

Brenda Stalcup, ed. *Adolf Hitler*. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 2000. Pp. 202. Paper, \$21.81; ISBN 0-7377-0222-2.

A.J. Nicholls. *Weimar and the Rise of Hitler*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. Fourth edition. Pp. xiv, 229. Cloth, \$59.95; ISBN 0-312-23350-7. Paper, \$25.00; ISBN 0-312-23351-5.

Studies on the Nazis and biographies of Adolf Hitler are as popular and as common as they are important. Unfortunately, they are not always of high intellectual quality. But the two volumes at hand are examples of responsible scholarship treating the troubled history of Germany from the 1920s to the 1940s. They are both accessible for undergraduate readers, although many freshmen and sophomores will find the Nicholls volume rather demanding. Instructors might want to consider using the books together for two reasons. First, the book on Hitler is an edited collection of sixteen essays from fifteen different scholars, mostly historians, and their diverse interpretations provide the raw material for some fascinating historiographical debates. Second, the monograph by Nicholls treats many of the most important aspects of Hitler's ideology and rise to power and places them in a helpful, broad perspective—a very fruitful form of overlap, one might say, with the Stalcup volume.

*Weimar and the Rise of Hitler* locates the weakness of the Weimar government more in the attitudes and decisions of individuals and parties than in systemic flaws. It was, above all, its political shortcomings that sealed Weimar's fate and allowed Hitler's rise to power. Nicholls demonstrates ably why this explanation takes precedence over—but does not fully displace—other causes, such as German political culture, economics, and Hitler's political skills. This work is recommended for courses in German history, modern Europe, and World War II.

For Nicholls, voluntaristic factors outweigh structural and international considerations. For instance, the army and police forces were not thoroughly purged and reconstructed after 1918, thereby leaving in place many armed elements that later would be sympathetic to Hitler or at least hostile to the central government. Groups on the far right and far left fought paramilitary street battles with each other and against the federal authorities, while the parties in the center had fault lines between them (and even within themselves) that diminished their power. Important and popular leaders were assassinated. Bavarian particularism weakened Berlin's authority and provided a safe haven for radical groups. Even in times of crisis, a genuine spirit of cooperation within *Reichstag* coalitions and between branches of government eluded politicians.

Field Marshal Hindenburg, who became President in 1925, was both manipulable and ambivalent in his feelings towards the very system of government he was sworn to protect. He also caved in to the special requests of grain-growing Junkers during the Depression, battering German consumers and small farmers and playing into the hands of Darré, the Nazi agrarian ideologue. Worst of all, when Hindenburg and others thought they could make tactical use of Hitler to settle old scores or to govern during a general crisis, they committed a mind-boggling error in judgment.

Nicholls should be praised for working in a thorough discussion of Weimar's economic woes. Still, one wishes the author had spent some time chronicling the disjuncture between German culture and politics at the time. Klaus Mann's challenging statement from his memoir *The Turning Point* deserves exploration: "The Weimar Republic was completely indifferent to the efforts of its literary supporters ... No writer could hope to earn gold or glory by sticking out his neck for the German Republic."

*Adolf Hitler* is a solid work useful for courses on German history, the Nazi period, or World War II. The book includes material on the Holocaust but it does not seem appropriate for use in courses specifically on that subject, since such courses now typically move beyond the "commanding heights" of the ultimately responsible Nazi regime to examine many varieties of perpetrators (including non-Germans) and victims (including resisters). The book consists primarily of selections from already published—and mostly well known—works of history and psychology about the Nazi era and Hitler. The brief introductions supplied by the editor are helpful. Working into the book some sort of discussion of fascism as an ideology would help make it compatible with general European history courses. There is, refreshingly, among the selections no dalliance with the tired old notion of Hitler as some sort of "evil genius," military or otherwise, as one often finds in popular histories.

