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William L. Shirer , Gordon A. Craig (Foreword by)

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By the acclaimed journalist and bestselling author of *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, this day-by-day, eyewitness account of the momentous events leading up to World War II in Europe is now available in a new paperback edition.

CBS radio broadcaster William L. Shirer was virtually unknown in 1940 when he decided there might be a book in the diary he had kept in Europe during the 1930s—specifically those sections dealing with the collapse of the European democracies and the rise of Nazi Germany.

Berlin Diary first appeared in 1941, and the timing was perfect. The energy, the passion, the electricity in it were palpable. The book was an instant success, and it became the frame of reference against which thoughtful Americans judged the rush of events in Europe. It exactly matched journalist to event: the right reporter at the right place at the right time. It stood, and still stands, as so few books have ever done—a pure act of journalistic witness.

Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent 1934-1941 Details

Date : Published April 17th 2002 by Johns Hopkins University Press (first published January 1941)

ISBN : 9780801870569

Author : William L. Shirer , Gordon A. Craig (Foreword by)

Format : Paperback 627 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, War, World War II



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From Reader Review Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent 1934-1941 for online ebook

David Gustafson says

Just as I was finishing Neil MacGregor's engaging, "Germany: Memories of a Nation," a little voice reminded me that it was about time for a reread of William Shirer's classic, "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich," while another voice immediately scolded me for not having read his "Berlin Diary 1934-1941."

Maybe I should read that one first? When it arrived two days later, I placed it aside on my drawing table since I have way too many projects on my plate at the moment, but what harm will just a little peek at the first entry do? Well, 605 pages later, my overflowing plate is still calling my name.

A diary at the epicenter of world events is not an objective history. This is a real time narrative that blazes across the pages, filled with urgency, uncertainty, speculation, indecision, good decisions, bad decisions, and regret. An effortless journal that the reader never wants to put it down without reading just one more pulsing entry.

William Shirer began as a print journalist, eventually being recruited by the CBS radio network as one of its premiere European correspondents. One of the many back stories tucked inside this diary, next to the unforeseen dominance of air power covering a motorized blitzkrieg along country roads is the sudden transition of public information and propaganda from print to radio media at such an influential juncture in history.

Shirer witnesses the rise of Nazi Germany up close and personal. He views Hitler and Chamberlain chatting below his own balcony before the sell-out of Czechoslovakia. He reports directly outside the same Compiègne wagon-lit where Germany gets its revenge by forcing France's surrender exactly where Germany had laid down its arms after the previous World War. Months in advance, he predicts the invasion of Poland as Hitler's logical next move while the government dunderheads in France and England remain totally clueless.

Shirer uncannily picks up on all the subtle ticks and mannerism he observes in Göring, Goebbels, Himmler, Streicher, Generals Halder and Brauchitsch as well as those quirks of the very excitable Herr Hitler. He has a poker player's knack for making a quick and accurate assessment of almost every individual he meets, famous or not. His summary insights into the ambivalent German soul resonate to this day.

As I mentioned beforehand, this is not objective history. This is a real time history that simmers with analysis on one page only to boil over with surprising action on the next page while Shirer is constantly trying to outwit his censors, forecast future military and political events, meet a deadline, scoop the competition, find a meal, a pound of coffee, pipe tobacco or an urgent train ticket to somewhere important while dodging bombs and shrapnel courtesy of the Brits flying above whom he is cheering on.

Be forewarned: one little peek and you will be Shirer's willing captive for the duration!

Brendan Lyons says

William L. Shirer wrote the classic "Rise and Fall of the Third Reich" based on his experiences as a foreign correspondent and his later exhaustive researches among the captured documents of the fallen regime. This book is his personal diary written during prewar working assignments in Vienna and Berlin and comprises many of the opinions that he was forbidden or unable to publish at the time and they make fascinating reading. Shirer is a prescient observer possessed of a sharp independent mind (he gets into shouting matches with Nazi officials!) and one is impressed and often amazed by the accuracy of his political forecasts since he was writing them as events were actually unfolding. Until the Czech crisis of September 1938 the world was largely baffled and bemused by Hitler but not Shirer and several of his colleagues, including the CBS radio pioneer Edward R Murrow. His frustration at the fact that nobody would listen to his and others' warnings about the danger of the regime comes through quite clearly. One comes away from this book with a feeling of bitter regret that these warnings were not listened to and that Hitler and his band of political thugs were not stamped on when it was still possible to stop them and prevent the war they were clearly planning.

Lewis Weinstein says

Shirer's diary is a unique window into what was known and believed at the time in Nazi Germany ... I am currently focusing on the 1939-41 period when Shirer, in Berlin, had access to many sources and was able to put information together in a series of brilliant reporting, analyses and conjectures.

