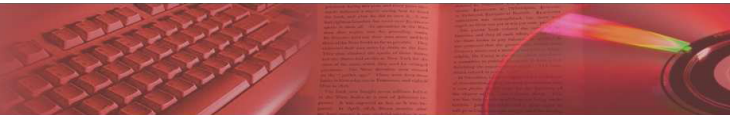


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Lisa Pine, ed. *Life and Times in Nazi Germany*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016. 328 pp. \$35.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4742-1792-7.

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Lisa Pine, one of the most productive historians of everyday life in Nazi Germany, has published another marker in the historiography of ordinary Germans. Detractors have charged this alternative approach to “big man” and structuralist interpretations with undue celebration of “the man on the street.” This collection of ten essays, rich with research and observations, helps demonstrate that history from below does not have to ignore other approaches. Especially when it relates the everyday to political decision-making, it adds dimensions and not just texture. Thus, it is especially well suited to the urgent task, in what might be a new populist era, of confronting ordinary persons with the question of how they contribute to the development and sustenance of autocracy, fascist or otherwise.

Life and Times in Nazi Germany asks how ordinary persons perceived and acted during such an extraordinary time as the Nazi period, raising questions about whether they considered their time to be extraordinary, and if so, when and why. While Hitler and his allies did not succeed in constructing a *Volksgemeinschaft* according to their ideal, the degree to which they did gain and maintain support from the population as long as they were providing incentives for the majority—and at a horrendous price to others—casts a probing light on the learned habits of our species and its trajectories. Pine’s introduction rightly emphasizes the pressures of social conformity and the terror of nonconformity when considering whether most Germans freely chose Nazism or were compelled by terror to accept it. Many must have found themselves somewhere in between, given the familiar urge to make life easier and more rewarding along with the simple lack of experience with resistance or even

nonconformity. Resistance is also tremendously difficult given our propensity to rationalize in ways that comfort and align self-interest with the mainstream, as Victor Klemperer’s diary points out. By the late 1930s almost all Germans could find something to support about the Nazi dictatorship so that, as Pine writes, dissent, complicity, and outright support often coexisted. Not surprisingly, considering the general human condition, Germans “were not equal to the situation,” as Sebastian Haffner observed. Drawing on familiar habits, they tried “to ignore the situation and not allow it to disturb our fun ... to think about unpleasant things as little as possible.”[1]

The book consists of three parts: “Food and Health,” “Lifestyle,” and “Religion.” Nancy Reagin, who has written on women’s political organizations before 1933, offers real insights into the everyday life of “ordinary” Germans, in contrast to a few chapters that focus more on elites. She explores the dictatorship’s efforts to convince Germans to embrace Nazism, using new food-processing and -storage technologies along with enticement, lack of choice, and exhortation, reaching the conclusion that Nazi efforts to reshape consumption and dietary habits “were largely successful” (p. 40). Although it considered women incapable of conducting politics, the dictatorship encouraged women to feel empowered by touting their efforts as critical to Germany’s mission in the big, history-making world of men, war, and conquest (“cooking spoons” became “weapons” during the war). Reagin identifies the key role that looting from foreign territories played in propping up the German food economy and the paltry rations for Jewish Germans, although she did not find time or space to deal with sources on the privations

suffered by foreign forced laborers. Looking back from the 1950s, most Germans remembered the Nazi prewar years as a “good” period, because they themselves had jobs and their own tables were sufficiently set. Pointing out that alcoholics were sterilized while drug addicts were rehabilitated, Jonathan Lewy’s contribution, “Vice and the Third Reich,” argues that the Nazi approach to addiction (with the exception of alcoholism) was remarkably liberal, treating it as a disease (although ending addiction was promoted as a measure to stem antisocial behavior). He mentions but does not develop the special concern the regime had in cautioning women not to smoke. Geoffrey Cocks’s study of illness in Nazi Germany does consider the gendered nature of Nazi policies, which included a focus on promoting women’s health to increase the population. The *Volksgemeinschaft* was a Nazi ideal and the leadership made decisions in light of its goal of persuading Germans to join in constructing it.

