



Einstein in Berlin

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In a book that is both biography and the most exciting form of history, here are eighteen years in the life of a man, Albert Einstein, and a city, Berlin, that were in many ways the defining years of the twentieth century.

Einstein in Berlin

In the spring of 1913 two of the giants of modern science traveled to Zurich. Their mission: to offer the most prestigious position in the very center of European scientific life to a man who had just six years before been a mere patent clerk. Albert Einstein accepted, arriving in Berlin in March 1914 to take up his new post. In December 1932 he left Berlin forever. “Take a good look,” he said to his wife as they walked away from their house. “You will never see it again.”

In between, Einstein’s Berlin years capture in microcosm the odyssey of the twentieth century. It is a century that opens with extravagant hopes--and climaxes in unparalleled calamity. These are tumultuous times, seen through the life of one man who is at once witness to and architect of his day--and ours. He is present at the events that will shape the journey from the commencement of the Great War to the rumblings of the next one.

We begin with the eminent scientist, already widely recognized for his special theory of relativity. His personal life is in turmoil, with his marriage collapsing, an affair under way. Within two years of his arrival in Berlin he makes one of the landmark discoveries of all time: a new theory of gravity--and before long is transformed into the first international pop star of science. He flourishes during a war he hates, and serves as an instrument of reconciliation in the early months of the peace; he becomes first a symbol of the hope of reason, then a focus for the rage and madness of the right.

And throughout these years Berlin is an equal character, with its astonishing eruption of revolutionary pathways in art and architecture, in music, theater, and literature. Its wild street life and sexual excesses are notorious. But with the debacle of the depression and Hitler’s growing power, Berlin will be transformed, until by the end of 1932 it is no longer a safe home for Einstein. Once a hero, now vilified not only as the perpetrator of “Jewish physics” but as the preeminent symbol of all that the Nazis loathe, he knows it is time to leave.

From the Hardcover edition.

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From Reader Review Einstein in Berlin for online ebook

Din says

Quite a summation of Einstein's early life, theoretical physics, WW I, the Weimar republic, the rise of Nazism, Zionism and Nobel prizes! Excellent distillation of history and biography.

James says

Read as background for Berlin Literaryscape class at U of Chicago Basic Program. In 1913, fellow scientists Max Planck and Walther Nernst invited Einstein to join the faculty of the University of Berlin and to accept election to the elite Prussian Academy of Science. At 34, he had already changed the face of physics with his theory of special relativity. Plank and Nernst offered him an opportunity to work in the company of his scientific peers, with "no teaching obligations whatsoever [and] the right to lecture as he pleased," in a city that over the next two decades would see many startling events. The author takes Einstein's stay in Berlin as the point of departure for a wide-ranging examination of a crucial historical crossroads. Within a year of the physicist's arrival, WWI had broken out, to a chorus of approval from his new colleagues; Einstein was among the few to protest the wild enthusiasm with which the youth of Europe marched off to slaughter in the trenches. At the same time, he was working on General Relativity, the theory that would make him the most celebrated scientist of his time—perhaps, Levenson argues, of all time. The author conveys in largely nontechnical language the essentials of Einstein's scientific achievements and of the quantum theory that he helped launch but never could bring himself to accept. Levenson also gives a frighteningly vivid picture of the political and cultural upheavals that shook Germany and the world in the years following WWI. Einstein's Jewish background, along with his pacifist and internationalist ideals, made him an inviting target to right-wingers eager for scapegoats in the wake of Germany's defeat. His departure for America on the eve of Hitler's ascension to power brings the story to a close.

Jonnie Enloe says

It is hard to criticize the writer or his style due to the subject matter. I suppose I have read all of this information before at least once. Einstein is put in a unique position due to the Nazi party and the politics of the day. Coupled with his personal failures he still manages to emerge as a giant historical figure. I am an Einstein fan in any case, even given his quirks. It seems as though he is a reluctant participant one minute and a glory seeker the next. I believe this comes from being forced into the limelight from relative obscurity.

