



Hitler: Ascent, 1889-1939

Volker Ullrich

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A landmark biography that gives us an unprecedented understanding of the man who has become the personification of evil.

Volker Ullrich draws on previously unseen papers and recent scholarly research to shed new light on the man behind the public persona: from Hitler's childhood and his failures as a young man in Vienna to his First World War experience and his rise as a far-right party leader. Ullrich deftly captures Hitler's intelligence, intuitive grasp of politics, and skill at oratory as well as his megalomania, deep insecurity, and repulsive worldview. He gives us a vivid portrait of the postwar Germany Hitler stepped into--humiliated by defeat, wracked by political crisis, starved by economic depression--but the author's unique gift is to elucidate how Hitler used his ruthlessness and political acuity to shape the Nazi party and lead it to power. The world has long tried to grasp how Hitler was possible. By focusing on how he experienced his world, formed his political beliefs, and wielded power, this riveting biography brings us closer than ever to the answer.

From the Hardcover edition.

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From Reader Review Hitler: Ascent, 1889-1939 for online ebook

Owlseyes says

Wenn Sie die Wörter verwenden 'ist er wie' dann alle Änderungen.

Das politische linksgerichtete mag den Ausdruck verwenden: 'er ist wie'.

Das ist sehr nützlich.

(Er mag Juden, und er wird von vielen von ihnen unterstützt)

Tatsächlich ist es eine verschiedene Frisur... ohne Schnurrbart.

Lessons from Hitler's Rise

Christopher R. Browning

in:

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/...>

Trump/Hitler comparisons are overstated. How did Hitler actually consolidate power?

By Sebastian Schutte

in: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/m...>

John Collins says

Strange as it sounds, I'd been looking for a biography last year that covered the rise of Hitler—not the war years, but the years of his coming to power. In our current events climate in which authoritarianism took a higher profile, this historical context seemed worthwhile, even if there was not a direct correlation between Hitler and current events.

I researched a few titles and didn't feel they were quite what I was looking for, so the NY Times review of "Hitler: Ascent, 1889-1939" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/28/bo...>) immediately piqued my interest.

Ullrich has conducted extensive research (the content of the book ends at 64% on the Kindle edition, and about 35% of the book is notes and bibliography). The bibliography is sorted into (at least) primary and secondary sources. Ullrich has been careful not to sensationalize Hitler, and in fact, debunks or downplays some of the legend around the dictator.

I definitely learned things about German and world history from World War I and the 1920s. I also picked up warnings for the modern day to avoid repeating history.

Tidbits like:

- “His speeches typically began with a look back at “wonderful, flourishing Germany … This idealised vision of the past allowed Hitler to paint the present day in hues that were all the darker.”
- “the beer-cellar rabble-rouser, who liked to depict himself as a man of the people, in fact despised the masses, which he regarded as nothing more than a tool to be manipulated to achieve his political ambitions.”
- “conspiracy theory had become a stock element of ethnic-chauvinistic German propaganda”
- “Hitler was the one attracting the desire for religious awakening and salvation of those who had fallen down the social ladder or who feared they might be about to.”
- “Fed by those tendencies and carried by a ‘gigantic wave of eccentric barbarism and primitive, populist fairground barking,’ National Socialism pursued ‘a politics of the grotesque…replete with Salvation Army allures, reflexive mass paroxysms, amusement-park chiming, cries of hallelujah and mantra-like repetition of monotonous slogans until everyone foamed at the mouth.’”
- “attempts to depict the NSDAP leader as ridiculous could not combat the phenomenon of Adolf Hitler. Nor did they undermine the tendency of his supporters to see him as the national saviour.”

I also noted many, many passages about the use of religious symbolism and language and the appeal of a political savior, along with the role of the religious community in Hitler's rise. “Hitler was enough of a realist to see that he could never come to power without support from Christian voters.” And how support for Hitler was an issue of belief. When someone believed in Hitler, they could not be rationally argued with.

Then there's the warnings against ethno-nationalism. “Thimme branded the attitude of the Protestant Church ‘towards this organised hatred, murder and forced expulsion’ as ‘simply shameful. How can God's blessing be upon a movement that is a slap in the face to the simplest and clearest tenets of Christianity?’ he asked in May 1933. ‘The Church has an absolute duty to repeatedly raise a voice of caution and warning about all the injustice coming down from above.’”

Though long, the book reads very well. It was written in German and translated, so there's an occasional strange word or syntax, but only in an endearing way. In fact, there were some great lines. My favorite was “pursuing his goal with the single-mindedness of a sleepwalker.”

The book assumed more understanding of the structure and politics of Germany than I had, but it was a barrier that could be easily overcome.

Bottom line: A study of Hitler may not be enjoyable, but it's worth understanding such a dark time in history. This is an in-depth, readable account. As such, I suggest it.

