



The Third Reich: A New History

By Michael Burleigh



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A Major Study of One of the Twentieth Century's Darkest Periods

Until now there has been no up-to-date, one-volume, international history of Nazi Germany, despite its being among the most studied phenomena of our time. The Third Reich restores a broad perspective and intellectual unity to issues that have become academic subspecialties and offers a brilliant new interpretation of Hitler's evil rule.

Filled with human and moral considerations that are missing from theoretical accounts, Michael Burleigh's book gives full weight to the experience of ordinary people who were swept up in, or repelled by, Hitler's movement and emphasizes international themes-for Nazi Germany appealed to many European nations, and its wartime conduct included efforts to dominate the Continental economy and involved gigantic population transfers and exterminations, recruitment of foreign labor, and multinational armies.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Humans have a fascination with evil. We long to identify it, quantify it, and understand it. To this end, newspapers frequently splash photographs of murderers with the caption "The face of evil." Heading most lists of the 20th century's most evil people would be Adolf Hitler, but, as Michael Burleigh's tour de force makes clear, evil is not always as cut-and-dried as we would like. The Nazis could not have come to power and committed Germany to a policy of war and genocide without the tacit consent of the German people. This makes Germany as a whole responsible for the crimes committed in its name, but it is clearly wrong to label every German as evil. Through his painstaking research and direct prose, Burleigh slowly builds up a picture of a people desperate for identity and economic prosperity, who, bit by bit, closed off their conscience as the price of their dreams. There was no one cathartic moment when Germany, under the Third Reich, lapsed from goodness into badness; rather, there was an incremental realignment of a collective morality. Burleigh's explanation of this phenomenon is so simple, yet so obviously right, that you can only wonder that it didn't become the generally accepted currency years ago.

Instead of viewing Nazi Germany in purely social, political, and economic terms--though he doesn't ignore these spheres--Burleigh wraps them all into a picture of a country gripped in a religious, messianic fervor, and that which had previously felt inexplicable suddenly seems clear. If you want the nitty-gritty details of the Second World War and the genocide, they are here, retold as well as, if not better than, many of the other histories of this period. But it's Burleigh's take on the people of Germany that makes this book so special. Above all, with similar genocidal wars currently being fought in Kosovo, Rwanda, and Iraq, it makes you think, "Would I be able to resist becoming complicit in such regimes?" This is a must for every 20th-century historian. --*John Crace, Amazon.co.uk*

From Publishers Weekly

After literally thousands of books have been written on the Nazis and their history, the author who attempts another one has to have a compelling reason. Burleigh, professor of history at Washington and Lee University and author of several books on Germany, focuses on the moral breakdown that gave Hitler control of an industrial society, which then, along with the rest of the world, suffered the catastrophic consequences. Though the topic is not new, the treatment is first-rate, making this indeed a new history. For example, as he does elsewhere, in the case of the Roehm purge, he omits many of the well-known details in order to explain its significance with clarity and even verve. Burleigh treats Christian opponents of Hitler with more kindness than they usually receive, and his treatment of anti-Semitism as something quite minor in the lives of most Germans of the period will no doubt stir up controversy, as will his unusual emphasis on non-Jewish victims of the Nazis. The author emphasizes the perspectives of individuals who lived through these events, giving his book a democratic flavor uncommon since William L. Shirer's famous history. But the primary value of Burleigh's book lies in its overview of the interpretations made by others. However, the book is not without flaws: Burleigh's prejudices toward conservatives lead him to write of the feckless German officers as more heroic than they were and to sneer at the left-wing opponents of the Nazi regime who suffered far more in their struggle. And his writing is sometimes too clever. His reference to the sadistic and murderous Franz Alfred Six as a "1968er avant la lettre" is an example of both flaws at once. Such lapses are minor annoyances, though. Burleigh has produced an important work of synthesis that recapitulates an impressive array of sources. It deserves to become the jumping-off point for scholars who want to take their studies of this uniquely horrible era in new directions. Illus. not seen by PW. (Oct.)

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From Library Journal

Burleigh (Washington and Lee Univ.) has written a masterly narrative of how Nazi racial, political, and economic ideology was applied in Germany and in those territories conquered by the Third Reich. The result is a book that reveals the complexity of daily life under Nazism. Burleigh's greatest strength is in avoiding facile generalizations about such controversial topics as whether the Christian churches supported or opposed Nazism. In addition, he prevents the text from devolving into historiographical controversies, such as the functionalists vs. structuralist debate. Burleigh is at his best when analyzing the structure of Nazi ideology and its implementation, and as such his chapter on the postwar world is probably the weakest. Furthermore, although he introduces many interesting and sometimes sympathetic characters, the reader is sometimes left wondering about their fate. Nevertheless, this book should become one of the standard volumes on the history of the Third Reich. Recommended for all libraries. DFredric Krome, Jacob Rader Marcus Ctr. of the American Jewish Archives

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