

ARTICLE

January 30, 1933, in the Nazi Historical Imaginary

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Abstract

From 1934 until 1945, the Nazi regime celebrated the anniversary of January 30, 1933, the day of Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor. This article, based on unpublished and published documents from central and local Nazi and state institutions, asks how the Nazis choreographed these celebrations at home and abroad and how they fit into broader Nazi conceptualizations of history. Stage-managed celebrations etched January 30 into the historical consciousness of Germans as beginning of the Third Reich and were a crucial step toward the realization of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community), although the Nazi seizure of power was a process and cannot be pinpointed to a single date. Ambivalence characterized the festivities, reflecting the fact that the Nazis saw their coming to power as both revolutionary and restorative of the natural flow of German history. In the Nazi imaginary, this day was a conjuncture in history, separating the Nazi struggle for power from their triumphant mission to "make Germany great again" and create a racial utopia.

Keywords: Nazism; seizure of power; rituals; chronopolitics

On January 30, 1933, when Hitler became Reich Chancellor, Nazi propagandists began to establish this day in the Nazi historical imaginary and in the regime's ritualistic practices as the end date of the Weimar "system" and the beginning of a new era that turned Germany back onto the track of what the Nazis saw as the natural, continuous flow of German history and the realization of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Each year, from 1934 until its downfall in 1945, the Nazi regime organized commemorations of January 30, not only in Germany, but also in German communities abroad. The aim of these commemorations was to institutionalize this date as a historical turning point, in William Sewell Jr.'s conceptualization an event that marks the transformation of social and political structures. These commemorations, a particular form of political ceremonies centered on the past, emerged as a repetitive and essential element of official Nazi history politics. But they had a second function: Hitler's January 30 speeches became an important occasion for some of the regime's most catastrophic pronouncements about the future, above all his 1939 speech in which he threatened the extermination of Jews in the case of a world war.¹

¹ For a useful typology of commemorations, with a focus on fascist Italy, see Mabel Berezin, "The Festival State: Celebration and Commemoration in Fascist Italy," *Journal of Modern European History* 4 (2006): 60–74; for the role of political festivals, see also Malte Rolf, "Die Feste der Macht und die Macht der Feste. Fest und Diktatur zur Einleitung," *Journal of Modern European History* 4 (2006): 39–59; Jan Plamper, "State Communism at 100: Remembering and Forgetting the Russian Revolution," in *Cambridge History of Communism*, ed. Juliane Fürst, Silvio Pons, and Mark Selden, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3:581–99; William H. Sewell Jr., "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society* 25 (1996): 841–81.

In contrast to the Nazis' own populist event-based reading of history, the Nazi takeover of power was not a single event but a process in which Hitler's appointment was a crucial step, as Karl Dietrich Bracher demonstrated in a 1960 essay.² Yet through a close study of the discourses surrounding January 30, 1933, and the orchestration of jubilee celebrations at home and abroad, Nazi conceptualizations of historical imaginaries become clearer. Inspired by the cultural turn that has highlighted the significance of semantics and rituals, this article argues that the main focus of the festivities was the realization of a racialized *Volksgemeinschaft* through social practices. The notion of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was directly linked in the Nazi imagination to an ageless entity that comprised all Germans, past, present, and future. For the Nazis, January 30 was a major stepping stone on the road to the completion of a *Volksgemeinschaft* through social and political rituals. Whether the *Volksgemeinschaft* was completed in the short twelve years of the Third Reich is perhaps a moot point. For many Germans living through the Nazi dictatorship, *Volksgemeinschaft* was not an analytical concept but a vision for the future, and it was this message that resonated in Nazi rituals and discourses surrounding January 30.³

The ambiguity of the Nazi coming to power, at the same time revolutionary and reactionary, was reflected in the way in which the Nazis commemorated January 30. Hitler's appointment by national-conservative political elites was not revolutionary. But the process that his appointment unleashed fundamentally transformed the everyday lives of Germans, although it remains doubtful whether the notion of a "revolution," used by the Nazis for propaganda purposes, is appropriate, given the almost exclusively destructive nature of Nazism.⁴