Irene Guenther opens the book’s second section with a chapter on the fraught Nazi relationship to women’s fashion. She shows not only the political significance of women for Nazism, but also the limitations the regime recognized on its capacity to get its way within the Reich by sheer brute force. Characteristically, as well, it was the Führer who, in contrast to the cumulative radicalization that he permitted in the persecution of the Jews, intervened to reverse coercive measures taken by regional domestic officials that alienated the *Volk*. Hitler, to protect his image, rescinded a Total War measure by the minister for the economy to ban hair permanents in 1943. He was responding to complaints from women including Eva Braun, although as the war gobbled up chemicals, perms became increasingly rare and expensive. Guenther demonstrates that “clothes provided a tangible sign of inclusion in and exclusion from the *Volks-gemeinschaft*” (p. 101), as outsiders were forbidden to wear the dirndl (traditional *Volk* costume) or the uniforms of Nazified women’s organizations, while others were marked as outsiders on their clothing. Guenther concludes that fashion and fashion magazines served as a smokescreen that, like Hitler’s prolonged refusal to conscript women, attempted to create the impression that war under Nazism would not demand harsh sacrifices.

Kirstin Semmens’s chapter on tourism is an excellent example of how ordinary persons can align their own interests with those of tyranny, just as they have learned to align them with power structures during a democracy, without any thought of resistance. Semmens emphasizes that the Nazis had a big impact on the tourism industry, concluding that “everyday tourism” generally increased

support for Hitler or at least minimized overt resistance, even as it brutalized Jewish professionals, some of them colleagues or associates. *Gleichschaltung* (alignment or coordination) of the travel industry, Semmens finds, was often due to voluntary changes on the local level rather than orders from above, as many tourist professionals traded their autonomy for career advances. To the extent that tourist professionals were a coherent group (and this could be investigated further), Semmens shows them accepting the convenient Nazi claim that tourism united the Germans and promoted patriotism.

David Imhoof’s essay, “Sports, Politics and Free Time,” begins with the intriguing claim that “the history of sport illustrates that Nazi *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) of free-time activities was a two-way street, a process by which average Germans helped to create the Third Reich culture as much as they had it imposed on them” (p. 161). While the expulsion of Jews from the industry and erasure of Jewish sites on tourist maps occurred with brutal rapidity, *Gleichschaltung* was a long process, as traced in Imhoof’s case study of Göttingen, having begun on the initiative of local elites even before Hitler came to power and continuing into the mid-1930s. While masking “Göttingen interests,” townspeople playing, watching, or writing about sports “helped turn Göttingen into a Nazi town,” Imhoff argues (p. 179). Nazi policing and taxation of organizations made use of pre-existing notions of community associated with sports in ways that attracted Germans to the state and even prepared them for war.

Joan Clinefelter’s chapter on art and the *Volks-gemeinschaft* argues boldly that “culture generally and the visual arts specifically formed the core of the *Volks-gemeinschaft*” (p. 189). Before as well as during the war, the arts “provided visual proof of the very essence of German identity and the new society that was being created” (p. 204). As the site of engagement between the German people and Nazi conceptions of art, art exhibitions are of particular interest for Clinefelter, who contends that the struggle between Josef Goebbels and Alfred Rosenberg over German modernists largely played out not between the two Nazi bigwigs but at the local level, through decisions about how to stage individual art shows. Clinefelter argues that the objective of efforts to create a uniquely German style of art was to unite the German people and serve their needs in a way that erased class differences, making the case that the way visual art was presented and consumed functioned as a mechanism for integrating the people into the national community through participation. Art, like fashion, was a representation of Nazi

ideology: both presented modern styles as non-German, influenced by Jews.

This book's final section on religion concerns Protestants, Catholics, and Christmas. To avoid a repetition of the home front unrest that Hitler blamed for Germany's loss of World War I, the dictatorship wanted to fight war without impinging on everyday norms and consumption, although this became increasingly difficult with each year of war. Conversely, churches' practice of their religious customs generally became easier during the war, following Hitler's resolve, delivered as an order during the first days of the war, that all unnecessary provocations of the churches must cease.