Marks54 says

The first volume (with a second volume to follow) of Volker Ullrich's new biography of Hitler is very good. There are lots of Hitler biographies out there and this one is comparable to the greats, such as Kershaw's two volume work. Why the need for a new Hitler bio? Ullrich addresses this himself in the introduction - he has some new sources to tap and there is such interest that new generations need to be reintroduced to this very strange man. In part, the topic is fascinating. Besides Jesus, this is likely the most written about man ever, and his rule really did reshape the world. … but this could lead to bad new biographies just as easily to good ones. The strength of the book comes from how Ullrich, an accomplished historian and journalist, has approached Hitler. On the one hand, the life is told as it unfolds, with Hitler moving through stages, during which he makes choices and acts, with consequences that shape what comes next. Along with this traditional way to construct a story, Ullrich also writes his book with an acknowledgement of his unique subject that

looks back over the whole story to identify the origins of what Hitler became. So for example, when does the monstrous anti-semitic Hitler first display himself? When did his speaking capabilities arise? When did his caution give rise to world threatening arrogance and brinksmanship? The result is a complex story, with lots of details, but a really compelling account. Ullrich also trades off between sequential story telling (typical in a bio) and a topical treatment of key issues, such as Hitler's personal life or his evolving strategy towards organized religion in Germany. The result is a view of Hitler as having arrived on the scene more or less developed by the mid-1920s. This is also a view that highlights Hitler as an exceptional actor/liar who could present many faces to the world and could jump in and out of different roles with relative ease.

In developing this complex view of Hitler the leader, Ullrich also emphasizes how the led were actually led - how Hitler managed his party and his regime. The disorder of Nazi rule has long been recognized by such historians as Bracher, and Ullrich makes Hitler's presentational multi-tasking and his "divide and conquer" management style as central to his success. This is a very enlightening book because of these perspectives and how Ullrich ties them together. I cannot wait until the second volume is written and translated. The first volume takes us up to the outbreak of World War II.

I can only touch on the book's richness here. For example, I just finished a new book on TE Lawrence (Lawrence in Arabia) followed by Lawrence's memoirs. The comparison between Hitler and Lawrence at different times is obvious. They were born within a year of each other (Lawrence was older.) Both were shaped by disenchantment following WW1, although in very different ways. Both thrived in combat but were more unsettled by peace. Both were cultural outsiders seeking new and somewhat adopted identities with somewhat mixed success - the Austrian who would be German and the British Oxford grad who identified more with the Arabs than with England. The legacy of both was shaped by their writings and both became very public constructed persons while individual behind the public persona remains a bit unclear for both to this day. I could go on.

That is only the first comparison that comes to mind. I am sure there are more.

This book gained some notoriety from a recent NYT review that seemed to tie Hitler to the current US election cycle and one of the candidates. A careful reading of the review, which I strongly recommend, shows a masterful piece of editorial choice in emphasizing aspects of Hitler that appeared to have parallels in a certain candidate. A careful reading of the book, however, will quickly raise some critical dimensions (military experience, relationships with women) where Hitler could hardly be more different than the candidate. That is OK. I never entertained a strict parallel with the candidate - there are fundamental differences. The comparison is a useful one to analyze, even with the significant differences. Ullrich has even written about it, although I suspect he does not mind it - since it might otherwise sell large numbers of a 1000 page biography. If it gets people to read more history, that is fine with me.

Maru Kun says

When I see leading historians of 1930's Germany being asked if the Nazis and the Trump administration have anything in common I used to expect them to chuckle politely, quote Godwin's Law and tell us how different 21st century America is from pre-WW2 Europe. Sad to say, but this is not what they do.

Well before Trump expressed his sympathy for the "...good people..." attending the neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Richard J. Evans was writing about how the Trump administration was 'Too Close for Comfort' to the Nazis. Timothy Snyder made the comparison even more explicit. talking about Trump's

November election and, for good luck, compared the GOP to the incompetent German conservatives who tried to control Hitler's rise.

With Evan's and Snyder's words in mind, where better place to try and discern the similarities and differences between Hitler and the 45th President of the United States- than in the pages of a recent, comprehensive and critically praised biography of Hitler.

So after finishing this thousand plus page book, what have I found? To begin with, making a comparison between Hitler and Trump is not as easy as I expected. This is not because of a lack of points in common but because there are so many. One begins to wonder whether the exercise is more of a psychological illusion. Might I be seeing Hitlerian traits in Trump in the same way people see themselves in the vague generalities about one's personality that come from the cleverer type of fortune teller? Let's take a closer look at the facts, starting with a few of the more trivial points of comparison between the two dictators and then moving on to the core of the matter.

Neither Trump nor Hitler lack self belief. Is such belief justified? We find in Trump one of the best known examples of the Dunning-Kruger effect but in Hitler's case one cannot be so sure. Hitler was good at school, but lazy. Talking about the class photo:

The 10-year-old [Hitler] occupies the middle of the top row with his arms crossed and his face slightly overexposed 'in a pose of demonstrative superiority'. The young boy was obviously not plagued by self-doubt.

