

debates on the origins of the Holocaust as no longer relevant and lauds Saul Friedländer's two-volume history as a model of integrating victims' perspectives with the previously dominant emphasis on the perpetrators. He does point out, however, the contradiction between Friedländer's earlier suspicion of *Alltagsgeschichte* (in his famous dispute in the 1980s with Martin Broszat on the historicizing of National Socialism) and Friedländer's own reliance on diaries and letters to present victims' voices.

Eley concludes his survey with an effort to come up with a coherent theory of what constitutes fascism and why use of the term might be applicable to the present. An essential precondition for making fascism useful as an analytical concept is "to be as clear as possible that fascism is first and foremost a type of politics, or a set of relations to politics" (p. 214). Another point he stresses—consistent with so much of his earlier work—is that fascism is best theorized "in terms of the crisis that produced it" (p. 209). He ends with several relatively uncontroversial theses about European fascism in the 1920s and 1930s: it was a modernist movement, expressing "the most hubristic potentialities of social engineering, inspired by the promise of technological, managerial, and scientific modernity" (p. 212); it took different forms in Italy and Germany; it appealed to the popular imagination through the emergent "culture industry"; and its main ideological thrust was the drive for war. This briskly written and lucidly argued book will be of value to students and scholars, but it can certainly be recommended to a wider readership among the general public as well.

RODERICK STACKELBERG, EMERITUS
GONZAGA UNIVERSITY
doi:10.1017/S0008938914000818

Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture. By David B. Dennis.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2012. Pp. vii + 541. \$35.00.
ISBN 978-1-107-02049-8.

In scope, content, and insights, David B. Dennis's study of National Socialist culture is much richer than its modest title suggests. Meticulously researched in the "cultural sections" of the invaluable, though too often neglected Nazi *Völkische Beobachter*, this book poses a considerable challenge to those inclined to dismiss any association of the Nazis with higher culture and the Western tradition, or the notion that, at the time, intelligent people could ever be susceptible to Nazi endeavors to establish such a link. In specific arguments, as well as its cumulative effect, this book urges us to take National Socialist cultural politics seriously, because the Nazis certainly did; and so too did educated contributors and readers of the *Völkische Beobachter*. Dennis

periodically emphasizes that his purpose is not to establish the validity of Nazi usurpation of this European intellectual and artistic creativity. Rather, he seeks to demonstrate that Nazi efforts to establish a relationship between their worldview and this cherished cultural heritage was no mere cynical manipulation by Nazi ideologies or hack writers. Moreover, relentless long-term repetitious assertions and interpretations, often arrived at necessarily through intellectual contortions or crucial omissions, had convinced many party members and general readers that National Socialism was, in fact, the inheritor of this rich cultural tradition.

From Hitler personally through ideologues such as Josef Goebbels and Alfred Rosenberg, the top Nazi leadership truly believed in their peculiar version of this cultural heritage, of which they were supposedly the true heirs, guardians, and their movement the future realization in still higher form. Similarly, most contributions in these cultural sections emanated not from party hacks, or even editorial staff. A variety of well-educated academicians, scientists, and intellectuals (often highly gifted specialists in their fields) who submitted articles sincerely thought that they were engaged in sound and necessary artistic, literary, musical, or even scientific scholarship; it was imperative to inform the broader public of their research findings. In turn, the Nazi claims of such cultural inheritance, like their presumed intimate association with such prestigious creative figures, was a significant aspect of legitimizing the general Nazi worldview to themselves and others. However, given the anti-intellectualism inherent in National Socialism (crucially, quite explicit in Hitler), their version of true German *Bildung*, and higher cultural affinities, had to be completely disassociated from any inkling of “intelligentsia,” intellectual pretense, effete proclivities, or the “asphalt literati,” often chastised as Jewish or Jewish influenced. Consequently, contributors sought to demonstrate that the creativity of the great past masters was always grounded in the “genuine lives of the rural Volk” (p. 38).

From 1923 to 1945, the paper contained an abundance of in-depth scholarly analyses intended to convince readers that the best of the entire Western tradition was inherently Germanic/Nordic in origin and acutely anti-Semitic. This cultural identification extended beyond the German Masters (Bach, Beethoven, Dürer, Liszt, Mozart, Schiller) to a broader European pantheon of greats (Leonardo, Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Rembrandt), demonstrating that Germany’s was a “world culture.” Equally significant, these geniuses were supposedly no mere artistic creators, but the self-conscious precursors of a patriotic political struggle for the true nationalist, *volkisch* battle in which this “combat paper” presently engaged. While the classical world received scant attention and Enlightenment rationalism severely critiqued, the essence of National Socialist culture emerged with the Renaissance, through the crucial figure of Luther and especially the romantics, who were particularly politically motivated. It culminated, however, in Wagner—“the first great German cultural politician” (p. 82). Even certain aspects of expressionism and Nordic existentialism were

fitted into this intellectual template, though their stand on Nietzsche remained ambivalent. And, starting with the legacy of the “Front Experience,” by World War II the Nazis militarized Western culture, highlighting heroism and sacrifice, with “the most German of arts” (p. 456)—music—rising to the occasion. Difficulties in proving the racial pedigree of some, like the ideological affinity and correct political engagement of others (a special problem with Goethe), was overcome by strained hereditary rationalizations and selective political biography.

Many of these greats were invoked in the cultural wars against the great enemy—modernism, particularly as manifested in Weimar decadence. In Weimar, as throughout history, the Jews (“archenemy incarnate”) were held responsible for this “rot of German culture” (p. 85). Allegedly, the great masters had long recognized this “Jewish threat,” as supposedly evidenced by Luther, Shakespeare, even Goethe, but most of all by Wagner. Various articles distorted the indisputable place of eminent Jewish composers and writers in the Western tradition, denying their contributions were original at all, and warning of the dangers of assimilation. The paper keenly focused on Heine’s scathing commentaries of his age and culture as proof of Jewish insidiousness and duplicity, the very core of an anti-German conspiracy.

Dennis eventually addresses the lingering methodological question of how we know whether such articles had any impact, or received a detailed reading. To him, it was a process of political advertising, where visual images and repetition mattered more than content. Literally more than a thousand articles, with photos or artistic representations and repeating the same themes (under titles such as “Beethoven and Racial Hygiene” or “Goethe and the Jews”), provided abundant validation of the Nazi worldview.

In his final paragraphs, Dennis abandons the prudent, reserved tone previously maintained, by asserting that these articles contributed to the “transformation of some ordinary Germans into murderers” (p. 463). These are strong contentions open to debate over the mindset and motivation of perpetrators that, at a minimum, certainly require more detailed discussion. Also, although generally a splendid writer, Dennis’s style is unnecessarily disrupted by explicitly stating what he is going to tell us, restating that he told us this, and then telling us what is to follow, only to repeat this didactic cycle throughout the book.

Nonetheless, with a superb command of the literature, as well as historiographical and terminological issues, Dennis has published a substantial work, whose quality is enhanced by photographs pointedly illuminating his arguments. His book stands among the very best studies of Nazi culture, from the classic work of George Mosse to more recent research of, among others, Michael Kater, Jonathan Petropoulos, Pamela Potter, and Alan Steinweis.

JOSEPH W. BENDERSKY
VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY
doi:10.1017/S000893891400082X