

out of a lake and written in code gives a sense of the drama that he is able to work with in the text. Although *New Beginning* was not the most well-known of the leftist groups from this period, it is arguably their very marginality that makes them interesting for Renaud, as one example of many micro-experiments in political form.

Renaud's overall topic is what New Leftists themselves called the *Organisationsfrage* (organization question). The question was as simple as it was vexed: if one rejects the party form and seeks another format for pre-figurative political organization, what emerges? The members of *New Beginning*, many of whom went into exile, worked at times with the Western Allies, at other times with communists, and later the most prominent among them, including Richard Löwenthal and Fritz Epler became key members of the postwar reformist SPD. Some of Renaud's story recalls earlier books by Catherine Epstein and Jeffrey Herf, which reconstructed the pre-history of the East German political elite. But, as Renaud points out himself in his conclusion, the dominant mode of his book is irony. Outcomes are often different from what one might expect, and lineages rarely run smoothly. His narrative tracks a sequence of generational upheavals whereby the work of forebears is superseded by new experiments in what he calls "neoleftism."

The book is written with great detail and a clear sense of the stakes of the discussion. What is one left with by the end, and how does this change our understanding of the West German left? Renaud's work is helpful in drawing attention to the centrality of a domestic German communist and socialist movement. In this sense, he follows a recent revival of interest in the importance of Wolfgang Abendroth, the foremost proponent of what has been called "left legalism," suggesting the possibility of a transition to socialism through a strictly literal reading of the German Basic Law. Renaud's focus on the organization question also helps to decenter the photogenic events of 1967 and 1968 and to remind us that there are many decades of engagement with the challenge of doing politics differently. By filling in the gap of the 1950s, his work also fulfills a similar function to that of historians of the U.S. left like John Munro and Penny von Eschen. One is not left with the feeling that the newer histories of internationalism can be discarded. Indeed, Renaud himself points out the importance of the Spanish Civil War as a "proxy for the global south" (103) at an earlier moment. But it is certainly praiseworthy to be reminded that the other end of the shelf exists, and that a pendulum in trends of history writing should and indeed must eventually swing back to attention to the local.

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Blood and Ruins: The Last Imperial War, 1931-1945

By Richard Overy. New York: Viking, 2021. Pp. xliii + 990. Cloth \$42.00. ISBN: 978-0670025169.

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Scholarly surveys of World War I abound, yet there are far fewer up-to-date scholarly histories of World War II as a whole. For that reason alone, the publication of Richard Overy's massive history of that global conflict is very welcome. What is more, reflecting a lifelong engagement with that war by one of its most prominent Anglophone scholars, *Blood and Ruins* is a wonderfully ambitious monumental history of World War II that

represents a tremendous achievement. Its wealth of materials, its learnedness and erudition, its scale and scope, are simply staggering. Its ambition and accomplishments are indeed expansive, as its author rightly insists on widening the chronology of the war beyond the years 1939 to 1945, on casting the war as a truly global conflict with several centers of gravity, on directing attention to the multiplicity of different forms of war and participation, and on attending to the war's extraordinary ferocity and intensity of mobilization.

Multi-perspectival in outlook and based on an impressive command of vast bodies of scholarship, *Blood and Ruins* falls into two parts, with each of them amounting to a major monograph in itself. The prologue and chapters 1, 2, 3, and 11 offer a broadly narrative account of the war, focusing on the period from 1931 to 1945 yet also stretching back to the pre-1914 global politics of empire and war and looking forward to the war's many violent aftermaths and the making of a new global order in the postwar period. At the center of this narrative of the "long" World War II are the making and unmaking of the Japanese, Italian, and German pursuits of war and empire, with an emphasis on the big questions of diplomacy, war, peace, and strategy, and on elites as well as the sequence and contingencies of decisions and events.

By contrast, chapters 4 through 10 offer thematic analyses of the broader experience of the war, encompassing combatants and noncombatants, armed forces, civilian societies, and broader populations, and ranging freely among the major combatant states and warring parties across the globe, with an eye toward identifying causes for success and defeat in war. Key themes include the mass mobilization of military and civilian manpower for war, the military practices and effectiveness of armed forces and their ways of war, the mobilization of the productive powers of war economies, the languages of just and unjust war sustaining the broader war efforts and popular mobilization, the different modes of direct civilian participation in combat and violence, the emotional states and psychological burdens created by wartime violence among combatants and noncombatants, and, finally, the cataclysmic violence and extraordinary criminality of a war marked by genocide and mass murder beyond any legal limitation or military restraint.