As scholarship on the Third Reich since the late 1980s and 1990s has increasingly focused on the racial dimension of the Nazi regime, 1933 no longer seems to be the major turning point in German history. Instead, 1941, the beginning of the Holocaust, appears as the central vanishing point of German history.⁵ But the jubilee of Hitler's appointment, officially known as "Memorial Day of National Elevation" (*Tag der nationalen Erhebung*), was of central importance to the regime's self-commemoration and resonated well beyond 1945 in German political culture. Reflecting the ambiguous message behind the event, January 30 never became a public holiday in Nazi Germany unlike, for instance, May 1, the "National Holiday of the German People" (*Nationaler Feiertag des Deutschen Volkes*), or November 9, the "Memorial Day for the Fallen of the Movement" (*Gedenktag für die Gefallenen der*

² Karl Dietrich Bracher, "Stufen der Machtergreifung," in *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung. Studien zur Errichtung des totalitären Herrschaftssystems in Deutschland 1933/34*, ed. Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer, and Gerhard Schulz (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1960), 31–368.

³ For the debate on *Volksgemeinschaft*, see Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto, "Volksgemeinschaft: Writing the Social History of the Nazi regime," in *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives*, ed. Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1–28, here 2; for a critique of the concept, see Ian Kershaw, "Volksgemeinschaft: Potential and Limitations of the Concept," in *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany*, 29–42; for an advocacy, see Michael Wildt, "Volksgemeinschaft: A Modern Perspective on National Socialist Society," in *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany*, 60–72.

⁴ Horst Möller, "Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung. Konterrevolution oder Revolution?," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 31 (1983): 25–51; David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1967); Hans Mommsen, "Die nationalsozialistische Machteroberung. Revolution oder Gegenrevolution?," in *Deutsche Umbrüche im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Dietrich Papenfuß and Wolfgang Schieder (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), 329–43, here 334; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Viertes Band. Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914–1949* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2008), 600–03; for a recent discussion, see Andreas Wirsching, "Die deutsche 'Mehrheitsgesellschaft' und die Etablierung des NS-Regimes im Jahre 1933," in *Das Jahr 1933. Die nationalsozialistische Machteroberung und die deutsche Gesellschaft*, ed. Andreas Wirsching (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 9–29, here 25n9.

⁵ Helmut Walser Smith, "The Vanishing Point of German History: An Essay on Perspective," *History and Memory*, 17 (2005): 269–95; Richard Bessel, "The Nazi Capture of Power," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39 (2004): 169–88; for a now dated broader evaluation, see Norbert Frei, *1945 und wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2005), 83–96; for a broader perspective see the essays in Wirsching, *Das Jahr 1933*; for recent literature, see Franka Maubach, "Die 'Machtergreifung' als Panorama? Neue Perspektiven auf 1933," *Journal of Modern European History*, 17 (2019): 43–47.

Bewegung) on the anniversary of the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch.⁶ The Nazis continuously highlighted the significance of the day, for instance in a 1939 guide for Nazi party branches on how to celebrate national festivals as the “birth of the Reich, [the] beginning of new *völkisch* reality, [the] beginning of a new order in our history.”⁷

Not least because of the Nazi institutionalization of the date as the crucial event on their road to domination, January 30, 1933, became, after 1945, the reference point of a powerful master narrative of what lessons could be learned from the abject failure of liberal democracy in Germany. Post-1945 interpretations of 1933 initially came from a top-down perspective; either through the *Sonderweg* paradigm, according to which democracy stood no chance in Germany because of structural failures that prevented a bourgeois liberal-democratic political culture from developing in the long nineteenth century or through short-term power maneuvers of political elites in the early 1930s.⁸

Apart from a short 2010 survey chapter by Bernd Sösemann, little systematic research has been done on how January 30 featured as a central memorial day in Nazi public culture, notwithstanding the rich literature on how the regime promoted heroic myths surrounding Hitler and Nazi “martyrs.” With the January 30 anniversary celebrations, the regime delivered its official version of history: Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor was a natural development in the course of German history.⁹ Copious use of the mass media helped the regime amplify its audience and touch the senses of Germans. In the visual landscape of Nazism, the highly regulated reenactments of the stormtroopers’ torch-lit rally of January 30, 1933, became annual fixtures. And in Nazism’s soundscape, the annual Hitler speech on January 30, broadcast on the radio, became a central event.¹⁰

Building on work on the politics of time by Peter Fritzsche, Christopher Clark, Fernando Eposito, and Sven Reichardt, this article probes the self-historicization of the Nazi regime, as a central part of its quest for authority and legitimacy. The Nazis’ view of their own history was connected to their assumptions about the present and the future. The January 30

⁶ For the status of the days, see *Reichsgesetzblatt*, Teil I, February 28, 1934, 129; *Reichsgesetzblatt*, Teil I, February 25, 1939, 322; *Reichsgesetzblatt*, 1937, Teil I, September 3, 1937, 917; Christoph Kühberger, *Metaphern der Macht. Ein kultureller Vergleich der politischen Feste im faschistischen Italien und im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Münster: LIT, 2006), 191–93.

