regime. Many of the "biologically unworthy" (the blind, deaf, schizophrenic, mentally deficient along with epileptics and others) were forced to undergo mass sterilization so as not to spread, from the Nazi viewpoint, their "deficient" genes to future generations.

Chapter 5 details the events of the Second World War from the German perspective, hitting

on the early successes in the Blitzkrieg operations against Poland, Denmark, Norway and France; the Battle of Britain; the invasion of Russia; America's entry into the war; the slowdown and turnaround (Kursk and Stalingrad) in the East; and the war in the air. In the next chapter, Crew traces the evolution of the Holocaust from the two million Jews murdered by the SS Einsatzgruppen (special killing squads who followed the Wehrmacht into the East) and the detention of Jews in filthy, overcrowded ghettos to their transport to the concentration camps and the killing centers of Chelmno, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor and Madjanek. Crew rounds out the chapter by highlighting the voices of rescuers, survivors and resisters.

The final chapter focuses on postwar Germany and describes how the Allies tried to erase all remnants of the Nazi regime (denazification) and to force the Nazi criminals to pay for their crimes (the Nuremberg trials), as well as how both sections of a divided Germany dealt with their dark past. *Hitler and the Nazis* also contains an introduction, an index, lists of suggestions for further reading and of pertinent websites, and a brief timeline of major events in National Socialist history from the birth of Hitler in 1889 to his suicide in 1945. Oddly, Crew neglected to include a concluding chapter, allowing the work to end rather abruptly, thus leaving an unfinished feeling to the book overall.

There are literally thousands upon thousands of books which make Nazism their main focus. So what sets this short, 176-page volume apart? Unlike most histories of the Third Reich, whose authors comb through thousands of primary documents to turn out their own narrow (albeit unique) take on the regime, this one allows those primary works to speak for themselves. In each chapter, Crew introduces the topic with a few short paragraphs. He fills the remaining pages of each section with primary entries related to that particular topic separated by his own remarks

(bold-faced), which provide both an historical overview and background information on that specific entry. The result is a lively, first-person account of the entire history of National Socialism told from a myriad of perspectives: the speeches and writings of Nazi leaders like Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels and Speer; testimonies, interviews and memoirs of SA and SS members, German soldiers and officers and the victims (both male and female) of Nazi terror; foreign newspaper reports (American and British); laws and government documents from Germany and occupied countries; and an impressive collection of visual evidence (propaganda posters, cartoons and pictures). In short, what this volume lacks in length it more than makes for in scope. In such a short work, Crew could not have possibly delved into any facet of the Third Reich in any great detail. However, he makes sure to allow almost every major group or player in that history to be heard, leading to a well-balanced, objective and concise history of the Nazi regime.

Countless illustrations also help bring this short history of the Third Reich to life. Black-and-white maps, propaganda posters, battle scenes, copies of orders and government papers, paintings, models and scores of photos (all with individual captions) appear on no less than every other page of this work. Chapter 3, in particular, consists of little else. The written and visual primary evidence presented throughout the work makes *Hitler and the Nazis* a unique addition to the literature.

Students of history need to be wary of primary documents, however, particularly those from the Nazi era. The state's widespread use of distorted propaganda and euphemisms ("Final Solution" and "special treatment") requires a critical eye. The author's point of view and reasons for writing always need to be taken into account, as well as the place and time in which he or she was writing, as Crew points out in the opening pages of the book. However, Crew includes a number of pri-

mary entries written or recounted decades (sometimes even half a century) after the events in question. That is not to say the authors of such words were deliberately untruthful or misleading. However, the passage of time alone can often fade, distort or even change memories. So, as a word of caution for all students reading Crew's work, one must not accept every entry literally merely because an accomplished and respected historian included them in his book—as Crew himself is quick to point out.

Because Crew seeks to provide merely a short history of Nazism as told through the eyes of all its key players, he does not contribute any new arguments or evidence to the field. However, by making such a rich assortment of primary sources readily available, Crew provides instructors of courses on Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, genocide, World War II, or simply world or even American history with the tools needed to craft attention-grabbing assignments, lectures, projects, reports and classroom discussion questions. For example, in chapter 5, Crew points out that Hitler declared war on the United States shortly after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 even though he was not bound to do so by any treaty. Therefore, a logical question for a teacher to open to the class would be, why did Hitler declare war on the United States when it obviously was not in his best interests militarily to do so?[1] Later in that same chapter, Crew includes a report filed by the Army Supreme Command regarding the conditions of Soviet POWs. Instructors could ask students to create a project comparing and contrasting conditions of POWs with those in the concentration camps. These are just a few examples. Literally every page provides enough information to create an interesting, thought-provoking and informative topic for any of the above-mentioned courses.

In 1994, the Hutus murdered an estimated 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda between April and June alone, leading commentators to draw compar-

isons with the extermination camps of the Holocaust. Recently, dictators such as Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong-il have been compared to Adolf Hitler. The words "Gestapo" and "Auschwitz" and symbols like the swastika and the lightning bolts of the SS still strike fear into the hearts and minds of people today. In short, Nazism was, is, and may well forever be the defining example of terror and destruction in world history. It has, still does and will continue "to live on in our imaginations" (p. 11), thanks in no small part to David F. Crew's condensed, illustrated history of the National Socialist era as told through the eyes of those who experienced it. Crew helps bring this chaotic, shocking, and often gruesome page of history to life, making the volume a necessary resource for anyone teaching on the topics of modern Germany, the Holocaust, the World Wars, race or genocide.

Note

[1]. For more on Hitler's relationship with the United States, see Saul Friedländer, *Prelude to Downfall: Hitler and the United States, 1939-1941* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967); Richard F. Hill, *Hitler Attacks Pearl Harbor: Why the United States Declared War on Germany* (London & Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003); and James P. Duffy, *Target: America: Hitler's Plan to Attack the United States* (Westport, CT & London: Praeger, 2004).

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