

Institution: University of Sheffield
Unit of Assessment: 30 - History
Title of case study: Working towards the Führer: Shaping Public Understanding of Nazi Power
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Professor Sir Ian Kershaw's <i>The End</i> (2011) marked his 'final word' on the Nazi state and so concluded research that fundamentally changed public understanding of Nazi power. A key stage in this transformation came with the publication of Kershaw's definitive biography of Adolf Hitler (2 vols: 1998, 2000), which during the assessment period continued to shape how the Third Reich was taught in schools and universities. Through his concept, 'working towards the Führer', Kershaw's publications have shifted public understandings across Europe of Hitler's relationship with the German people. A variety of publishing formats, including TV collaborations and a major exhibition at the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, testify to the extent of the impact while responses to the research culminated with the Leipzig Book Award for European Understanding. Beyond the Nazi state, Kershaw's work has profoundly influenced contemporary understandings of the Holocaust by demonstrating the incorporation of ordinary citizens in the system of government that made it possible. His research has thus changed both scholarly and public understanding of the nature of Nazi power, within both Germany and the wider confines of occupied Europe. Kershaw's contribution to European reconciliation, as emphasised by the Leipzig Book Award judges [S4], lies in our deeper comprehension of the historical circumstances of the Second World War and the Holocaust, which has allowed current generations to come to terms with these events, both in Germany and elsewhere.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Ian Kershaw's research into Adolf Hitler has been among the most influential historical works completed in the last twenty years. The research was completed during his time as professor of modern history at the University of Sheffield (1990-2008; emeritus 2008-), with the first volume of his Hitler biography appearing in 1998, and the second two years later [R1,R2]. The importance of the research lies in the way it combined a study of Hitler as an individual leader with an investigation into the nature of power in the Nazi state. By investigating the Führer's position in terms of the Weberian concept of charismatic authority, Kershaw's research not only transformed historical understandings of the Third Reich but also of Hitler's societal position and how Germans—both 'ordinary' and otherwise—related to the Nazi leader. Kershaw's phrase, 'working towards the Führer', became familiar to A level students and professional historians alike. Serving as the title for Kershaw's Festschrift (MUP, 2004), it reinforced how his work on charismatic authority in the Third Reich, the leader cult around Hitler, and, in day-to-day terms, the relative absence of the man himself, illuminated the workings of the Nazi State, and explained the path to radicalisation in terms of contingent decisions, made by Germans at all levels of governance, who tried to interpret what Hitler wanted and acted accordingly. Nowhere was this interpretation more important than in informing our understanding of the Holocaust, the decisions that led to it and the processes through which it was implemented [R4].</p> <p>This published work culminated in his 2011 study, <i>The End</i>, of why Germany continued to fight even after the war was clearly lost [R5]. In this study, Kershaw demonstrates that Hitler and the closest members of his entourage retained their agency right up to the hour of the capitulation, and were able to frame public understanding of the impending defeat in a manner that mobilised ordinary Germans for individual and collective acts of self-destruction.</p> <p>The publication of Kershaw's work marked a paradigm shift in the historiography of Nazi Germany, dominated for many years by debates between functionalists and intentionalists. The importance of the research was recognised with the award of the Bruno-Kreisky Prize for Political Book of the Year (Austria) and the Wolfson Literary Award for History in 2000, the British Academy Book Prize in 2001 and a knighthood for services to History in 2002. Both volumes of the Hitler biography were</p>

shortlisted for the Whitbread biography prize. Professor Kershaw was also awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz (Federal Cross of Merit) in 1994.

3. References to the research

- R1. *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (Penguin, London, 1998), 845pp.
- R2. *Hitler. 1936-1945: Nemesis* (Penguin, London, 2000), 1115pp.
- R3. *Fateful Choices. Ten Decisions that Changed the World* (Penguin, London, 2007), 624pp.
- R4. *Hitler, the Germans, and the 'Final Solution'* (Yale U.P, New Haven/London, in conjunction with YadVashem, Jerusalem, 2008), 394pp.
- R5. *The End. Hitler's Germany* (Penguin, London, 2011), 564pp.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The sustained and international nature of the impact is shown first in terms of its *reach*: the volume of worldwide sales. Since 1998, Penguin Books has published five single-authored volumes on Hitler [R1-5] and the Second World War, and *Hubris* and *Nemesis* have been translated into 20 languages, including German and Hebrew. The continuing appeal of this work is demonstrated in the fact that Penguin has also produced an abridged, single-volume biography (*Hitler*, 2008), a stand-alone reissue of chapter 17 of *Nemesis*, published for 'Penguin's 70th Birthday' (*Death in the Bunker*, 2005), and a short book on Operation Valkyrie (*Luck of the Devil*, 2009), again taken from *Nemesis*. Lifetime sales of all these works stand at over 500,000 (it has not proved possible to get a separate figure for the REF period) [S1].

