

## Peter Longerich's Meticulously Researched Biography of Hitler

**Peter W. Petschauer**—Psychohistory Forum Res. Assoc.

*Review of Peter Longerich's Hitler: A Biography, translated from the original German by Jeremy Noakes and Leslie Sharpe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), ISBN: 978-0190056735, 1344, hardbound, \$39.95.*

What a gift to find two biographies of Adolf Hitler on sale together. One is by the German historian Peter Longerich, and the other is by an American historian (Simms, 2019). In essence, the German argues that Hitler's main focus was the East, specifically the Soviet Union. The American maintains that the *Führer's* focus was the evils of capitalism, Jews, the U.S., and G.B. (the West, really). Neither book is completely off, but their emphasis depends on which parts one wants to highlight in Hitler's speeches and writings. Both books are meticulously researched and well-argued. This review will emphasize Longerich's biography; as a Russian and Central European historian since the beginning of my career with a focus on economics and the denigration and elimination of Jews and Slavic peoples, I have no reason to question Longerich's emphasis. From 1919 on, Hitler's aim remained steadfastly on the destruction of Slavs and elimination of all Jews on his way to conquering *Lebensraum*.

For those who are familiar with Hitler's biography from previous works, like those of John Toland, Ian Kershaw, Joachim Fest, Allan Bullock, and thousands of others, Longerich offers a precise summary of Hitler's adult life with a clear focus and much attention to detail. He makes the *Führer* neither the hero nor the victim. He portrays him as the principal actor of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) and later the Third Reich. Longerich substantiates his approach with comprehensive "Notes" (pp. 967-1211), a helpful "Bibliography" (pp. 1215-1285), and a splendid index (pp. 1290-1324). The footnotes are an essential source for any serious scholar.

Longerich emphasizes Hitler as the driving force for all major, and often minor, decisions. For example, he ordered the activities of the pogrom, the *Kristallnacht* (p. 589ff), and the planning and execution of *Barbarossa*, the attack on the Soviet Union (p.

741ff). Indeed, Longerich shows in detail that Hitler made all key decisions. While he occasionally listened to advice, Hitler was the leader. For instance, when some members of the military leadership and other functionaries disagreed with him about the timing of the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, Hitler fought back immediately. Ludwig Beck, the Chief of the General Staff, disagreed with his approach and felt the call to resign. More dramatically, Hitler's ways already became apparent in the case of the elimination of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) and other "enemies" (p. 383ff); he decided quite specifically who was to be killed. When disputes arose about this or that topic, the men who surrounded him knew whom to consult.

Longerich's discussion of the war in Eastern Europe gives meaning to Hitler's emphasis on that part of the world and not the U.S. and G.B. Regarding *Barbarossa*, the author lays out the disputes between Hitler and the generals; he attributes several of the significant disasters to the *Führer's* lack of an overall military strategy for the massive front. He also shows Hitler's views about this part of the war as a death struggle between two ideologies and thus the merciless approach toward Soviet functionaries and Polish and Russian civilians in general and extermination of all Jews in particular. Consequently, the death toll during this part of the war in the Eastern European theatre was horrendous: over ten million Soviet and close to four million German soldiers, plus the almost unimaginable loss of civilians in Poland and the then Soviet Union; add to these losses the close to six million Jews! By comparison, the U.S. lost in all theatres about 416,800 soldiers and, thankfully, few civilians according to *The National WWII Museum* "Research Starters: Worldwide Deaths in World War II." Note: The Soviet Union lost more soldiers than the number of inhabitants in North Carolina today.

Although historians have attempted to pinpoint the origins of Hitler's "vitriolic anti-Semitism," in this volume, we note that even as late as WWI, he seems not to have exhibited a particular exterminationist impulse toward them. But we are offered details about why he thought Jews were "a problem" and needed to be gone from Germany in speeches and communications in 1919-1920 (p. 58ff). So, one must ask, where did this attitude begin to flourish? Did he simply fit in with other *Reichswehr* veterans who were indoctrinated in anti-Bolshevism and anti-Judaism in Munich right after the war? Or was it that this training activated his admitted hos-

tility toward the downtrodden Eastern European Jews in Vienna? Should we add Alice Miller's argument that hating Jews and Slavs was a permissible outlet for the inexpressible hostility toward abusive parents and teachers that pervaded society? Or was it initially simply expedient to "go after the Jews" because "everyone" hated them, and he could gain politically? These questions relate to another: Where did Hitler learn to order the murder of fellow human beings practically at will? Did he transfer the killing he experienced at the fronts of WWI to the political sphere? Having learned to act with impunity there, did he continue into his later vicious behavior and lack of concern for the millions who died at the fronts, at home, and in concentration camps?

Although there was the obvious horror of Hitler's tactics, it would have been appropriate for Longerich to point more clearly to the atrocities of the *Wehrmacht*. While the murderous activities of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), and Gestapo in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are well-known, Omar Bartov's *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Revised, 1999) would have provided excellent insight into the nefarious activities of the regular German military.

As for psychohistorians, it seems that Longerich ignores our research. He uses neither an acclaimed book by Rudolph Binion (1984) nor David Beisel's (2004) excellent *The Suicidal Embrace: Hitler, the Allies, and the Origins of the Second World War* that accounts for the psychological environment that allowed Hitler's success. Unlike Beisel, Longerich focuses on Hitler's actions and leaves out the reasons other leaders across Europe folded seemingly readily. All the same, the author is very much aware of other psychological literature. He consulted extensively with psychotherapists and psychoanalysts, taking his cues from Paul Matussek, Peter Matussek, and Jan Marbach's (2000) *Hitler – Career of a Delusion*: "It claims that Hitler's personality was characterized by narcissistic fixation on his public self, combined with a repression of his private feelings, which resulted in his finding any public shame or exposure intolerable" (see "Acknowledgments" and note 17 to the Prologue on p. 969). Longerich's other sober assessment is in the "Conclusion" (p. 950).

One can only hope that this carefully crafted (and well-translated) study will encourage all those who live freely in democracies to now allow aspiring authoritarians to succeed.

**Peter W. Petschauer, PhD, Dr hc**, Professor Emeritus of European History, Appalachian State University. He is also an author and a poet. Two of his most recent works include *An Immigrant in the 1960s: Finding Hope and Success in New York City* (2020) and *Hopes and Fears: Past and Present* (2019). The author may be reached at [petschauerpw@appstate.edu](mailto:petschauerpw@appstate.edu) or [peterpetschauer.com](http://peterpetschauer.com).

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## Putting Pop Culture on the Couch

**Jack Schwartz**—Psychoanalyst

*Review of Ken Fuchsman's Movies, Rock & Roll, Freud: Essays on Film and Music (Ori Academic Press, 2021), ISBN 978-1942431169, 210 pages, paperback, \$29.99.*

One could marvel at the breadth and scope of Ken Fuchsman's psychoanalytically and sociologically tinged explorations into cultural signifiers of film, music, and people in his new book *Movies, Rock & Roll, Freud: Essays on Film and Music* (2021). The essays may at first appear unrelated, creating a sense of wonder at how one places Sigmund Freud and 1960s counter-culture pop music into one volume. But, Fuchsman's distinctive sensibility and knowledge of the various subjects take the reader on a journey of discovery and insight that enables the essays to feel more uniform and connected.

Fuchsman begins his new book with numerous essays dedicated to the depiction of Freud's life through the lens of various filmmakers, most notably John Huston and his film *Freud: The Secret Passion* (1962), then backtracking into Jean-Paul Sartre's ra-