⁷ Claus Dörner, *Das Deutsche Jahr. Feiern der Jungen Nation* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP Franz Eher Nachf., 1939), 32.

⁸ For the *Sonderweg*, see James J. Sheehan, “Paradigm Lost? The *Sonderweg* Revisited,” in *Transnationale Geschichte: Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, ed. Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad and Oliver Janz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2006), 150–60; for 1933 as a vanishing point, see Thomas Nipperdey, “1933 und Kontinuität der deutschen Geschichte,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 227 (1978): 86–111; Henry Ashby Turner Jr., *Hitler’s Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Hermann Beck and Larry Eugene Jones, ed., *From Weimar to Hitler. Studies in the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic and the Establishment of the Third Reich, 1932–1934* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018).

⁹ Bernd Sösemann, “30. Januar 1933. Inszenierung einer ‘Macht-Ergreifung,’” in *Erinnerungstage. Wendepunkte der Geschichte von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Etienne François and Uwe Puschner (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2010), 259–71; Ian Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden. Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole* (Vierow: SH-Verlag, 1996); Sabine Behrenbeck, “Durch Opfer zur Erlösung. Feierpraxis im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland,” in *Inszenierungen des Nationalstaats. Politische Feiern in Italien und Deutschland seit 1860/71*, ed. Sabine Behrenbeck and Alexander Nützenadel (Cologne: SH-Verlag, 2000), 149–70; Peter Reichel, *Der schöne Schein des Dritten Reiches. Faszination und Gewalt des Faschismus* (Munich: Hanser, 1996), 114–56; for Italy, see Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Fascist Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); for a comparative study, see Kühberger, *Metaphern der Macht*.

¹⁰ For visual landscapes, see Geoff Eley, “Nazism, Everydayness and Spectacle: The Mass Form in Metropolitan Modernity,” in *Visualizing Fascism: The Twentieth-Century Rise of the Global Right*, ed. Julia Adeney Thomas and Geoff Eley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 69–93; for the Nazi soundscape, see Cornelia Epping-Jäger, “Lautsprecher Hitler: Über eine Form der Massenkommunikation im Nationalsozialismus,” in *Sound der Zeit: Geräusche, Töne, Stimmen. 1889 bis heute*, ed. Gerhard Paul and Ralph Schöck (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2014), 171–77; for the guidelines to the 1939 torch-lit SA rally, see Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BAB), NS 23/7, Betr. Fackelzug am 30.1.1939, January 19, 1939.

anniversary celebrations reflected this perspective. This article deconstructs the types of historicity the Nazi regime made available to ordinary Germans and how they established those regimes of historicity.¹¹

Nazi Discourses on January 30

Scenes such as the torch-lit Nazi rally through central Berlin on the night of January 30, 1933, reflected the ostensible communion between Hitler and the German *Volksgemeinschaft* that had finally found its legitimate leader after fourteen years of alleged decadence and decline.¹² In Nazi temporal politics, January 30 was the beginning of the new regime that restored the natural flow of German history. This mantra was provocative, as it rendered January 30 as both restorative and revolutionary, reflecting the fine balance between restoration and revolution that was characteristic of Nazism. Also notable is that the event was being commemorated and historicized almost as soon as the regime was born. A bestselling 1933 album for collectors of cigarette pictures devoted ample coverage to the day when “the dawn arrived.”¹³ And in a popular 1933 history of National Socialism, written for school students, the Nazi propagandist Johann von Leers insisted that on January 30, 1933, the “German Reich arrived at a turning point of its political development.”¹⁴ *Ein Volk steht auf*, a popular 1933 book with photographs of the key events of the “national revolution” hit a similar chord about the supposedly world-historical turning point of January 30.¹⁵ How the German *Volksgemeinschaft* was renewed and saved from “one of the ghastliest epochs of its history” on January 30 was the main theme of a 1934 book edited by Gerd Rühle, a Nazi Reichstag member.¹⁶ At Freiburg University, Paul Schmitthenner, a Nazi State Minister in Baden, lectured the university community on January 30, 1935, on the place of January 30 in the flow of German history and concluded that it was the apotheosis of two millennia of German history. He insisted: “For at last, Germany is a unified *völkisch* body.”¹⁷