The End appeared in English, German, and Dutch in 2011 and has now been translated into 17 languages and issued as a Penguin audiobook (2012). It has sold a total of 106,000 copies and has attracted attention all over Europe. Its publication led to interviews in *The Guardian* (17 August 2011), where it was billed as 'saying farewell to Hitler' and *Der Spiegel* (14 November 2011) [S5]. The book was reviewed in all the major British and German papers and many other international broadsheets, including the *New York Times*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Globe and Mail*, as well as the *Daily Mail* and the political website, *The Daily Beast*. It was featured at the Hay Festival in June 2012 and has been highlighted on personal blogs such as 'Resolute Reader' and on-line book clubs, including 'Good Reads'.

A further indication of the impact of Kershaw's work on Nazi Germany lies in his own public profile. In 2008, he was one of only 18 historians chosen by the Institute of Historical Research to be interviewed for the website 'Making History' and he has a significant profile on public history websites such as History.net. and ww2history.com, where he is interviewed by Laurence Rees. Shorter interview clips are available in English and German on YouTube. His seventieth birthday in April 2013 was marked by published appreciations in leading German broadsheets (*Sueddeutsche.de*, *Stern.de* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (all 29 April 2013). In the last, Patrick Bahners described Kershaw as 'today the world's leading authority on Hitler and Hitler's state'.

The public impact of Kershaw's published work has been multiplied by its dissemination on TV. Kershaw's collaboration with Laurence Rees and the BBC dates from the BAFTA-award winning television series they made in the 1990s and early 2000s, when they worked on four series for BBC2 [S2]. Their most recent collaboration was *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler* (2012). With Kershaw as historical advisor, this programme was screened in three episodes in November 2012, attracting an audience of 2.1 million for the first episode [S6]. This programme derived directly from the body of research cited in section 3 and, as the audience figure indicates, reached a far wider audience than the published works. These are supplemented by the continuing accessibility of the television series Kershaw and Rees made prior to 2008: *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (1997), which won an International Documentary Award (1998) and the BAFTA for the Best

Factual Series (1998); *Horror in the East* (2001); and *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the "Final Solution"* (2005; screened on PBS in the USA as *Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State*), which won the 2005 Grierson Award for Best Historical Documentary. Given the plethora of available viewing formats—DVD, iPlayer, numerous download sites—overall viewing figures are impossible to ascertain, but some audiences are clear. Both *The Nazis: A Warning from History* and *Auschwitz* featured on teacher resource lists for the AQA A level syllabus 'Anti-Semitism, Hitler and the German People' (2008) and testimony from *The Nazis: A Warning* is used as source questions in unseen exams (e.g. AQA AS exam paper June 2010) [S7]. Worksheets to accompany the series are available from <http://www.activehistory.co.uk/> reinforcing the point that these programmes continue to be used as active teaching tools. This use of the testimony and documentary evidence that underpins the television work reflects the archival depth of Kershaw's work.

The reach and significance of the substantial impact of this body research is reflected in the transformation of public understanding of the nature of Hitler's leadership. The Hitler biography has become a fundamental point of reference in university teaching and, together with his other research publications, routinely appears on university reading lists around the world (e.g. Princeton, UC Santa Barbara, Victoria [NZ], Newcastle [UK and Australia], and the LSE). Kershaw's concept of 'working towards the Führer' has redefined students' and teachers' understanding of Hitler's place and role in the Nazi state. Though central to the study of German history, the influence of this thesis means that the work is also widely assigned on general European history and comparative fascism courses. The Hitler biography itself features as an example in textbooks on the writing and philosophy of History, e.g. John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (5th edition 2009), pp. 68-9.