Opening the book's final section, on religion, Christopher Probst rightly contrasts Protestant objections to Nazi infringement of traditional religious practices with its occasional objections to the persecution of the Jews. He points out that the Confessing Church did not support Hitler's dream of establishing a Reich Church with a Reich bishop above all other German Protestant bishops, answering to the Führer. Because Party officials could neither turn opinion against these bishops nor agree on how to control them, they referred the decision to Hitler, who appeased the bishops and their churches in order to maintain the forward momentum of his movement. The bishops prevailed because of the public opinion they mobilized. Probst's "Protestantism from the Margins" presents a view not so much from social margins as from the margins of the Protestant ideological spectrum, promulgated by elites. The focus on the Protestant relationship to the advance of the violent persecution of the Jews identifies the difference between antisemitism and anti-Judaism, but more might be made of the range and types of antisemitism and the church's relationship to Nazi biological or "racial" antisemitism. Probst's consideration of Theodor Pauls and Hermann Maas does illustrate the extremes of Protestant thinking about the Jews, showing how Pauls twisted Martin Luther's writings by applying racial concepts of antisemitism while Maas spoke out against Nazi antisemitism and helped Jews to emigrate. One wonders whether these elites represented the views of the Protestant masses.

Kevin Spicer's treatment of "Catholic Life under Hitler" is also more concerned with clergy than parishioners. Focusing on the ways in which the clergy supported or failed to hinder the persecution of Jews, the chapter identifies church opposition, before and during the war, as the self-serving "preservation of their own belief system" (p. 253). Spicer evaluates resistance in

terms of moral behavior while insights about the mechanisms that rendered some forms of opposition more effective than others are missing. Insights into the possibilities, extent, and limits of Catholic opposition are lost in sweeping statements such as that Bishop Sproll "had to flee his home ... after church-state tensions in his region threatened to become deadly" or "the euthanasia programme actually continued uninterrupted" (p. 253) following Galen's protest. Bishop von Galen's protest against euthanasia "at most ... drove Catholics to mistrust state authorities even more.... The Gestapo also acted swiftly and mercilessly against any form of resistance" (p. 253). The dictatorship's response to Galen's protest hardly supports this claim about the Gestapo's reach, and on the other hand the church's failure to resist to the extent possible is not identified. (The bishops ignored Bishop Galen's suggestions to bring the public into opposition by protesting from the pulpit rather than in private; each locale that struggled against the removal of crucifixes from Catholic schools struggled alone rather than as part of a common Catholic front; Johannes Sproll stood alone in refusing to allow sterilizations in the hospital of his diocese, etc.) How much will for resistance was there considering Spicer's conclusion that most Catholics were patriotic, loyal Germans supporting Hitler and few questioned his racial policies?

This book's study of the ways and extent to which the regime succeeded in permeating German cultural and social life ends with Joe Perry's "Christmas as Nazi Holiday." The Nazis wished to take Christianity out of Christmas while aligning the *Volk's* perception of National Socialism with the Christmas mood. The dictatorship tried to "colonize" Christmas, in the description of Perry, like other institutions and holidays that commanded strong popular allegiance or a positive mood. Perry does a fine job of outlining the social and historical context of the development of the Christmas mood in Germany before the dictatorship attempted to repurpose it as a celebration of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. *Völkish* and pre-Christian solstice celebrations interpreted as reflecting the values of Nazism were introduced probably with some success, although it is difficult indeed to access emotions as people experienced them.

Overall, *Life and Times in Nazi Germany* is strong in exposing mechanisms that drove the process of *Gleichschaltung* and in illustrating the development of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, coerced and voluntary. It demonstrates the continuing vitality of everyday life history and would be particularly useful for college courses not only in that field but also twentieth-century German or Euro-

pean history, not to mention courses in Nazi Germany. [1]. Sebastian Haffner, *Defying Hitler* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000), 155.

Note

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