To underline the Third Reich’s place in the natural flow of German history that had ended abruptly with the German surrender in 1918 and resumed on January 30, 1933, some Nazi intellectuals such as the racial scientist H. F. K. Günther described the years between 1918 and 1933 as an “in-between Reich” (*Zwischenreich*), a term also adopted in the 1937 edition of *Meyers Lexikon*, a leading German encyclopedia.¹⁸

Because of Nazism’s combination of the old and the new and the combination of violence with seemingly legal political activity, the message behind January 30 remained deliberately ambivalent. Therefore, the Nazis celebrated January 30 both as the completion of the

¹¹ Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 1–20; Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Utopie als Ideologie. Geschichtsdenken und politisches Handeln im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998); Christopher Clark, *Time and Power: Visions of History in German Politics, from the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 208; Fernando Esposito and Sven Reichardt, “Revolution and Eternity: Introductory Remarks on Fascist Temporalities,” *Journal of Modern European History* 13 (2015): 24–43.

¹² Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 137–214.

¹³ Leopold von Schenkendorf, *Kampf um’s Dritte Reich. Eine historische Bilderfolge* (Altona-Bahrenfeld: Cigaretten-Bilderdienst, 1933), 62.

¹⁴ Johann von Leers, *Kurzgefaßte Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus* (Bielefeld: Velhagen & Klasing, 1933), 76.

¹⁵ *Ein Volk steht auf. 53 Tage nationaler Revolution. 120 Kupfertiefdrucke* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1933); see also Söseman, “30. Januar 1933,” 431n6.

¹⁶ Gerd Rühle, *Das Dritte Reich. Dokumentarische Darstellung des Aufbaues der Nation. Mit Unterstützung des Deutschen Reichsarchivs. Das erste Jahr 1933. Mit zahlreichen Bildern und Dokumenten sowie einem Sachregister* (Berlin: Hummelverlag, 1934), 17.

¹⁷ Paul Schmitthenner, *Vom Ersten zum Dritten Reich. Festrede zur Feier der Wiederkehr des Tages der Machtergreifung durch den Führer und Reichskanzler am 30. Januar 1935* (Freiburg: Fr. Wagnersche Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1935), 20.

¹⁸ Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 710 (also for quotation).

“National Socialist revolution” and a new beginning. Hitler’s appointment as Reich Chancellor was rendered as the inevitable development of German history. The German nation and the German *Volk* had become one and the same, as Reich Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels declared in a lavishly illustrated book given to high-ranking Nazi officials on the tenth anniversary of January 30, 1933. The book’s central refrain was the self-historicization of the Nazi party, which stood in the eternal flow of history.¹⁹

Nazi efforts to commemorate January 30, 1933, as a turning point in German history served as a powerful instrument to legitimize their rule and to locate it firmly with what they saw as the inevitable direction of the course of German history. In the Nazi historical imagination, recently examined by Christopher Clark, 1933 was the starting point of the Nazi project to reshape Germany into a racial dictatorship bent on conquering living space. Clark, inspired by scholarship on the historicity of time, including François Hartog’s work, argues that Hitler and the Nazis were not interested in revolutionizing history which, in their crude worldview, was characterized by fixed racial hierarchies. Nevertheless, in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany, museums of the “Nazi revolution” emerged from 1933, often following grassroots initiatives from within the Nazi movement. Memorials too sprang up across Germany soon after Hitler’s appointment. For instance, in Dettendorf, a village in Upper Bavaria, the local Nazi party erected a swastika memorial, eight meters high, on a mountain top as a “symbol of German unity.”²⁰