Snail in Danger (Sid) Nicolaides says

Seems like a good book but I got distracted by other things (shiny fiction mostly). Admittedly it was slightly depressing to read about Einstein's, well, failures at relating to other humans, mostly women. I'd consider resuming this book at some other time, though.

Thomas Bach says

Although a well written book, Levenson relies on outdated and unconvincing discussions of German "character," the origins of WWI, and, what is worse, seems not understand the origin, course, and meaning of the German revolution or Weimar more generally. In addition, his discussion of Einstein adds little what was already known, and his description of Einstein's Theory of Relativity, Gravity, and ideas is obscure when not being banal. All this is unfortunate.

Tim says

one of the most valuable passages was not even about Einstein:
[about Hitler]: "'The German people', he said were ' made up of children, for only a childish people would accept million-mark bills.' It was a demagogue's trick and an effective one, for ultimately children must be blameless. The fault lies with the grown-ups who allow them to come to harm."

Fieroula says

Even though I don't like historical books and I am fairly good in theoretical physics, this book attracted me due to the historical facts and the approachable physics concepts. Strange? Might be, but Levenson did a very good job in putting Einstein's most productive years in the historical context of the Middle-War Berlin providing the reflections that the one had to the other. Great book in general...

Charlie says

Einstein in Berlin is an ambitious book portraying a place and time in history as well as highlighting a person who tried to affected that place and time. Einstein's physics changed Berlin and the world yet his social activism could not open the eyes of his fellow Berliners or the world.

Thomas Levenson expertly weaves both the politics of the day and an individual. I grew to see why Einstein was such an important person of his day. The same man who revolutionized physics saw what Germany could be under the Weimar Republic and what it was becoming influenced by the National Socialists.

The only knowledge I had of the lead up to World War II was what I had learned in high school 25 years ago. This book gave me a view of what was happening in Germany leading up to both WWI and WWII. I really liked this book.

Antonio says

An outstanding work. It delivers a clear picture of the life of a great scientist and of an important city veering

into the abyss, again. It gives a clear account of Einstein's scientific achievements and delivers a honest account of its complex personality

Yvonne says

This book gives you a good history for Germany from just before WWI though the rise of Hitler. Einstein's story gives a good look at Einstein the man, the scientist and an explanation of his theories.

Sandra says

I wasn't expecting to learn history and physics. Well, it would be a stretch to say I learned physics. The author patiently tries to explain relativity and quantum physics. Way over my head. Sorry. And I always suspected there was more to WWI than Arch Duke Ferdinand being shot. The beginnings and the groundwork for the war is brilliantly explained in several chapters. But back to the complexity of Einstein. Sometimes you would just like to wring his neck, then you can sort of understand why he got so short with us mere mortals, and just wanted to be left alone to think. This is a very good read, and I plan to reread several of the chapters.

Andrew says

Einstein in Berlin was an interesting read. It was a good mixture of biography, science, and history. The author did a nice job of making the science approachable for a layman such as myself. Although someone with more technical experience may have criticisms that I could not pick-up. The author did a good job of exploring the history and culture that surrounded Einstein during his greatest scientific triumphs. And, as my brother-in-law observed, the book gave interesting insights into Germany's motivation entering the Second World War. Apparently, Germany just did not realize and could not accept that it "lost" World War I. It was also interesting to learn more about Einstein. The book did not defy nor idolize him. Rather, it respected him enough to give greater insight who he was. Brilliant if emotionally cold. I am glad that I read it

Mike Lundgren says

Focused on Einstein's years in Berlin and the world events thatshape the man... and in turn how he shapes world events.

Antonio Toledo says

Livro muito interessante. Além de contar sobre a história de um dos grandes gênios da humanidade, faz uma excelente contextualização histórica e permite uma visão da Alemanha no período entre as guerras mundiais.

Pavel Miksa says

?ekal jsem, že se kniha bude více v?novat Einsteinovi b?hem jeho života v N?mecku. Obsahuje spoustu informací o dvou sv?tových válkách a okolní politické situaci, že jsem knihu ani nem?l chu? do?íst.