In my sequel to A FLOOD OF EVIL, I am thinking of having Shirer meet my fictional character Berthold Becker and carry on a series of conversations - in the Tiergarten, at the Adlon Hotel.

A Flood of Evil

Derotha Ann says

I just picked this one up from the many many books in the house. . . William Shirer is a bit blunt with his assessment of the German population, implying that they lacked the perception to be able to assess a truly human gauge for morality. By today's standards, this may in itself be considered a racist assessment. This book was written before the real atrocities were known, but even so, the signs of genocide were there: the request for lists of psychiatric patients, the monitoring of public hospitals, the lies about reasons for invasion (to protect the people of Holland and Norway) and the double standard constantly invoked regarding the rights of civilians, the diatribes against Jews and blacks and even people of different nationalities, and the lack of press coverage of obvious events. What Shirer doesn't emphasize, (and he should have) is the absolute brutality that was imposed by the Versailles Treaty upon the German people. Shirer writes like a dream, I couldn't put it down. He notes the ambiguity of the British and the French, and documents that there was very little resistance as the Germans approached Paris.

We are also allowed into his personal life, and I read in amazement of his marriage, and the sheer tenacity of his wife, who easily compares to the toughest of pioneer women. He talks about Segovia and Ed Murrow, and various other correspondents and friends, German and otherwise, and heads of state. He gives graphic details about Hitler's henchmen, and gives a stunning blow-by blow of the second French Armistice, which he managed to broadcast live, much to the consternation of Nazi officials. He tells us of constantly stumbling

through the dark during an air raid at 1 am in order to reach the transmission station in Berlin, in order to broadcast a censored script that may not even get through.

This is an incredible book, and it was eerie because of parallels of our own current culture, as we invade countries in order to protect them, complain about human rights as we send drones which impersonally kill civilians, monitor the daily lives of civilians and lie about it, and lie about provocations for war. Our government is currently shut down as our Senate and House debate the extent that social services will be cut to the advantage of the corporate investment houses. We are closing schools and hospitals, and monitoring repeat visits of older people to the doctor. We are subject to tirades against immigrants and Muslims as though they were less than human, while perfecting the art of blaming the victim as our economy is making us desperately grab at necessities as shortages continue, prices rise, and we are told that there are too many people, and not enough resources to go around. And that economic development that would provide for everyone is bad for the environment.

Shirer rejoiced and Hitler despaired at the news of Roosevelt's third term. As this country devolves into fascism, what is our excuse? And where are the Democrats?

Jeffrey says

William L. Shirer's thoughts and experiences provide fascinating insight and invaluable context to what it was like to be there in Europe during the years leading up to World War 2. While most history books necessarily look at things in the hindsight of time, Shirer's account provides a raw, running commentary on what people who were there thought about Hitler's rise to power and the run-up to the war. Shirer is a great chronicler and a likeable protagonist, and his own story intertwines with the story of the events going on around him, but never detracts from the main story of the amazing events going on around him.

Gerry Claes says

What an interesting life William Shirer must have lived. He was right in the thick of things when Hitler was developing his war machine and planning the total domination of Europe. Shirer had access to many of the top Nazi officials and got to know some of them quite well.

This book covers the period from 1934 until the end of 1940. Since America was not yet in the war Shirer, as an American reporter, was given significant access to the inner workings of the German government. Shirer had to be totally impartial when reporting on the war and all of his reporting had to be approved by Nazi censors. Shirer took significant risk in keeping a personal diary as to what was really going on compared to what the German propaganda machine was reporting. This is the best book on the prelude to America entering the War that I have ever read.

Along with the story of the Nazi's, it was quite interesting to read about Shirer's personal life and trials during this time. He had married an Austrian girl and had a daughter during this time. Keeping both of them safe and eventually getting them to America was a challenge. Shirer was hired by Edwin R Morrow for CBS and the two of them developed a strong friendship. The friendship between Shirer and Murrow ended in 1947, culminating in Shirer's leaving CBS in one of the great confrontations of American broadcast journalism. This part of Shirer's life is not covered in the book and it is still unclear as to what actually

caused the split. I would think that a book on this part of Shirer's life would make for a great book.

In reading about Shirer I always questioned how a marriage could survive his work schedule, constant travel and exposure to some of the most beautiful and powerful women in the world. Alas , it couldn't and in 1970 Shirer divorced his wife and remarried. Shirer died in Boston in 1993 at the age of 89

Elizabeth says

This was a splendid book and not like anything I've read before, and I've read a lot of WWII stuff (both fiction and nf). Mr. Shirer knew at the time that things were afoot in Europe, where he'd been living and working since the age of 21, and he wrote his diary with the thought that it would be published--in other words, this is not the personal diary of someone musing about what they had for breakfast that day, and it's published b/c the person or some event in it became momentous later on. These are the notes of someone who knows that what he's witnessing that very day is important, and he is recording it because it is so and because he knows people need to know about it. The details that are in it are amazing, and you really are there with him, seeing things unfold. It is one of the most gripping books I've read, and I even knew how it ultimately ends! Do note the end year--it ends before America comes into the war--the end comes when Mr. Shirer finally leaves Berlin.