Nazism’s use of a “revolutionary vocabulary” was ambiguous, if not vacuous, as Reinhart Koselleck and Hans Mommsen have highlighted. For the Nazis, the concept of revolution conjured up negative associations with the French, Bolshevik, and the November 1918 revolution in Germany, which is why the Nazis made little use of the term between the 1923 Beer Hall putsch and Hitler’s appointment. After 1933, terms like “National Socialist revolution” or the “revolution of Adolf Hitler” became widely used in the Third Reich in a formulaic manner. Typical of this tendency was a study by Konrad Steinbrink, a young lawyer, who dedicated a short 1934 book to Hitler. In it, Steinbrink argued that Hitler’s revolution had been completely legal (*eine Revolution mit den Mitteln des Rechts*). The Nazis reinforced the term through violent actions, but also through rituals, especially the anniversary celebrations of Hitler’s appointment as Reich Chancellor.²¹ In this sense, January 30 became the key date of the “National Socialist revolution.”²²

Reflecting the ambiguity of the “Nazi revolution,” some Nazis had used the term *Machtergreifung*, the “grabbing” of power, since the 1920s. After 1933, the term came to

¹⁹ Hauptkulturamt in der Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP, ed., *Ich kämpfe. Der alten Garde zum 10. Jahrestage der Machtergreifung am 30. Januar 1943* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf., 1943), 42–43; for fascism as a new beginning, see Roger Griffin, *Modern and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

²⁰ Clark, *Time and Power*, 180; for a survey of recent histories of time, see A. R. P. Fryxell, “Time and the Modern: Current Trends in the History of Modern Temporalities,” *Past and Present* 243 (2019): 285–98; for the museums, see Hans Georg Hiller von Gaertringen and Katrin Hiller von Gaertringen, “NS-Revolutionmuseum statt Anti-Kriegs-Museum? Zur Entwicklung der Berliner Museumslandschaft in der NS-Zeit,” in *Museen im Nationalsozialismus. Akteure-Orte-Politik*, ed. Tanja Baensch, Kristina Kratz-Kesemeier and Dorothee Wimmer (Cologne: Böhlau, 2016), 99–113, here 103–06; for the swastika monument, see “Monatsbericht der Gendarmerie-Station Au, 11.9.1940,” in *Bayern in der NS-Zeit. Soziale Lage und politisches Verhalten der Bevölkerung im Spiegel vertraulicher Berichte*, ed. Martin Broszat, Elke Fröhlich, and Falk Wiesemann, 6 vols. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1977), 1:674.

²¹ Reinhart Koselleck, “Revolution: Rebellion, Aufruhr, Bürgerkrieg,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, 8 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 5:653–788, here 5:785–86; Mommsen, “Die nationalsozialistische Machteroberung”; Konrad Steinbrink, *Die Revolution Adolf Hitlers. Eine staatsrechtliche und politische Betrachtung der Machtergreifung des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Carl Heymanns, 1934), unpaginated foreword.

²² Ian Kershaw, “Der 30. Januar 1933. Ausweg aus der Staatskrise und Anfang des Staatsverfalls,” in *Die deutsche Staatskrise 1930–1933. Handlungsspielräume und Alternativen*, ed. Heinrich August Winkler (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1992), 277–84.

denote the epochal shift denoted by Hitler's arrival at the Reich Chancellery. *Machtübernahme*, the "taking" of power, became institutionalized in official language after 1933 to denote the day of Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor. Indeed, Hitler was handed power by national-conservative elites, but this would not have happened without electoral mass support for the Nazi party and their dispensation of political violence.²³

How January 30, 1933, featured within the Nazi historical imaginary can shed new light on their mythmaking, which involved the top brass of the Nazi party, state and party officials, and ordinary people. Rituals, highly regulated events that require active participation, and symbolic performances for less-active audiences, were essential parts of the aestheticization of politics that Walter Benjamin identified as a central feature of fascism. Rituals and ceremonies gave meaning to January 30 as a historical turning point, bringing together the German "people" with Hitler and the Nazi party.²⁴

Celebrating January 30

Nazi celebrations of the anniversary of January 30, 1933, went through three phases. In the first phase, from 1934 till 1935, the regime created the framework for the ceremonies and rituals, featuring torch-lit parades in commemoration of the massive January 30, 1933, rally, alongside speeches by Goebbels and Hitler. In the second phase, starting in 1936, as the Nazi regime had consolidated itself and enrolled the search for historical meaning and legitimacy in its preparations for war, celebrations of January 30 as a turning point in German history became more formalized. During the early years of the war, when a Nazi victory seemed likely, celebrations continued. The third phase, from 1943 till 1945, was marked by the conjuncture of the tenth anniversary of the Third Reich and a dire turn in the regime's fortunes in the war. A large volume of documents had survived on the planned 1943 celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the Third Reich. They were supposed to be glorious reassertions of the communion between Hitler and the German people, but the realities of the war were so dire that the celebrations had to be scaled down.