In addition to the TV programmes, Kershaw's published work is also widely used by sixth-formers studying for A levels or the International Baccalaureate: 'working towards the Führer' is a theme and object of study on the Edexcel A2 History paper on Germany 1900-45 and both the Hitler biography and *Hitler, the Germans and the Final Solution* are used for possible source questions (Barbara Warnock, *My Revision Notes Edexcel A2 History: from Kaiser to Führer* [Feb 2013]; Alan White and Adam Bloomfield, *Student Support Materials for History - Edexcel A2 Unit 3 Option D1* [June 2012]). The book features on numerous secondary school reading lists (eg. Whitby High School; Lycée Française; Burgate Sixth Form; Tapton School, Sheffield [S3]), and it is available in school libraries and features on chatrooms [S10].

Perhaps most remarkably, Kershaw's work on Hitler has encouraged the German people to rethink the relationship that individual German citizens had with their leader. In October 2010, the first major public exhibition in Germany to focus on Hitler opened at the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin. The exhibition drew directly on Kershaw's research; he was a member of the Advisory Council (*Beirat*), contributed a chapter to the exhibition catalogue (published 2010), and gave an opening lecture that was attended by hundreds. *Hitler und die Deutschen* had been due to close in January 2011 but was extended for three weeks to 27 February 2011 as a direct consequence of public demand. At the point that the decision was taken to extend the exhibition, it had been visited by 170,000 people. It was not simply, however, a question of public interest. The exhibition also sparked considerable debate around how the Nazi past should be presented in contemporary Germany, which ran through German press (including *Der Spiegel*), indicating the profound impact that this work on Hitler has had in Germany.

It is precisely this public debate around the reassessment of a uniquely difficult past that led to the award of the Leipzig Book Prize for European Understanding in 2012. Awarded jointly to Kershaw and Timothy Snyder, who works on Eastern Europe during the Second World War, the prize not only acknowledged the substantial contributions these historians had made to European co-operation but also recognised their achievements in demonstrating the relevance of understanding the past to the contemporary world. The judges referred to '*Ian Kershaw's enlightening book*' as '*a godsend for historiography, but also for a wider, open-minded reading audience*' and also maintained that '*European reconciliation [Verständigung] is not possible without the work of historians such as Ian Kershaw [and Timothy Snyder]*' [S4]. The impact of Kershaw's work in re-evaluating a troubled and troubling past is also shown in the high profile public lectures he has

given since 2008: the annual lecture to the Centrum voor Holocaust- en Genocidestudies Amsterdam in 2009, the Adam von Trott Memorial Lecture in Oxford in 2010, and the Holocaust Memorial Trust's Lord Merlyn Rees lecture in the Houses of Parliament in 2012. This final lecture is available as a Holocaust Educational Trust free podcast, the most popular on their iTunes site [S8].

As the ultimate example of Nazi power, the Holocaust raises continuing ethical and historical questions, and Kershaw's work has done much to illuminate public debate. German commentators have stressed that this research is 'in the very best tradition of British empiricism' (*Sueddeutsche.de*, 29 April 2013). This accounts, in part, for the impact of his work, which has cut through the tendency to moralise in public debates, with proponents often either condemning Nazism as the absolute—and therefore incomprehensible—evil, or trivialising it by emphasising its banality. Kershaw's work replaced these interpretative clichés with real historical knowledge, moving public debate on to a sober analysis of the mechanisms that allowed Hitler to seize and maintain power to the very day of his suicide. Reframing understandings of charismatic authority as 'working towards the Führer' underlines this shift, which also reflects Kershaw's ability, as noted in reviews, to combine analysis and narrative in a way that provides an accessible but nuanced and sophisticated explanation of immensely complex historical circumstances [S9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1. Publishing Director, Penguin Books (book sales figures)
- S2. Laurence Rees, filmmaker (Kershaw's contribution to documentary films)
- S3. Head of History, Tapton School, Sheffield (use of Kershaw's books in secondary school teaching)
- S4. Laudation by Karl Schlögel on the occasion of the award of the Leipzig Book Prize for European Understanding 2012: (<http://tinyurl.com/ncd6xom>)
- S5. Kershaw interview in *Der Spiegel* (<http://tinyurl.com/ojrdt7d>)
- S6. Viewer figures for 'The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler' (<http://tinyurl.com/qcz3s3a>).
- S7. AQA A-Level syllabus (<http://tinyurl.com/o62ctgb>).
- S8. Holocaust Educational Trust podcast, Lord Merlyn-Rees Public Lecture (<http://tinyurl.com/oxssarf>).
- S9. Reviews of *The End*: (<http://tinyurl.com/brjdz7y>).
- S10. School student chatroom: <http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/showthread.php?t=1690772>