Hitler had and Trump still has obsessions with personal hygiene, diet and physical health. Where Hitler was a vegetarian Trump's first choice is always meat - overdone steak with ketchup or a McDonalds. Not much in common there you may think at first glance, but Hitler became a vegetarian because he believed he would die young and was trying to reduce his cancer risk. Trump believes his vital energies will be exhausted if he does too much exercise over his lifetime ("Donald Trump Thinks Exercise Makes you Die Young"), hence the USD137,000 spent to date by the US taxpayer for golf carts for the Secret Service. All that walking is bad for your health.

The young man, who according to Kubizek had always dressed properly and was extremely conscious of hygiene

But as soon as we find a commonality – an obsession with personal hygiene and health (Trump hates to touch people because of the germs) – we find a contradiction again. Hitler fought bravely in WW I but had a troubling attitude towards women. Trump also participated in a little known war, fighting his "own personal Vietnam" which involved Trump heroically avoiding contracting venereal disease:

Paying prostitutes to initiate him into the ways of love, as was common among men of his age from middle-class backgrounds, was out of the question for Hitler: according to Kubizek, he was terrified of contracting syphilis.

I could go on with a host of other traits that Trump and Hitler share in common; the violent fits of temper, the contempt towards perceived inferiors, the racism, the reluctance to drink alcohol and the rest of it. Instead let's take a closer look at the one place where Trump and Hitler really are inseparable, where they are as tight as a Senator and his Super PAC, and that is in the relation of both of them to objective truth:

Seventeen years after the fall of the Third Reich, in his memoirs the former Finance Minister Lutz Schwerin von Krosigk identified ‘bottomless mendacity’ as Hitler’s primary personal characteristic. ‘He wasn’t even honest towards his most intimate confidants’, Krosigk recalled. ‘In my opinion, he was so thoroughly untruthful that he could no longer recognize the difference between lies and truth.’

There were big Nazi lies: Hitler knowingly portrayed himself as a peace maker during the period of re-armament while Germany was still vulnerable to a pre-emptive attack, he lied about the Anschluss, he lied at the Munich conference. There were, and still are, big Trump lies: everyone will have cheap healthcare, tax cuts will benefit the middle class, parts of Europe are under Sharia law and so on. There were fewer small Nazi lies (they tended to lie big) but the list of small Trump lies is never ending, tedious and petty. Just in the last week we have:

“...The Failing @nytimes set Liddle’ Bob Corker up...”, “...The Trip by @VP Pence was long planned...”, “...Senator Bob Corker “begged” me to endorse him...”, “...The issue of kneeling has nothing to do with race...”

A difference between Hitler’s lies and Trump’s lies is that those of Hitler had a clear and unchanging purpose: the promotion of the German Volk, Lebensraum and the destruction of the Jewish race. Trump’s lies also have a purpose but one of an entirely different nature: the promotion of Donald Trump and the feeding of his narcissistic ego for the brief moment the lie is uttered.

What this mendacity has in common for both Trump and Hitler is that it pays no regard to its human cost. Hitler was prepared to lie and so bring about the deaths of millions for his vision of the German nation. Trump seems equally prepared to lie brazenly and recklessly and bring about the death of millions, in Trump’s case indirectly by depriving them of healthcare or directly by doing his best to start a war. Unlike Hitler, Trump’s mendacity is only intended to boost his ratings and nothing more.

So it is lies that define both Trump and Hitler better than any other single trait. How about their followers?

The people that surrounded Hitler were motivated by a personal lust for money and power at any cost. Their greed stood behind state sanctioned murder, theft, invasion and war with no regard to the lives of the people of Germany, Europe or the world. Hitler provided the drive, intelligence (undoubtedly Hitler was both cunning and intelligent) and obscene vision to carry him and his cronies to levels of wealth and power they never imagined they could reach.

The people that surround Trump are very much the same as the class of people that surrounded Hitler; greedy liars with no moral compass putting their own bizarre ideologies above the common good (DeVos, Pence) or doing the bidding of others for money no matter the damage to the majority (Pruitt).

The problem that Trump’s followers have is that, unlike Hitler, Trump lacks the intelligence or skill to move their agendas forward. In contrast to Hitler, Trump makes no real effort to direct any policy matters except to the extent that they might, by coincidence, look good on Fox News that day. Trump leaves all the work of running a government to his followers. In Trump what we have today is the very 21st century phenomenon of fascism by delegation, fascism sub-contracted and fascism outsourced.

A comparison between Trump and Hitler is not so straightforward. There are certainly some rare personality traits they share that I am sure are shared by other authoritarian personalities; mendacity, narcissism, self obsession more generally. However besides mendacity there is another thing about their historical situation

that they have also common, perhaps the most important commonality of them all but also one of the easiest to overlook. What was true for Hitler in relation to Germany in 1933 remains entirely true in relation to Trump and America's situation today:

Hitler's path to power was anything but inevitable: in January 1933, it would have been eminently possible to prevent his nomination as Reich chancellor.

Trump remaining President or, God forbid, his re-election in 2020 is also not inevitable if only those in a position to do so had the courage to act.