Within these propagandistic celebrations, despite Goebbels's efforts to bring propaganda under his complete control, Nazi institutions at various levels competed for attention and power with one another. But the broad message of January 30, 1933, as the birthday of the Third Reich, remained constant, demonstrating the increasing staleness of Nazi propaganda and its growing inability to appeal to popular opinion in the later stages of the war.²⁵ There was an inherent ambiguity in the meaning inscribed in this date, which was at once a beginning and an end. The yearly repetition of a moment that could not settle on its orientation to time remained an ambiguous, undecided "moment."

In early 1934, when the Nazi seizure of power was almost complete, the regime specified the broad pattern of the ceremonies. The Nazi yearbook for 1934, for use by Nazi party members, comprised a diary with a calendar section with blank spaces, marking birthdays of leading Nazis and German heroes as well as important anniversaries. January 30 was marked with "Adolf Hitler Reich Chancellor."²⁶ In that year, the Nazis invented the tradition that Hitler would speak on his anniversary and have the speech broadcast on the radio. His speeches typically featured a sentimental history of the Nazi struggle to power against the Jews and the hated Weimar "system" that had culminated in his arrival at the Reich Chancellery on January 30, 1933. Hitler's January 30 speeches sought to reinforce the legitimacy of Nazi rule as the historically inevitable culmination of German history. In 1934,

²³ Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus*, 392–94; for the post-1945 use, see Norbert Frei, "Machtergreifung. Anmerkungen zu einem historischen Begriff," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 31 (1983): 136–45.

²⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2006); for Nazi rituals, see Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden*, 35–64.

²⁵ For the polycratic struggles within the propaganda apparatus, see Aristotle Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 111–29.

²⁶ *Nationalsozialistisches Jahrbuch* (1934), 16.

Hitler euphemistically looked back at a year of brutal Nazi terror and declared: “Within about twelve months, a world of opinions and institutions were eliminated and another [was] put into its place.” Reclam, publisher of literary classics, issued Hitler’s speech as a cheap pamphlet.²⁷

Hitler’s speeches were held at the Reichstag, which met at the Kroll Opera House but had lacked real legislative powers since the March 1933 Enabling Law. After Hitler’s 1934 two-hour speech, the Reichstag rubberstamped the effective dissolution of Germany’s states, a step toward further cementing Nazism’s domestic power. The erstwhile liberal *Vossische Zeitung* reported that across Germany, houses, official buildings, and even buses were covered in swastikas and Imperial flags, reminiscences to the torch-lit parade on the night of Hitler’s appointment in 1933. Thousands were waiting near the Reich Chancellery to catch a glimpse of Hitler and other Nazi officials. Postmen allegedly got stuck in the crowds and therefore were delayed in delivering bags of congratulatory letters and telegrams to Hitler. The populist appeal of the Nazis as saviors of the poor and unemployed was accentuated by the distribution of free meals for those in need by the Nazi welfare organization (*NS-Volkswohlfahrt*).²⁸

Nazi celebrations took place not only in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany, but also across the globe. For the German foreign ministry, the anniversary served to persuade international opinion that the Third Reich had restored Germany as a legitimate great power. In 1934, given international protests—including a boycott campaign against the storm of Nazi political violence and antisemitic discrimination—the German foreign ministry, which was undergoing a creeping nazification, invested heavily in celebrating anniversaries of January 30 as a landmark in history. Particularly active was the *Sonderreferat Deutschland*, a special department within the foreign ministry, led by Vicco von Bülow-Schwante, tasked to defend the new regime against international criticism. Bülow-Schwante instructed diplomatic missions abroad to hoist flags on their buildings on January 30.²⁹

Because Germans abroad could not be as easily mobilized for the *Volksgemeinschaft* as Germans within the Reich, embassies, consulates, and the Nazi *Auslandsorganisation* organized events for German expatriates to commemorate Germany’s alleged rebirth on January 30, 1933. In Hong Kong, a British crown colony, the German consul, a Nazi party member, engaged in self-historicization and boasted about what had been “achieved in the first year” of Nazi Germany at an event organized by the local Nazi group.³⁰ In Cairo, celebrations were more elaborate, given the sizable German community. Here, the German legation and the Nazi party branch for German expatriates (*Landesgruppenleitung*) in Egypt, led by Alfred Hess, brother of Hitler’s deputy Rudolf Hess (both had been born in Alexandria), organized a two-day gathering in late January 1934 to celebrate the “anniversary of national elevation”

