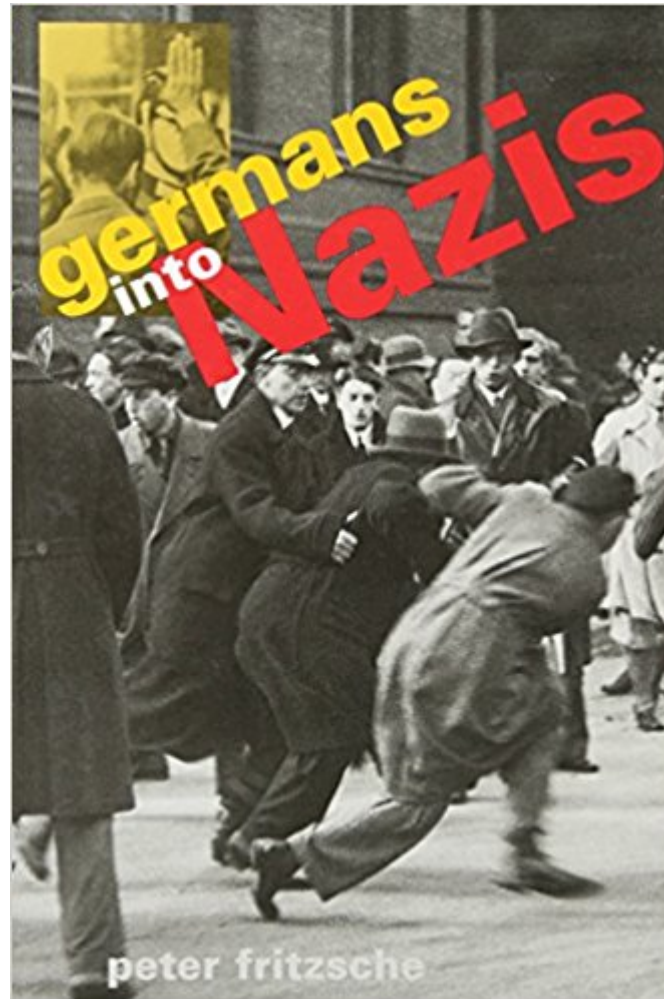




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# Germans Into Nazis



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## Synopsis

Why did ordinary Germans vote for Hitler? In this dramatically plotted book, organized around crucial turning points in 1914, 1918, and 1933, Peter Fritzsche explains why the Nazis were so popular and what was behind the political choice made by the German people. Rejecting the view that Germans voted for the Nazis simply because they hated the Jews, or had been humiliated in World War I, or had been ruined by the Great Depression, Fritzsche makes the controversial argument that Nazism was part of a larger process of democratization and political invigoration that began with the outbreak of World War I. The twenty-year period beginning in 1914 was characterized by the steady advance of a broad populist revolution that was animated by war, drew strength from the Revolution of 1918, menaced the Weimar Republic, and finally culminated in the rise of the Nazis. Better than anyone else, the Nazis twisted together ideas from the political Left and Right, crossing nationalism with social reform, anti-Semitism with democracy, fear of the future with hope for a new beginning. This radical rebelliousness destroyed old authoritarian structures as much as it attacked liberal principles. The outcome of this dramatic social revolution was a surprisingly popular regime that drew on public support to realize its horrible racial goals. Within a generation, Germans had grown increasingly self-reliant and sovereign, while intensely nationalistic and chauvinistic. They had recast the nation, but put it on the road to war and genocide.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the four key archival photographs in this history of the rise of the Nazi state shows a young,