Steve says

An interesting biography of Adolf Hitler. I have read many biographies of Adolf Hitler and besides Ian Kershaw's 2 volume biography, This one ranks as the best. Hitler Ascent, 1889-1939 goes into his early childhood and throughout his struggling years as a artist in Vienna until serving in the German Army during World War I where he recovered in a hospital from a gas attack. He was involved in 1923 in the Beer Hall Putsch and started a revolution to overthrow the government which was unsuccessful and was in prison. During his time in prison, He wrote Mein Kampf (My Struggle) and paved the way to set up a socialist government known as the Nazi party and became Nazi dictator of Germany in 1933 and began a campaign against Jews known as the Holocaust and sent millions of Jews to concentration camps where many died. I would love to see the author write a second volume that deals with Hitler from 1940-1945 when he conquered half of Europe and his downfall in Berlin where he committed suicide in a bunker. Very well written.

Robert Miller says

So much has been written about Hitler that I confess that I was of the opinion that a book of this size would be mired down with boring expatiating writing and endless copious footnote references: Otherwise, I thought, how could the book contain 758 pages. How could such a book be interesting? But the book does contain much information that has not collectively appeared in other related books I have read about Hitler and it is a fascinating read (I cheated by buying the audible and hardcover versions-- I travel for work a lot). All of the common biographical data about the man, political history of Germany, and description of the multiple parties in power are covered. One might wonder how a man with no wealth or apparent political sway could rise to ultimate power in an advanced country such as Germany. Ulrich does an excellent job explaining the unique geopolitical and antisemitic realities existing in Germany before and during Hitler's rise to power: It was the perfect storm. The chapters I felt were the most interesting dealt with Hitler's woman, and in particular, his attraction to and "mentoring" of young girls (not as intellectually challenging to him, it seems) and ultimately to Eva Braun, who ironically, exercised some control over him until his death. This book keeps your attention and is well documented at the same time. You will learn things about Hitler that you didn't know in this book. I highly recommend it.

Michael Finocchiaro says

I cannot find any fault with Volker Ullrich's Hitler Ascent 1889-1939). It is articulate, heavily researched,

fearless in challenging long-held assumptions with historical facts and overall just a terrifying pleasure to read.

The author covers the events in Hitler's life up to 1939 interspersed with occasional chapters to illuminate parts of Hitler's dark personality. There are two chapters that deal with Hitler's relationship with women (and purported by apparently false rumours of homosexuality). Unlike his other cronies, he did not drink (à la Trump) and did not whore (unlike Trump) and was a vegetarian, and was - at least until his brief imprisonment at Landsberg in 1923) - probably a virgin. This author does not play up sexuality as a primary motor in the manic psychosis of Hitler. His explanation is more that Hitler was tortured by feelings of inadequacy and economic inferiority which he overcompensated for in his incredible speaking voice, his perfect photographic memory, and his expert political manoeuvring.

As for Klara Hitler's influence on Hitler, the tragedy of her early, untimely death probably did damage him, but - as posited by the author - his relationships with older women such as Wagner's widow Winifred, seemed to be adequate substitutes. That being said, it is clear that he felt women were "inferior creatures" because he was careful to ensure that all the people in positions of power were men and that the pretty much well-known liaison between Eva Braun and himself remain hidden from public scrutiny.

Hitler's father Alois was a brutal disciplinarian who savagely treated his wife and kids - albeit not uncommon at that time (or even, sadly, today) - and Hitler's mother Klara did her best to protect her favourite child, Adolf from the violence. He was a mediocre student and sort of a loner. Two important events happen when he is 18 years old: his mother is diagnosed by the Jewish family doctor, Eduard Bloch (Hitler grudgingly looked up at Bloch's window during Anschluss in Linz in 1938 as Bloch said after he narrow escape to the United States in 1941) with breast cancer in 1907, she improves under his care, Hitler is rejected from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, and his mother dies of cancer in 1908 at the age of 47. It is likely that this rejection by the "establishment" (which haunted him from then on and was at the root of his detest of intellectuals) and the death of his mother that started to destroy his soul. That being said, he quickly developed a talent for hiding his true feelings as he hid his rejection from the school from his parents. In 1909, he moves to Vienna and becomes embittered by his struggle (well documented of course in *Mein Kampf*) to survive on his meager art skills. It is also at this time in Vienna that he began to imbibe anti-Semitism. Due to the economic factors, there was an influx of Jews from eastern Europe into Vienna leading many to fear that Vienna was being "Jewified". It seems likely that Hitler wanted to place the blame of his own failure to succeed and advance personally on an external factor and like many Austrians of that epoch, he settled on the Jews as a convenient and popular scapegoat. But, for the moment, his changing views did not make him the outspoken demagogue that he would later become in Munich to which he emigrated in May 1913. Other than a squabble with Austrian authorities over military service, he was still a relatively quiet, friendless person.

After the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, all of Germany was caught up in a wave of nationalism leading up to Germany's declaration of war. In reality, this wave was political manipulation by Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg who propagandised external threats from Russia as the bogeyman: by feeding this fear of invasion, they stoked up a cross-class, cross-party fire of nationalism resulting in massive public demonstrations such as those in Munich from July to October 1914 which Hitler witnessed and in which he was caught up emotionally. He immediately tried to get enlisted to fight for the Germans and was sent to Lechfield in the "List" Regiment (so named for its first commander Colonel Julien List).