²⁷ Max Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen*, 2 vols. in 4 parts (Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1965), 1/1:49, 1/1:352; Adolf Hitler, *Die Rede des Führers Adolf Hitler am 30. Januar 1934 im Deutschen Reichstag nebst dem Gesetz über den Neuaufbau des Deutschen Reiches und der Begründung* von Wilhelm Frick (Leipzig: Reclam, 1934).

²⁸ *Vossische Zeitung*, January 31, 1934; for the dissolution of the states, see Bracher, “Stufen der Machtergreifung,” 593–99; for the Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt (NSW), see Herwart Vorländer, *Die NSV. Darstellung und Dokumentation einer nationalsozialistischen Organisation* (Boppard/Rhein: Boldt, 1988).

²⁹ See the 1934 reaffirmation of the 1933 instruction in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin (PA AA), RZ 214/99110, Bl. 2: Bülow-Schwante to all diplomatic missions, December 21, 1934; for the German foreign ministry, see Eckart Conze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes and Moshe Zimmermann, ed., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Blessing, 2010), 25–73, esp. 43–44; for a critique, see Richard J. Evans, “The German Foreign Office and the Nazi Past,” *Neue Politische Literatur*, 56 (2011): 165–83.

³⁰ PA AA, RZ 214/99136, Bl. 33: report by Deutsches Konsulat Hongkong, January 31, 1934; ^[30] PA AA, RZ 214/99136, Bl. 34: Einladung, January 1934; for the *Auslandsorganisation*, see Donald M. McKale, *The Swastika Outside Germany* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1977), 43–82; for the Nazi party in East Asia, see Donald M. McKale, “The Nazi Party in the Far East, 1931–45,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (1977): 291–311; a recent pithy survey on the foreign ministry is Marie-Luise Recker, “Die Außenpolitik des Auswärtigen Amtes. Ergebnisse, Probleme und Perspektiven der Forschung,” in *Das Auswärtige Amt in der NS-Diktatur*, ed. Johannes Hürter and Michael Mayer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 79–91.

(*Wiederkehr der nationalen Erhebung*), a term with revolutionary elan commonly used by the Nazis. The ceremony was held at the packed German House in Cairo, and started with a ringing of the bells of the German church and the hoisting of the swastika flag. At events like these, German expatriates were supposed to experience the *Volksgemeinschaft*, mediated through an eyewitness account of a Nazi official who had been in Berlin on January 30, 1933.³¹

After the full consolidation of Nazi domestic rule in the wake of the brutal elimination of the Sturmabteilung (SA) leadership in June 1934 and Hindenburg's death in the same year, followed by the triumphant victory in the Saar plebiscite, the regime put on "simple memorial celebrations" of "the great turning of fate on January 30, 1933" (*großen Schicksalswende*) in 1935. Thousands assembled outside the Reich Chancellery to cheer Hitler, who appeared on the balcony to take the ovations, as a regional Nazi newspaper from the outskirts of Berlin reported.³² In Hesse, the regional authorities of the Heppenheim district passed on an order of the Reich Ministry of Education to all schools that "the birthday of the National Socialist state" had to be celebrated "in solemn form," without giving direct instructions about the shape of the celebrations.³³

By 1936, as the Nazi regime turned its attention toward foreign expansion, the foreign ministry had formalized the choreography of January 30 celebrations, not least to give historical legitimacy to Nazi expansionism. The key responsibility rested with the head of the German diplomatic or consular mission. Local expatriate Nazi groups, which, by June 1937, had 29,099 members around the world, were to be involved. The main speaker was ideally a Nazi official—often sent from Germany at considerable cost. The German national anthem and the party anthem were to be sung.³⁴ In Chile, where Nazi party membership was high among the 5,300 German residents (by June 1937, 985 of them, about 18.5 percent, were party members), a torch-lit parade was held, a reenactment of the 1933 rally in Berlin supposed to reflect the *Volksgemeinschaft* through social practice.³⁵