disheveled Hitler among the throng of "patriotic Germans gathered on Munich's Odeonsplatz to hear the declaration of war read aloud from the steps of the Feldherrnhalle on 2 August 1914." Fritzsche analyzes the exact significance of this moment to Hitler and the German population. To de-emphasize, in this manner, the Nazis' rise from the rubble of economic despair and hardship and to posit their birth in this popular movement represents a shift in the more conventional historic point of view that dates Nazism at the end of World War I (1918). In the moment captured by this photograph, the German Volk was in the process of being born. The Volk becomes a crucial entity as Fritzsche scrutinizes the evolution of Germans into Nazis. The Nazis rose to power "because [they] spoke so well to [the peoples'] interests and inclinations. Given the illiberal aims and violent means of the Nazis, this popular support is a sobering, dreadful thing." The Nazi revolution offered a complex and vicious intertwining of the Left and Right that amounted to a reckless rebelliousness and the crossing of nationalism with social reform, anti-Semitism with democracy, and paranoia with nationalistic zeal for a new beginning. Their rise spanned a remarkably short period--from 1914 to 1933. Each of the four chapters opens with an archival photograph that represents a key point in the evolution of this dreadful rise. The pivotal November 1918 event, for example, was the call by the Volk for the abdication of the Kaiser, exemplified by the unprecedented demonstration of socialist workers in the government quarters. It would take just a few hours for the old order to crumble and Germany to declare itself a socialist republic. Leap ahead to January 1933. Hitler had just been made chancellor of Germany. Here is a description of the swelling crowds and celebratory atmosphere: "Nearly one million Berliners took part in this extraordinary demonstration of allegiance to a party that promised to do away with both the sentimental bric-a-brac of the prewar past and the clutter of Weimar democracy and to establish a strong-willed and strong-armed racial state...." In the meantime, Communists, Socialists, and Jews were being severely beaten. Fritzsche cites the dramatic overpowering of German towns and the harrowing popularity of Nazi brutality as he sheds light on Hitler's immense popularity. Fervent nationalism and an overarching anti-Semitism weigh in heavily. This is a history that seeks not to exonerate but to tell the cautionary tale. --Hollis Giammatteo --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Everyone knows that the Germans turned to the Nazis when dismay over the Treaty of Versailles mixed with the depredations of the Great Depression. Fritzsche (Reading Berlin), however, quickly points out flaws in the scenario. To start, every party in Germany excoriated Versailles, and the people hardest hit by the recession were not the ones most likely to vote National Socialist. It is as a broader social revolution that Fritzsche attempts to make sense of Nazism. As Kaiser Wilhelm

hoped, WWI unified Germany; but after withstanding four years of privations with little help from the monarchy, ordinary Germans emerged with a new sense of their worth within the society and with the German volk, a vitally different entity from the Hohenzollern Empire. By 1933, Germans were law-and-order chauvinists, and Nazis seemed to offer order and a national vision that embraced all the volk. Well researched and succinct, this history offers a nuanced view of a complicated history. As for Germany's uniquely murderous anti-Semitism, Fritzsche notes (without mentioning Daniel Goldhagen by name) that the complicity of so many ordinary Germans in the murder of Jews "was not so much the function of genocidal anti-Semitism which they shared in uncomplicated fashion with Nazi leaders; rather over the course of the twelve-year Reich, more and more Germans came to play active and generally congenial parts in the Nazi revolution and then subsequently came to accept the uncompromising terms of Nazi racism." Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Why did the Germans usher Hitler into power in 1933? Peter Fritzsche's book *Germans into Nazis* takes a fresh look at the question. Published in 1998, the book sets out an explanation that seems especially topical and urgent now, given subsequent trends in Western politics. Fritzsche is Professor of History at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has published widely on European and especially German history. His thought-provoking book attempts to answer the question by casting aside the conventional explanations "Versailles, the Depression, reparations" and looking at the dynamics of division in a society and the desire for unity. Fritzsche's thesis is that the First World War was crucial to the rise of Nazism, but not in the way that has been assumed. Conventional explanations have focused on the humiliation of the Versailles treaty, territorial losses and reparations. According to Fritzsche, many postwar parties opposed these; the Nazis were nothing new in this respect. If we want to understand the real role of WW1 in the rise of Nazism, we should start not in 1918 but in 1914, and look at the way it made the Germans feel one people, even though they had been that in theory for over 40 years. Facing attack from outside in 1914, Germans coalesced into what the Kaiser called the *Burgfrieden*, the "peace of the fortress", [which] promised to resolve the divisions between workers and the middle classes, between socialists and conservatives, [and] between Protestants and Catholics. This was important in a divided country. Fritzsche points out that (for example) Prussian voters were divided into property classes, the highest of which were allocated votes of greater value. The popular mobilization brought people together for the first time in a sense of common purpose and resulted in an unprecedented level of civic engagement "the