There is a fascinating and absolutely critical historical sidenote here (page 53), where the author explains that

when the German army retreated in September 1914 to the Marne having failed to encircle and destroy the French army, that the war has already lost on paper and yet this fact was never released to the public. This is particularly critical because in his later rhetoric, Hitler would always put Germany in the position as the victim of aggression whereas the truth was utterly different. And since the public was never told the truth, they believed Hitler and the NSDAP's "fake news" which justified in their minds the extreme measures that the Nazis began to take in the 20s and 30s to "revenge German honour" supposedly lost during WWI.

Hitler's baptism by fire (p55-57) was the near complete annihilation of the "List" Regiment including its namesake and commander near Ulm in October 1914). In mid-November 1914, near the western front, Hitler left a tent where the new commandant of the List company, Philipp Engelhard just 5 minutes before the tent was shelled and its occupants seriously injured or killed - one of many lucky escapes that Hitler would play up in his "divine mission" in *Mein Kampf* in that he felt that "God" had saved him. Hitler became a courier between the regimental command and the front line and was present at the horrific Battle of the Somme. Here again, he luckily survives but on October 5, 1916, Hitler was hit by shrapnel when the staff bunker was hit by a shell. While he was recovering behind the lines, he learned of the accusations of profiteering levelled against the Jews (although, in truth, it was the corrupt government safely behind the battle lines was engaged in profiteering but conveniently fermenting these anti-Semitic lies to hide their tracks.) This was particularly ingenuous as thousands of Jews were fighting in the trenches for Germany. Hitler's List Regiment continued to participate in all the major skirmishes up to the end of the war with heavy casualties. Another great irony of history is that it was likely that Jewish lieutenant Hugo Gutmann was probably the person that put Hitler up for the Iron Cross. Hitler's thanks? "We had a Jew in our regiment, Gutmann, a coward beyond compare." (p. 70). In October 1918, his unit went back to the front where he was nearly blinded by mustard gas.

I will be less verbose about the rest of Hitler's career - I just learned so much about the formation of Hitler's psyche in the years leading up to the 20s that I wanted to spend some time on them.

It was horrifying to read about how Hitler decapitated and recuperated the DAP (German Worker's Party) and soon NSDAP (same with National Socialist) party which became his primary vehicle to taking power. I knew that a primary motor for Hitler's rise was the unfairness of the Treaty of Versailles after WWI, but what I didn't know was that when Hitler was in Munich during later 1918, he witnessed first-hand the Bolshevik Republic of Bavaria - a short-lived Communist revolution that was mercilessly repressed by a mercenary group, the Freikorps (which gave Hitler ideas for the SA and later the SS) sent by the government in Berlin. From this moment on, Hitler becomes virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Communist - two subjects that became interchangeable in his invective. While his paranoia versus the Communists can be understood based on the Revolution of October 1917 and the small-scale revolution he witnessed in 1918 in Munich, the anti-Semitism that came to be such a core value for Hitler remains, for me at least, still somewhat mysterious. As Ullrich points out, Jews made up only 1.9% of the population of Germany, but there had always been pogroms against them - under the pretence of "Jesus killers" and the like. It was sad to learn that Dachau was opened as soon as Hitler was declared Chancellor in 1933. They wasted little time in unleashing their violence. I felt physically ill reading in particularly about Krystallnacht. Horrifying.

Suffice it to say that the entire book is incredibly informative and thought-provoking. It is HIGHLY recommended for those who wish to understand how monsters are created and how monstrous regimes are born out of ignorance and concessions to ignorance. In the present period, fascism is still a real and present risk and must be fought.

The world has not gotten beyond its latent (and not so latent) racism and anti-Semitism and books like Volker Ullrich's *Hitler Ascent* make an irrefutable case for caution and the dangers of underestimating the capacity for evil and manipulation by populist rabble-rousers. Still weeks later, this book echoes in my mind.

With the Fascists gaining 100 seats in the Bundestag on 24 Sept 2017, unfortunately the nightmare is still a threat even 80 years later :(

Paul says

Hitler – Demystified

Most people today think that they know a lot about Hitler, that any more books about him are a waste of time and add nothing. This book on Hitler is the Volker Ullrich's first volume on Hitler, that demystifies some of the 'legends' that have grown around him, examines how this Austrian came to lead Germany, rebuild confidence in the country and build a cult around himself.

In my opinion this magisterial volume builds and compliments the work of Sir Ian Kershaw and Ullrich also admits as much in his introduction to this 760 paged volume. Ullrich has also been able to use the few sources that have become available since the publication of Kershaw's two volumes, as well as re-reading all existing research sources.

My Great-grandfather was born in Lwow/Lemberg in 1889, part of Polish Galicia that was then under Austrian control, the same year Hitler was born in Austria itself. Both fought in the First World War technically on the same side, but like most Poles it was with no great love for Austrian it was because they were forced to defend Polish Galicia from the Russians. In 1918 my Great-Grandfather was celebrating the end of the war and the rebirth of Poland that had escaped the clutches of Austria. Whereas Hitler was in Germany licking his wounds like many Germans, blaming the leadership of Germany for selling them out. These events would affect both differently, but one went on to reap his revenge on Poland amongst others.

