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Aspects of the Third Reich

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contribution of the pastoral letter to the nuclear moral debate.

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Koch, H.W., ed. *Aspects of the Third Reich*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985. 611pp. \$29.95

No questions, no history. Huge chunks of the past are exempt from historical inquiry because no one wants to know about them. It is only when people ask questions, only where there is a problem, that a period, or an issue, will be addressed. In our time, for instance, formerly unexplored areas of our past have become relevant, and so there is now women's history, black history, world history, comparative history, the history of sexuality, the history of death. Investigation arises when people want the facts, and help in interpreting them.

The Third Reich never lacked for questions. This book of essays by German and British authors addresses the question: Are our customary views about Hitler's Germany still valid, or do we need to revise our conclusions in light of new evidence, new times, new problems? Was the Third Reich a modern, or an anti-modern phenomenon? Did it radically break with history, or can it be seen in terms of continuity? Did Hitler follow a master plan, or did he improvise? How much of the Third Reich is biography, and how much reflected broadly based contemporary wishes?

Ernest Nolte, dean of scholars of generic fascism, gives the overall answer: "the innermost core of the negative picture of the Third Reich needs no revision." What the essays in this book do mainly is to amplify, not alter, our knowledge of the period. Here are some points. *Mein Kampf* was a product of a particular time in Hitler's development. It is a fair indicator of the future, but Hitler was an improviser and new circumstances influenced him. Hitler's rise to power was helped by the absence in the Weimar constitution of any prohibition of parties whose explicit purpose was to overthrow the republic. Hitler could be, and was, entirely candid about his intention to take power legally in order legally to overthrow the democracy.

The organization of government was a management nightmare, with a confused, overlapping, and turf-obsessed hierarchy. Hitler alone stood as the integrating figure. His enormous popularity was decisive, and flowed from the skill and passion with which he expressed the deep longing for a classless, organic community that was, probably the most common characteristic of the Germans. It turns out that it was the leader of the army, dominated by this longing for *Volksgemeinschaft*, who took the initiative to establish the Fuehrer oath, hoping to establish a mystic relationship between the head of state and the armed forces as in the days of the emperors.

The genesis of the "final solution" is explained in terms of this unique authority of Hitler. A Fuehrer order,

the message that "the Fuehrer wished it," overrode law, humanity, and restraint, and carried through the genocide. There did not need to be, and there was not, a simple written order. Hitler's wish was enough. This is true, but narrow concentration on whether Hitler explicitly gave an order for the extermination of the Jews fails to take into account what scholars like R. Hilberg have shown: that the extermination came at the end of a process. Anti-Semitism became industrialized murder through the bureaucratic machinery of the modern state. First Jews were identified, then concentrated, then removed, and then, finally, killed—systematically, by the apparatus of the state. It was this process, well advanced by the time of the invasion of Russia, that enabled people to accept the final Fuehrer order.

The most original article here is by Nolte. He argues we must see the Third Reich anew, always in a broad historical context and never just as an isolated phenomenon, but no longer so dependent on the old totalitarian model which has, for the 1980s, lost much of its factual authority and interpretative vigor. Nolte proposes another historical connection in terms of the history of what he calls the "annihilation strategy" in Western politics. He shows that the idea of the annihilation of whole groups, one way or the other, goes back to the days of the French Revolution and Napoleon, to the industrial revolution, and, most importantly, was carried on in the Sovietization of Russia which Hitler

watched so carefully. In those times annihilation applied to classes or political groups (aristocrats, counter-revolutionists, opposing armies, capitalists, kulaks, etc.). The Third Reich applied it to "radical" groups, and the result was genocide. And, Nolte somberly adds, we still see annihilation strategies practiced in our day. Thus, the Nazi regime may be investigated "historico-genetically" within this trend of world history.

But whatever our perspective, this book shows there is no need to change our enduring negative judgments, our final moral denouncement, of the Third Reich. Nolte concludes: ". . . from the history of the Third Reich there must result the fundamental insight that the absence of *annihilating* measures towards political, economic, social or biological groups is the great distinction of that society which, with all its weaknesses, we call the liberal one."

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Terraine, John. *A Time for Courage: The Royal Air Force in the European War, 1939-1945*. New York: Macmillan, 1985. 816pp. \$29.95

A unique one-volume history of RAF European Operations during World War II by one of Britain's leading military historians whose works have earned him the Chesney Gold Medal—the highest award of the Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies.

While the central focus of the book is on the RAF during the war in