Running to nearly 1000 pages, *Blood and Ruin* is a real tour de force. It is also framed by a clearly articulated general argument, flagged in the title of the book. Overy presents World War II as the "last imperial war," that is, as both a manifestation of the crisis-ridden world of global empire that had come into full being by the start of the twentieth century, and as the direct product of the Japanese, Italian, and German bids for territorial empire, which had been fueled by long-standing, ever-evolving imperial fantasies. Accordingly, Overy views both world wars of the first half of the twentieth century as "stages of a second Thirty Years War about the reordering of the world system in a final stage of imperial crisis" (xii), with World War II eventually ushering a new and different global age, defined by the final unravelling of territorial empire, the triumph of the nation-state, and the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers.

This argument is highly compelling and, broadly speaking, sits well with the main thrust of current scholarship across various fields, which highlights the centrality of the world of empire for any history of the first half of the twentieth century, including fascinating new scholarship that studies the connections between the imperial pursuits of the three "Axis" powers. But in *Blood and Ruins* this claim also comes with limitations. It does not provide a determining framework for all the analyses in the book's thematic chapters that Overy claims it does. As importantly, the focus on the issue of colonialism as the defining issue of the war does not do justice to other defining features of a world war shaped by ideological polarities and contests over competing visions of modernity and global ordering, of the war as a global civil war of sorts, beyond the competitive and mutually exclusive pursuit of colonial territory. Furthermore, in setting the aspiring empires of the "Axis" powers against the established empires of France and Britain in its account of the making of global war in the 1930s, *Blood and Ruins* falls short of offering a persuasive account of the place of the United States and its imperial imaginary in the fast-moving world of twentieth-century empire and

geopolitics, let alone, of the specter of superior U.S. power and global domination that haunted the world since World War I and conditioned any post-1918 bids for “national autonomy” (35) through empire and societal transformation.

But any such limitations do not take anything away from *Blood and Ruins*' enormous contribution as a magisterial history of World War II, which surpasses any of its predecessors. The book will be essential reading for anyone interested in that war and a key touchstone for subsequent scholarship.

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Fighter, Worker, and Family Man: German-Jewish Men and Their Gendered Experiences in Nazi Germany, 1933–1941

**By Sebastian Huebel. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022.
Pp. xii + 248. Paperback \$32.95. ISBN: 978-1487541231.**

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In recent years, the study of the Holocaust through a feminist lens has seen tremendous growth. However, little has been published about the history of Jewish men in Nazi Germany, particularly in the years preceding the outbreak of World War II. The new book by Sebastian Huebel seeks to bridge this historiographical gap. On one side, Huebel shows how German-Jewish men, already before 1939, were subjected to a gender-specific process of marginalization from the Aryan *Volksgemeinschaft*, and, on the other, the book argues that many of these men resisted emasculation through “contestation, negotiation, and defiance” (7).

In each chapter of his book, Huebel operates on three different levels: discourses and ideas; legal and social practices; and subjective experiences. The author shows how the Nazis sought to make Jewish lives unbearable through the circulation of antisemitic discourses and the implementation of antisemitic rules. At the same time, Huebel exposes how Jewish men – fathers, husbands, veterans, and workers – dealt with these antisemitic ideas and practices and affirmed their own masculinities by opposing – and adapting to – the hostile sociopolitical system they lived in.

The first chapter analyzes the marginalization of Jewish men in the cultural-military realm of Nazi Germany. Compared to the “militarized” Aryan men, Jews were presented as cowards. Their military valor and their role in World War I were denied. However, Huebel emphasizes, Jewish men developed strategies to counter Nazi intimidation by performing their own military masculinity. They embraced their participation in the Great War as brave soldiers and officers of the Imperial German Army and used it as evidence of their Germanness.

The second chapter explores how Nazi propaganda represented Jewish men as hypersexualized individuals intent on defiling the German race. While Aryan men were presented as self-controlled, Jewish men were depicted as prone to extreme and uncontrollable passions. Newspapers, posters, and children’s books were used to portray the stereotypical physical features of the Jews and convince German men and women to avoid them. Sexual antisemitism forced Jewish men to change their attitude in the presence of women and avoid behaviors that could be perceived even remotely as flirtatious. Fears and anxieties about racial defilement deeply affected Jewish men who began to believe that having “Aryan” features was the only way to feel safe when walking in the streets.