Ullrich as well as building on what Kershaw told the world about Hitler, he takes a look at Hitler the man and attempts to give us a forensic account of the person up to 1939. It has always been a mystery to many how Hitler was able to mesmerise the German people and take over the instruments of power with little to no resistance.

What we do learn is that Hitler was the ultimate salesman who could sell dreams to people who needed something they could hold on to. What is interesting is how lazy Hitler actually was, how after his walk at the Berghof with his entourage, he would be driven back while everyone else was made to walk. He could not drive, nor swim and with his love of the alps could not ski!

Most books on Hitler try to paint the man as having hidden depths, this book shatters that image completely. What Hitler did understand, the need to control the narrative, the overarching message you want to expand and make people believe. This is very much the concept of the modern politician and public relations consultant, he who owns the narrative controls the story the public will receive.

Something that Ullrich does discuss is the love life Hitler had, such as it was, and that he was attracted to teenagers, and that led to the suicide of his own 17-year-old niece. It does come across that it was quite complicated and not what the public perceived.

There are many interesting chapters in this volume that cover many topics from the early life of Hitler, through the War and Versailles, to the failed putsch and on to writing Mein Kampf. We are also told that Hitler's antisemitism that developed was different to his actual interactions with Jews.

This is one of the most important books on Hitler that has ever been published especially as this starts to peel away the mask of Hitler the man rather than the Hitler the projected leader. This is an excellent volume that gets under Hitler's skin, makes us see the man as a charlatan who happened to be lazy, shallow, attracted to teenage girls rather than women his age and very narrow minded.

This is an excellent volume that all students of German History should be required to read and absorb. Ullrich has been able to approach the subject with sensitivity as well as honesty and paints the picture that succeeds in breaking down the myths that have built up around Hitler the person.

Adrian Hon says

Highly readable yet excruciatingly detailed account of Hitler's rise to power. Volker Ullrich is both a historian and a journalist, and it shows, since he makes this one of the most accessible 'serious' biographies I've ever read.

Like everyone who's taken GCSE History, I know the bullet points of pre-WW2 Germany: how Hitler was a frustrated artist, the Beer Hall putsch, Night of the Long Knives, Kristallnacht, "peace in our time", etc. This book turns them into a story that makes sense.

What's unusual about this book is how much we know about Hitler's movements, plans, intentions, and even private words on a day by day, and hour by hour, basis. At times it feels like half of his inner circle kept diaries about current events; but Ullrich always carefully chooses the briefest yet most powerful quotes, and translates them into informal English. As a result, everything feels incredibly real.

Of course, it's impossible to avoid drawing comparisons to Trump. Hitler, like Trump, was continually underestimated and had a huge inferiority complex. I suppose time will tell, but the one good piece of news is that Hitler seems a hell of a lot smarter than Trump. Unfortunately, Trump and the Republicans show a disturbing inclination to do away with the rule of law because they feel they have the popular will behind them, or due to some kind of emergency situation. This biography shows just how far that tendency can take us.

Eric says

I've been having one of those weeks when I finish several books that I've been working on for a long time, and I clear the decks!

Like the title says, this book covers Hitler's life up to the weeks before Germany invaded Poland and started World War II. By that time, Britain, France, and the United States had had enough of Hitler. He had shown himself to be utterly untrustworthy. As the author makes clear, by the time Hitler brought himself to the brink of global war, his fate was already sealed. Apart from a few more lucky breaks, it was all downhill from there.

The main question is, what did Hitler have to offer? To what did he owe his success? He was uncompromising and pushy, and very, very lucky. And he was a superb actor, who convinced a beaten

people suffering under a failing, fledgling democracy, that they could be great again. That he was the one who could make them so. It was mostly smoke and mirrors, coupled with the fact that Germany was suffering economically and badly needed a self-esteem boost after WWI. And they needed a scapegoat to blame their misfortune on. Hence Hitler's campaign of increasingly ruthless anti-semitism.

I could start making comparisons between Hitler and a current leader. There are many to be made. But that has been done frequently, and I wouldn't change anyone's mind, so I'll let that rest.

An informative biography, and not only relevant to our time, but to all times. We should train ourselves to recognize an empty-souled, self-serving megalomaniac when one appears. If we don't recognize and shun such a would be leader, we deserve to be ruled by him. Or her.

Spencer Quinn says

This is a review of the hardcover, not the audio. This is the third of the 4 major Hitler bios that I've read. In some strange way, the appalling story never gets old. Ullrich is a very good writer with an instinct for the telling details and where to put them. Despite that, I could only read the book in twenty or thirty page chunks. It's just too depressing - how lucky Hitler was, how many times his way could have been blocked forever but was not, the disgusting character of the other top Nazis (none of whom had anything like his talent for rousing and organizing a mass movement, meaning if Hitler had been stopped it's quite possible the whole movement would have collapsed). And then there's the behavior of the German people, the consequences of which are still with them - and us. I look forward to book 2, where justice - way too little and way too late - was done.

