

not harsher (as in the case of the Treaty of Sèvres), and German politicians foolishly tried to instrumentalise the wave of nationalism that the Treaty of Versailles provoked rather than damping it down.

While offering a measured assessment of how the brutal crushing of the January 1919 uprising, and of later worker insurrections, helped quickly radicalise support for the far left, Gerwarth convincingly shows that the majority of Germans supported the Weimar Republic in its early years, as shown in electoral results in which the lion's share of votes went to moderate pro-republic parties. He points to how the Kapp Putsch of 1920 was brought down by a universal general strike, supported by workers and the middle classes alike, indicating the scale of support for the Weimar state. When Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau was murdered by the far right, in Berlin alone, "400,000 people took to the streets to protest against the assassination and express their support for the republic" (215). It was only ever a small minority, Gerwarth points out, on the far right and far left who rejected the republican compromise.

Gerwarth argues that the Weimar state's ability to survive against challenges from both the far right and the far left and overcome economic turmoil during its early years suggests that 1918 was not the stillborn revolution it is sometimes purported to have been but rather reflected a genuine centrist consensus among the majority of its citizens. "In fact," he argues, for Germany "in late 1923, the failure of democracy would have seemed far less probable than its consolidation" (221). Weimar's later collapse in 1933 thus appears more contingent, a product of the Great Depression, than of anything the November Revolution instigated. This is a useful, fascinating and highly readable synthesis which emphasises that it was no small achievement to turn a semi-authoritarian state into a liberal democracy in 1918-1919, following defeat in a world war – Gerwarth's kinder reassessment of the German Revolution's successes is one that will resonate with modern audiences all too aware of the challenges of founding new democracies.

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## **Dragonslayer: The Legend of Erich Ludendorff in the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich**

**By Jay Lockenour. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. Pp. xiv + 292. Cloth \$32.95. ISBN 978-1501754593.**

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In his engaging study of Erich Ludendorff, the quartermaster general who led a military dictatorship during the Great War, Jay Lockenour aims to write about what he calls the "Ludendorff Myth" (7). That is, he compares his own biographical approach to what Ian Kershaw accomplished in his influential book on Hitler. In many ways, Lockenour is successful at achieving this goal as, like Kershaw, he offers an impressively researched exploration of both how Ludendorff carefully managed his own image and how sycophants and the German public perceived, and largely projected, an image onto him. Ludendorff promoted himself as a symbol of the politics of victimhood and the desire for revenge that appealed to so many Germans in the interwar period. In his memoirs, publishing ventures, and political activism, Ludendorff obsessively preserved his "legend" as a war hero, defending his

manhood and honor in the wake of defeat, disseminating conspiracy theories, antisemitism, and pagan religious philosophy, which he saw as the basis for revitalizing Germany and rehabilitating himself.

Lockenour suggests that while most historians have given little attention to Ludendorff's life after his nervous breakdown in the face of defeat, the general's post-1918 life as a prolific writer, political player, and self-styled prophet is at least as important as his military career. Lockenour argues that Ludendorff's mental collapse did not render him inconsequential, rather it became a flashpoint that set into motion his next career as a myth-builder. The mythos, or heroic image that Ludendorff created for himself, modeled after the story of Siegfried, the hypermasculine warrior who was never defeated as a dragonslayer but only died when he was tragically betrayed, served as a political tool that proved useful for right-wing activists in Weimar and Nazi Germany.

The central myth cultivated by Ludendorff throughout his life, according to Lockenour, revolved around his role as *Feldherr* and warrior of unparalleled prowess. Ludendorff's victories at Tannenberg and Liège propelled him to fame and from the outset he constructed the narrative that through iron will he became Germany's greatest defender. This reputation would serve him for the rest of his life. Lockenour highlights how Ludendorff had to carefully manage this image and reputation, even as his catastrophic decisions—culminating in the military offensive in 1918 that ultimately led to defeat—proved, as other historians have concluded, his ineptitude. But Lockenour emphasizes that Ludendorff's mental breakdown in September 1918, far from marking his downfall, saw the start of arguably his most heinous act. Launching the “stab-in-the-back” legend to shift blame for defeat onto the home front, Ludendorff disseminated conspiracy theories about the “supranational powers” of socialism, Judaism, and Catholicism as responsible for the collapse. Nurturing these lies to deflect from his own failures would become Ludendorff's lifelong mission. Referring to Paul Lerner's work on “war hysteria,” Lockenour makes the case that, like German psychiatrists who believed that national unity was the cure for mental illness, Ludendorff dedicated himself to redeeming and healing Germany by rebuilding a national community based on racism and militarism. In a perfect example of psychological projection, Ludendorff attacked enemies who allegedly lost their nerve, while hoping to suppress any criticism that his own nerves, and manhood, were not up to the task.