Volksgemeinschaft, the community working as one. A side-effect was that it meant the stratified society of imperial Germany was no longer viable. But it was not satisfactorily replaced. The new civic engagement never went away. But in the 1920s it was expressed through a series of interest groups, and parties linked to different professional or trade bodies. It was not a substitute; but when the Nazis arrived, people did feel a sense of common purpose. The way the Nazis did this was, for Fritzsche, far more important than Versailles or reparations, which were already the subject of political discourse. As to anti-semitism, he does not deny its existence in pre-1933 Germany, but does not see the Nazis as having any ownership of it then – “all parties were somewhat anti-semitic” or find any evidence that most Germans supported anything like a “final solution”. It is the Volksgemeinschaft that is important here. Is Fritzsche right? Perhaps only Germans can answer this, but I feel he is onto something, if only because he provides an explanation for Nazism that does not rely on Germans being a weird, separate species. After all, no human is. I know plenty of Germans. They do not have two heads. A reviewer of this book in the Jerusalem Post commented that “Historians examining nations over periods of time have somehow to find a balance between what is inherent in a people and what is not, in order to attempt explanations of national attitudes and conduct.” But can you, in fact, have such a balance – “is there anything inherent in a people”? It is an important point, as ascribing Nazism to the German character has induced a dangerous conviction in other countries that they would never behave as the Germans did. Could any historical phenomenon be repeated by any country, given the right circumstances? Fritzsche doesn’t answer that question, and he doesn’t speculate on the broader implications of his theory. He leaves that to the reader, which is perhaps what a good historian should do. But one notes that many people in Western countries seem to feel that their sense of identity is threatened, and do not feel that any entity represents them collectively. Neither, it seems, do many Americans. In fact they seem to feel that there is no single national life, no conversation, that includes them, and few fora for civic engagement. Neither left nor right answers these concerns. In this situation, many will turn to those who claim to speak for them and against the establishment, and who promise to return their sense of belonging. These trends at least partly underlie the Brexit vote in Britain, the meteoric rise of Trump in the US and the growth of populist right-wing movements in Europe. If Fritzsche’s thesis is correct, could the German pattern be replicated elsewhere? Fritzsche quotes Hitler’s dictum that the nationalists forgot the social and the socialists forgot the national. Hitler forgot neither. Given people’s feelings of powerlessness against business, globalization and a perceived loss of identity, this is an important point. In fact Fritzsche’s

thesis invests the Nazi phenomenon with a universality that makes this book crucial in this new time of populism.

There is so much more revealed of how Hitler was able to transform the Germans to do his will.

Excellent book.

Interesting book on how a madman could transform the masses to his own ends.

For over 60 years, people have been debating the appeal of the Nazi Party to the German nation. Did anger over the treaty of Versailles make Germans support Hitler? Was it the effects of the Great Depression? Was it because Germans had little exposure to democracy that they turned to fascism? Was it the Nazi racial views that attracted Germans to Hitler? Is there one answer, probably not? Can one answer possibly explain such a complex situation as to why Germany turned to the Nazis? In *Germans into Nazis* historian Peter Fritzsche has a provocative thesis. He argues that the appeal of the Nazis was rooted in a strident nationalism that was born in 1914 during the lead up into the Great War. Fritzsche asserts that the Kaisers call for a true unity of Germans during the war (*BURGFRIENDEN*) may have been cynical on Wilhelms behalf, but that was not the way many Germans saw it. They saw it as "shot across the bow" of special interests and an opportunity to create a new Germany without as many class barriers. The collective experience of total war united many Germans as never before. The hardships of modern conflict (loss of loved ones, the turnip winter, etc) welded many Germans into the *Volksgemeinschaft*. (the peoples community) When the war ended many Germans looked forward to the republic as a way to fulfill their hopes for a new direction in national life. Fritzsche maintains that various political parties such as the communists, socialists and various parties on the right did not understand the language of the German masses when it came to national needs. But the Nazis did. They comprehended the energy that was unleashed during the Great War and they tapped into it. They rejected old political solutions and suggested new ideas. According to Fritzsche "They challenged the authoritarian legacy of the empire, rejected the class-based vision of Social Democrats and Communists, and both honored the solidarity and upheld the chauvinism of the nation at war." This book does not deal with Hitler or anti-semitism, but how Germans across the political spectrum were attracted to the Nazis. It seems that no one reason can explain the rise of the Nazis, but this book is a needed volume in attempting to understand this important topic.

This book describes the history of how German nationalism and socialism form National Socialism. This history starts in 1914 and even before that with the birth of Germany where "Germany always looked very different to Bavarians, Saxons, and Prussians, or, for that matter, to farmers, workers, and schoolteachers or to men and women." The story ends with Hitler and his National Socialist Workers Party grabbing power: "The Nazis did not win by being similar to but by being different from their competitors in the bourgeois fold. As Hitler stated again and again: - "The nationalists on the right lacked social awareness, the socialists on the left lacked national awareness" - ". With other words, the National Socialists were socialists with national awareness. The story between the beginning and the end goes way far beyond the Treaty of Versailles. It is a story that needs to be understood by anyone who doesn't want similar consequences of the policies of the German National Socialist Workers Party to happen again.

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