Julie says

Hitler: The Ascent (1889-1939) by Volker Ullrich is a 2016 Knopf publication.

Obviously, this is not the type of book I typically read. My husband and son read books, watch documentaries, and movies about world war two all the time, and I always find something else to do.

While I do enjoy reading about history, this period of history and the topic of war is just not my thing. Hitler is a person I prefer not to think about and I certainly don't like the images that war conjures up. So, why did I check out this book?

The main reason I decided to read this book is that the focus is on Hitler's rise and not his reign. How did he manage to draw in so many people? Become so charismatic? How did his 'movement' get started and was he always such a tyrant? What about his childhood, his family? Did he have any human qualities? Issues? Any time Hitler's name is mentioned I have wondered what made him the kind of person he was and if his background was an indicator of the man he would become.

The author immediately stresses that this book is not an attempt to 'humanize' or normalize, Hitler, or to create a softer image of the man, but to deconstruct the mythology of him.

As I have said, I never read one thing about Hitler, except in school, which was a long time ago, so I can't compare this book with any other books written about him, which there are many. But, this one did give me a clearer picture of Hitler – the man- as opposed to Hitler- the dictator/ monster.

This book does cover a vast period of time and is very lengthy, and also contains a large section of notes. There were periods where the discussion of Hitler's experiences in the first world war, strategies and such, for example, were extremely dull and dry for someone like me, but, the picture drawn of the man, shows exactly how closeminded he was, exposes his sick perversions, his sociopathy, and revealed him to be a charlatan, almost like a master of disguise.

This book, which is very, very detailed, and is slow going if you aren't an expert on the subject as there are many situations and names I was not familiar with. Still, I do have a much better idea of man, the climate in Germany that helped get his movement off the ground and how he managed to rise to power.

For me this book gave me answers to many of the questions I've had about Hitler, about how and why he got became the vile monster he did, almost like a 'character study', but is also an insightful piece of history which could also serve as a word of caution.

After reading a few other reviews, it is obvious I'm a little out of my depth here, my knowledge is slim on this subject, and I'm not exactly the audience the book was written for. But, I did manage to get through the book, a little at a time and it was certainly informative. The author is obviously very knowledgeable about his subject, and the book has been well researched.

I don't see myself looking for more information on Hitler, as this book was difficult enough to digest, but for those looking for a more in depth look at the man behind the myth, this book is the one you need!

4 stars

Joseph Raffetto says

Hitler: Ascent, 1889-1939 is a well-researched and well-written biography.

Ullrich's task of bringing this to life is challenging for one reason: Hitler is not interesting. There's almost nothing about Hitler the person that's compelling.

Orwell wrote that Hitler was a "criminal lunatic." That's the consistent theme of this book and Hitler never diverts from being a criminal lunatic. And not even an interesting lunatic.

However, this is a detailed and fascinating portrait of Hitler's rise to power.

Steven Z. says

The public's fascination with Adolf Hitler remains strong even sixty years after his suicide in the Fuhrer

bunker in April, 1945. To date over 120,000 books have been written about Hitler and Volker Ullrich's new biography, HITLER: ASCENT 1889-1939 is a welcome addition to this ever increasing bibliography. Up until now Ian Kershaw's two volume work was the recognized standard in this genre replacing earlier volumes by Alan Bullock, and Joachim Fest as the most comprehensive works on Hitler. Kershaw argued that Hitler was motivated by two obsessions as he pushed Germany toward war; the removal of the Jews, and German expansion to the east. Overall, Ullrich agrees with Kershaw's thesis, but what makes his book so important is his ability to synthesize the vast material that has already exists, his access to a great deal of new primary materials, and it has been almost twenty years since Kershaw's work was published. Ullrich should be commended for his voluminous research supported by his extensive endnotes. These endnotes contain a treasure-trove of information for scholars of the Nazi regime, their leaders, and their rise to power.

Many wonder what the keys were to Hitler's success. Ullrich correctly depicts a man who was able to conceal his real intentions from friends and foes alike as one of the keys to his success. He had the ability to instantly analyze political situations and exploit them, including his political opposition. His success rests on his improvisational style of leadership where he created numerous internal conflicts from which he emerged as the indispensable man. Ullrich breaks the myth that Hitler lacked personal relationships arguing that he was able to separate his political and private spheres which impacted his pursuit of power greatly. Another key that Ullrich stresses in understanding Hitler is examining the reciprocal nature of his relationship with the German people that contributed to his enormous popularity. It was not a forgone conclusion that Hitler would come to power, but domestic opposition leaders underestimated his abilities, as would foreign leaders after he consolidated power in 1934. Ullrich's aim "is to deconstruct the myth of Hitler, the 'fascination with monstrosity' that has greatly influenced historical literature and public discussion of the Führer after 1945. In a sense, Hitler will be 'normalised'—although this will not make him seem more 'normal.' If anything, he will emerge as even more horrific."