The selections cover Hitler's youthful intellectual and artistic development, the ways his charisma and opportunism helped cement his rule, his war aims, the policy origins of the Holocaust, and his legacy. Some of the selections are tantalizingly short, but they are all worth reading. The essays that are most likely to catch students' eyes and stretch their understanding of the period are by Henry Grosshans ("Hitler's Failure As an Artist"), William Carr ("Hitler's Oratorical Skills"), Lucy Dawidowicz ("The Final Solution Was Always Hitler's Ultimate Goal"), and Ian Kershaw ("Hitler's Devastating Legacy to Germany").

A substantial appendix includes 21 documents that will be useful in sparking student discussion and giving students practice in working with primary sources. Six of these documents are rather illuminating selections from *Mein Kampf* covering Hitler's youth and the evolution of his world view. Others are drawn from Hitler's speeches or from memoirs of people who knew him. Although all of the selections are interesting, the use of some of them in a classroom setting is to some degree problematic. Can it sometimes be irresponsible to present students with a cavalcade of anti-Semitic slurs (as in Hitler's book and speeches) without refuting them? Of course these selections are not included here for propaganda purposes, but as illustrations of his oratory and style of argument; likewise, a study of Hitler that ignores his rabid racism is unthinkable. But teachers should at least consider whether we owe it to today's undergraduates—many of whom know next to nothing about Judaism or Jewish history—to confront and puncture Hitler's stereotypes.

A few of the documents (9, 11, 19) add little significance to the detailed portrait of Hitler already created in the book. The several documents that speculate on whether or not he was insane also lead to a sort of pedagogical dead-end. How does Hitler's

(possible, eventual) insanity relate to the acceptability of his ideas to other Germans, and if Nazis are just "crazy," then how does this affect the issue of culpability? The self-congratulatory tone of the excerpt from Hitler's "Last Political Testament" seems trivial when contrasted with other possible inclusions, such as his bitter "sunset" imprecations at the German people for ailing in their historic mission under Nazi leadership. The other documents are both well chosen and introduced by a paragraph of insightful analysis. An essay at the start of the book gives an overview of Hitler's rise to power and World War II in Europe; at the back of the book one also finds a bibliography, a chronology, and three pages of useful discussion questions for students.

The Stalcup book is well edited; unfortunately, the editing of the Nicholls book leaves something to be desired. The number of misspellings and other small errors, while not overwhelming, is puzzling, considering that this book is in its fourth edition. More troubling is the fact that we are told that the Nazis received nearly 44% of the vote in Reichstag elections on 5 April 1933, two weeks after the Enabling Act. This is a major error. The elections were on 5 March, and the correct date is actually given in the Chronology at the back of the book.

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**Ian S. Wood. *Churchill*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. Pp. xii, 209. Cloth, \$49.95; ISBN 0-312-23061-3. Paper, \$19.95; ISBN 0-312-23062-1.**

This new title in the British History in Perspective series by Ian S. Wood, Lecturer in History at Napier University in Edinburgh, is not a conventional biography of Churchill—adding another seemed superfluous to the author—but rather a thematic study of the major and sometimes overlapping issues in the long and exceptional career of Winston Churchill. After a short preface in which Churchill's political career is divided into three phases—1900–1915, 1915–1939, and 1939–1955—the author investigates Churchill's career through nine themes that make up the nine chapters of the book. Among the themes are "Churchill the Warrior," "National Leader, 1940–1495," and "Churchill, Party Politics and Social Policy." Wood also focuses on Churchill's relationship with the United States, the Soviet Union, Europe, Ireland, and the British Empire, as well as his role in the appeasement policies of the 1930s.

Each of the nine chapters reassesses the historical literature that bears on the theme under consideration, including the more recent revisionist literature of authors such as John Charmley and Clive Ponting. One of the author's strengths is always weighing critical events in Churchill's career in terms of his entire career. While Wood does not ignore Churchill's failures, he does believe that on the most important issue of going to war rather than attempting to negotiate with Hitler in order to try to save the British Empire, Churchill was right. He states that the democratic Western Europe that