Returning to Germany in 1919 after brief exile in Sweden, Ludendorff began a career as political activist. His first salvo against the Weimar Republic came in the form of his appearance in the parliamentary committee investigating the cause of defeat, where he fervently expressed his theory of the “stab-in-the-back.” A useful symbol for right-wing forces who wanted to tap into his heroic myth, Ludendorff played a behind-the-scenes role as organizer and fundraiser for the Kapp Putsch and through Rudolf Hess he met Adolf Hitler, giving the latter much-needed contacts in conservative circles. Following the Beer Hall Putsch, the relationship between Hitler and Ludendorff became increasingly frayed due to personal and political tensions, and thus after 1923 Ludendorff dedicated himself to the creation of the Tannenberg League and his self-constructed role as Germany's spiritual prophet. Though he burned his political bridges, Ludendorff's symbolic importance persisted.

Lockenour convincingly demonstrates that this phase, in which Ludendorff focused on his role in promoting what he saw as Germany's spiritual revitalization through moral training and racial purification, was perhaps Ludendorff's most significant period. Through the mouthpiece of the Tannenberg League, which produced a mountain of publications thoroughly researched by Lockenour, Ludendorff obsessed over racial theory, anti-Catholic conspiracy theories, and neo-pagan visions for society, which included often polarizing attacks on Christianity, especially the Catholic Church. By 1935, Hitler, with encouragement from the military establishment who wanted to rehabilitate Ludendorff's mythic image, capitalized on the war hero's fame and reputation with public celebrations. Upon his death in 1937, the press reinforced Ludendorff's legend and suggested that he was a genius military leader who only had lacked a statesman of equal stature, who the press now claimed was

embodied by Hitler. Lockenour suggests that, despite some of Ludendorff's attacks on Christianity, which Nazi leadership often saw as detrimental to solidifying popular support, Ludendorff's goals were essentially the same as Hitler's, and the old general largely succeeded in promoting his symbolic Siegfried image, which drew widespread support from those who also sought revenge for a lost war.

Lockenour's study should prove to be a definitive work, especially on Ludendorff's post-1918 career. Though some of the chapters would benefit from more concrete arguments to highlight the author's main points, the engaging writing and compelling narrative make it a fascinating read. Lockenour's in-depth analysis of the Tannenberg League's publications and the role played by Ludendorff's wife, Mathilde, in influencing his ideology and cementing his legacy will be especially interesting to social and cultural historians. Lockenour's impressive research demonstrates that Ludendorff's postwar efforts at myth-building were at least as significant as his role as a military leader.

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## The Fiume Crisis: Life in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire

**By Dominique Kirchner Reill. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020. Pp. 312. Cloth \$35.00. ISBN 978-0674244245.**

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Following the end of World War I, Fiume saw one of its most tumultuous and watershed periods in the twentieth century. Between 1918 and 1924, governments of opposing geopolitical aspirations succeeded each other. The city's future was highly uncertain. Pro-Italian Fiumians strove for the city's integration into Italy, its pro-Yugoslav citizens demanded that the city become part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, while autonomists and socialists sought its independence. However, regardless of the strained postwar political atmosphere that was spurred by nationalist fervour, no blood was spilt in conflicts in Fiume, unlike a few other European border and multiethnic areas, and not only because international military troops were in charge of the public order in the city, along with the armies of the neighbouring states, i.e., Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

In the greater narrative of the interwar era, Fiume was, first and foremost, the scene of Gabriele D'Annunzio's proto-fascist, legionary adventure. The port city, which up to the disintegration of the Habsburg empire had been a multiethnic and multireligious *corpus separatum* within the Hungarian kingdom, became a symbol of *vittoria mutilata* or Italy's mutilated victory. Italian nationalists and the local irredentists reproached Italian diplomacy for being no match for international negotiators in Paris, too passive and failing to stand up to Woodrow Wilson's policy of the right of self-determination. Italian diplomats insisted that Fiume was Italian because half of the city's population identified as Italians but were not willing to leave the domain of the Entente's politics.

Dominique Kirchner Reill provides a convincing demonstration of how effective D'Annunzio's political campaign and that of his supporters was, how it contributed to the expansion of the nationalist myth that concealed the multiethnic past of the city and its