Ullrich's study is extremely comprehensive. He does not spend a great deal of time concerning Hitler's childhood and upbringing, just enough to explore a few myths associated with Hitler's childhood which he debunks, i.e.; he did not grow up in poverty as his father Alois had a good pension; he did not blame the Jews for the death of his mother from cancer; and he did not blame the Jews for his inability to be admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts. The biography becomes detailed as the Ullrich explores the effect Fin-de-Siècle Austria on Hitler and the author does an excellent job reviewing the historiography pertaining to Hitler's intellectual development. Hitler is presented as an autodidact who was self-educated which explains how he acquired his anti-Semitic prejudices and German nationalist ideas. But it is Hitler's experience in World War I that shaped the man, without which he would have remained "a nobody" with pretensions of being an artist.

Ullrich's work successfully shifts the focus of his study on to Hitler the person as is evidenced by an excellent chapter, "Hitler the Human Being." It is here that Ullrich delves into Hitler's behavior and personality and tries to lift the mask that makes it difficult to penetrate Hitler's shifting persona. Hitler's personality is a compilation of dichotomies.* He was a dictator who kept people at a distance, but sought company to avoid being alone with himself. He could be caring and empathetic at times, but at the same time he could commit or order brutal acts. Ullrich is correct in pointing out that Hitler was an actor and chameleon who was able to manipulate others who did not see through him as he overcame his personal insecurities and was able to shift many of them on to the German people in order to seize power.

Other important chapters include "Month of Destiny: January 1933," where Ullrich details Hitler's path to the Chancellorship by taking the reader through the numerous elections, the strategies pursued by Hitler and his cohorts, the approach taken by the opposition, and the political infighting on all sides of the political spectrum. January 30, 1933 became the turning point in the history of the twentieth century, but at the time Ullrich correctly points out leaders and the German public were not totally aware of its significance because

most power brokers believed that the Franz von Papen-Paul von Hindenburg-Alfred Hugenberg alliance would be able to control Hitler. As is repeatedly pointed out in the narrative it was just another example of people underestimating the new German Chancellor. When examining if there were opportunities to stop Hitler's ascent, Ullrich recapitulates the ideas of Karl Dietrich Bracher's **THE GERMAN DICTATORSHIP** published in 1972. Further, no one should have been surprised by Hitler's actions after he rose to power, because his speeches, other public utterances, and his book **MEIN KAMPF** carefully delineated what he proposed to do.

In the realm of what he did do it is carefully reconstructed in the chapters, "Totalitarian Revolution," and "Eviscerating Versailles." After achieving power on January 30, 1933 over the next year we witness the Nazi consolidation of power through the creation of the first concentration camp at Dachau; the passage of the Enabling Act, or "The Law to Remedy the Distress of the People and the Reich," which was used to create a dictatorship in the hands of the Chancellor as Hitler could now formulate laws without the approval of the Reichstag; and lastly, The Night of the Long Knives which destroyed the SA and the last vestige of political opposition. As far as Hitler's foreign policy was concerned the enemy was the Bolshevik-Jewish conspiracy and the key to its destruction was the step by step dismantling of the Treaty of Versailles. Ullrich takes us through this process and the tactic Hitler employed throughout the period was to simultaneously appear as conciliatory and presenting his adversaries with a fait accompli, i.e., German military rearmament and the occupation of the Rhineland in March, 1936. The response of the west was one of appeasement and Hitler recreated a strategy that worked so effectively domestically – implementing policy that fostered foreign diplomats to underestimate him. Overall, there is little that is new in this part of the narrative, but Ullrich's clear analysis and Jefferson Chase's excellent translation make events and policies easy to understand, particularly the historical implications that would result in World War II.

After reading Ullrich's narrative I am not certain he has met his goal of "humanizing" Hitler because no matter how the material is presented he remains the historical monster that his actions and belief system support. To Ullrich's credit he has written a carefully constructed biography that should be seen as the most comprehensive biography of Hitler to date, and I look forward to the second volume that will carry us through the end of World War II.

*To explore Hitler from a psychological perspective you might consult:
Binion, Rudolph. **HITLER AMONG THE GERMANS**
Langer, Walter. **THE MIND OF ADOLF HITLER**
Waite, Robert. **HITLER: THE PSYCHOPATHIC GOD**

Calzean says

Extremely detailed (maybe a tad too much detail at times). Nonetheless, this book covers Hitler's rise to power and provides analysis into his personal life, relationships with the German people, the churches and his ability to instil a messiah-like faith in his capabilities.

A 750 page tome, where Hitler's early life up to the end of WWI is covered in the first 70 pages. So little is known of his early life. Ullrich's book goes on to show how little is known about Hitler the man. While it is known he was a vegetarian, bohemian, dog lover, art lover, nationalist, autodidact, introvert, moody, chameleon, motivator and strategist, he remains a man of mystery, unpredictability and evil.

If it was not for WWI, Hitler would have probably lived a life of obscurity. If it was not for the political machinations of others, he would never have been Chancellor.

An impressive biography.