If you are at all interested in WWII, even if you think you've read it all by now, this is still a great book.

Mara says

A Personal Preamble

Reading **William L. Shirer** 's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* rocked my world. At the time, I wasn't much into reading historical tomes, and it swept me away by its sheer scope in addition to the material covered. When I read Eric Larson's *In the Garden of Beasts* a few months later, it seemed to be a sort of on-the-ground companion narrative of what life was like in Berlin during Hitler's ascent to power, and that was the end of my WWII erudition for a while. That "*while*" ended, and several WWII-centric books later, I came across Shirer's *actual* eyewitness account of many of the events he would later go on to chronicle, as they unfolded at the time.

Why the good marks?

Obviously, I thought very highly of this book (4.5 of 5 stars). Part of that has to do with the times, but more relates to the way in which Shirer positions himself as an observer. I recently found a photo (below) of Hitler arriving at a youth rally in Berlin in 1934 that seems to capture a sense of *in-betweenness* I found in the pages of Shirer's diary, and it's this liminal phase that is easily lost to history.

Hitler's countenance in this picture is striking for all the things that it is *not* (I encourage you to click to enlarge, it's also something in the eyes). The people are gathered, clearly taken with the pageantry of it all, but they are not amassed in a uniformed sea of *Sieg Heil* salutes. One of the soldiers in the background is *himself* trying to photograph the Fuhrer as he goes by.

The distance between the Berlin in this picture and the one so masterfully portrayed in Cornelius Ryan's *The Last Battle* (circa 1945) is beyond vast. Though William Shirer will not take you all the way there (*Berlin Diary* was first published in 1941), I found his perspective to be worthwhile.

Why Shirer?

There were several things that made Shirer a particularly interesting tour-guide. Hired by broadcast pioneer *Edward R. Murrow* (left, below), Shirer was in Berlin (and various other locales) as a radio correspondent for CBS.

Though not a scholar of military or political history, Shirer had a certain depth of understanding of the geopolitical underpinnings of Hitler's rise to power. After covering a rally at Nuremberg in September of 1934, he begins to realize the impact of the strategic use of color, music and "restoration of mysticism" on the German people:

In such an atmosphere no wonder, then, that every word dropped by Hitler seemed like an inspired Word from on high. Man's—or at least the German's—critical faculty is swept away at such moments, and every lie pronounced is accepted as high truth itself.

As a journalist, Shirer's reports were subject to the oversight of censors, which, in addition to his direct contact with men on the ground and colleagues in the U.S., left him with a deep skepticism lacking in, say, a Martha Dodd (who he did run into a couple of times). The extent of this censorship would, ultimately, lead Shirer to question the value of bothering to report at all. His notes are interesting as a chronicle of what *wasn't* being said by the press to the people back home.

However, Shirer was quite unenlightened (in hindsight, even naïve) on other matters. Perhaps due in part to the continual outpourings from the Goebbels propaganda machine, Shirer often writes of "*the German*" as an archetype, or of "*the Germans*" as a people in sweeping terms. He describes Germans as "a people without doubt," and with a "deeply ingrained" sense of militarism.

Some of these impressions grow from the conversations he recounts, such as a September 13, 1939 discussion with a maid in Berlin just after receiving telegrams on the latest bombings in Poland:

"Why do the French make war on us?" she asked.

"Why do you make war on the Poles?" I said.

"Hum," she said, a blank over her face. "but the French, they're human beings," she said finally.

"But the Poles, maybe they're human beings," I asked.

"Hum," she said, blank again.

At the same time, he acknowledges the dissonance between the theoretical conception of "Germans" and "Germanism" with what he observes of the people around him.

S., a veteran correspondent here, thinks every woman, and child in this country is a natural-born killer. Perhaps so. But today I noticed in the Tiergarten many of them feeding the squirrels and ducks — with their rationed bread.

Conclusions?

For one thing, I have a greater appreciation for the impetus behind the work of Stanley Milgram (who produced *Obedience to Authority*) and others in the wake of World War II. In the end I wouldn't say that I learned so much about what *happened* during the early years of the war, but more how it *seemed*.

Mahlon says

As a European correspondent (first for a wire service, and later for CBS) stationed in Berlin from 34-40, Shirer was uniquely placed to comment on every major event of the early stages of WWII as they unfolded. Luckily for us, he kept a diary. In addition to reporting on war news he also provides keen insights into the psyche of both the Nazi leadership, and the regular German citizen.

Reading this book felt a little like watching WWII on CNN with Breaking News every other page. This book had a much more intimate and visceral feel than Shirer's best known work, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*.

Mark Desetti says

Very interesting reading. I only wish I had read this concurrent with *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. This would have provided a really comprehensive look at these years. Having read both of Shirer's books as well as Klemperer's *I Will Bear Witness* (1933-1941), I really feel I'm getting a good sense of life in Nazi Germany up to the point where the US enters the war. For anyone interested in this time period and how these atrocities could apparently be accepted by the German people, I would highly recommend all three books.

Owen says

"Berlin Diary" is one of the more unusual documents to come out of World War II. First published in 1941, not long after America's entry into the war, it acted as a crucial means of informing the American public of the state of affairs in Germany up until the start of the war. Shirer spent the years from 1934 to 1940 in Europe as a foreign correspondent, and was mostly posted in Berlin during that time. As such, he witnessed the rise of Nazi fanaticism from a privileged position, often being given access to Nazi functions that the public could not attend. Shirer's better known work, *"The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,"* is more exhaustive and examines the subject from a slightly more detached point of view. "Berlin Diary" is the pithy, day-by-day account of what it was really like on the ground in Berlin, including all the personal difficulties and aggravations that occurred as the end of 1940 approached. It's a fascinating book which will add vital colour to anyone's attempt to understand the period.

Lilo says

This book, a diary written by William L. Shirer (who later wrote *"The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich"*), takes you into Europe of the 1930s (more precisely, the time span from 1934 to 1941) and tells you about the day-to-day life of a foreign correspondent stationed in Berlin. Shirer's diary is also a first-hand report of how

Hitler and his henchmen kept deceiving the German public with propaganda and outright lies, this being simplified by having full control over the press, which also required foreign correspondents to have their reports censored before submitting or broadcasting.

This is not history in retrospect. This is ugly history in the making.

There is actually not much I could say about the book that other reviewers haven't already said.

I would like to point out, however, that what Shirer considered to be the psyche of "the regular German" was actually the psyche of "the regular Nazi". It might not have occurred to Shirer that the only Germans who freely offered him their opinions were Nazis. Non-Nazis would have known better than to utter any critic of Hitler or Nazi ideology to anyone but close non-Nazi relatives and friends. If reported, they would have been arrested by the Gestapo and would have landed in front of the kangaroo court, called "Volksgericht", or they would, at least, have been shipped to the nearest concentration camp.

The book could have used a bit more editing. However, given its invaluable content, I consider such flaw insignificant. I rate this book 4 1/2 stars and round up to 5.

If you are the least bit interested in the reality of the Third Reich and how everything came to be, READ THIS BOOK!

David Lowther says

Shirer was a legendary foreign correspondent whose best known work is probably *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*.

His *Berlin Diary* is a more than interesting account of daily political life in Berlin between 1934 and his return to the USA at the end of 1940. Not surprisingly the diary had to be smuggled out. He was critical from the Nazis from the outset and became increasingly disenchanted with them as the years went by.

His style is very simple and easy to read and this makes the narrative all the more interesting. The diary deals almost exclusively with politics except for brief passages about rationing and its effects on the general population. Two things stand out; the ludicrously restrictive censorship imposed on foreign correspondents and broadcasters and the atrocious lies from the Nazi Propaganda Ministry led by the appallingly odious Josef Goebbels.

David Lowther. Author of *The Blue Pencil*, *Liberating Belsen* and *Two Families at War*, all published by sacristy Press.

Alex says

"He has become—even before his death—a myth, a legend, almost a god, with that quality of divinity which the Japanese people ascribe to their Emperor. To many Germans he is a figure remote, unreal, hardly human. For them he has become infallible."

Shirer's Berlin Diary documents his years as a reporter in the late 1930s, watching Hitler's rise as it unfolded. But Shirer plays more than reporter here. He's a war strategist, psychologist, patriot, soldier, husband, father, colleague, storyteller. And he's at his best describing Hitler's speeches which Shirer attended in person. You can feel the energy jumping off the pages. Shirer saw right through the charade, giving him an ability to analyze, describe, and articulate what was transpiring without being caught up (too much) in the emotion of the moment himself.

Only knock is that I found the pacing a bit slow. I'm tempted to say with some editing this book could really jump, but I think editing out the mundane daily entries would steal the essence of the book. The trudging pace stays true to the evolution of events-both in his personal life and on the world stage. So it's hard not to appreciate it for what it is: a genuine firsthand account of one of the biggest events in world history.