Within Germany too, in 1936, amid the Third Reich's domestic consolidation, celebrations of January 30 became more substantial and formalized.³⁶ In Berlin, stormtroopers reenacted the torch-lit parade of 1933 and marched through the Brandenburg gate toward the Reich Chancellery. So many crowds were present that SS units allegedly had to push them back. Unlike the period before 1933, Nazis now clearly dominated the cityscape and the streets of German towns and villages.³⁷ Radio stations broadcast live relays of the torch-lit parade.³⁸

A local newspaper from Fehrbellin, near Berlin, appealed to the senses of its readers and invoked social practices that reflected the spirit of the *Volksgemeinschaft*: "The step of the thousands of SA men aligned in dead straight rows of twelve echoed firmly and hard on

³¹ PA AA, RZ 214/99136, Bl. 38–41: Deutsche Gesandtschaft Kairo, February 1, 1934; for the program, see PA AA, RZ 214/99136, Bl. 42–45: Erster Deutscher Tag in Aegypten am 27. und 28. Januar 1934 in Kairo; for Alfred Hess, see McKale, *The Swastika Outside Germany*, 75; for Nazi activities in Egypt, see Barry Rubin and Wolfgang Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 109; for a critique of Rubin and Schwanitz, see Mia Lee, "Nazis in the Middle East: Assessing Links Between Nazism and Islam," *Contemporary European History*, 27 (2018): 125–35; see also Stefan Wild, "National Socialism in the Arab near East between 1933 and 1939," *Die Welt des Islams*, 25 (1985): 126–73.

³² *Teltower Kreisblatt*, January 31, 1935.

³³ Hessisches Staatsarchiv Darmstadt (HStAD), G 15 Heppenheim, B 79: An die Schulvorstände des Kreises, January 17, 1935; a good survey of Hesse in the early Third Reich is still Eike Hennig, ed., *Hessen unterm Hakenkreuz. Studien zur Durchsetzung der NSDAP in Hessen* (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 1983).

³⁴ PA AA, RZ 214/99110, Bl. 202–03: memorandum by Bülow-Schwante, December 15, 1936; on the NSDAP-AO, see McKale, *The Swastika Outside Germany*, 120.

³⁵ PA AA RZ 214/98681, Bl. 40: Deutsche Gesandtschaft Santiago, January 31, 1936; for membership numbers, see McKale, *The Swastika Outside Germany*, 121.

³⁶ Compare Kühberger, *Metaphern der Macht*, 194.

³⁷ Molly Loberg, *The Struggle for the Streets of Berlin: Politics, Consumption, and Urban Space, 1914–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 199.

³⁸ *Stuttgarter NS-Kurier*, January 25, 1936, copy in BAB, R 78/1176.

the asphalt.” The highlight of the evening was a ceremony outside Hitler’s Reich Chancellery, where Hitler, joined by high-ranking Nazi leaders such as Reich Leader SS Heinrich Himmler, paid homage to Nazi veterans who had—through violence—helped pave the way for his appointment. Music included extracts from Wagner’s Ring cycle and, predictably, the Nazi party anthem.³⁹ Farther south, in the Heppenheim district, the local authorities received a clearer directive than in previous years from the Reich Ministry of Education. School children were to be given the day off, and head teachers had to organize a program of festivities with the local branches of the Nazi party’s youth organizations.⁴⁰ All civil servants in Germany were instructed to assemble in their offices and tune in to Hitler’s speech.⁴¹

With the ritualistic pattern of the celebrations in place, the regime put on greater celebrations in 1937, marking four years of Nazi rule. As the regime focused on territorial expansion, it intensified the persecution of social and racial minorities, above all the Jews. 1937’s anniversary celebrations used the slogan “Give me four years’ time,” a variation of Hitler’s first radio broadcast on February 1, 1933, where he had suggested that he would resolve all of Germany’s woes within four years, the normal duration of a parliamentary term. On January 30, 1937, Hitler boasted in front of the Reichstag that he had kept his promises. Agents of the exiled Social Democratic Party observed the grand celebrations in much greater detail than in previous years and noted that workplaces stopped so that employees could listen together to the speech. Streets were almost deserted during the Hitler broadcast, as Nazi organizations across Germany—through a mix of incentives and coercion—mobilized people. In Cologne, some students were overheard ridiculing Hitler’s speech at the beginning of the Carnival season. Even some Nazi party members grumbled about Hitler’s superficial and formulaic speech. In Saxony, people were passive because the bombast of the celebrations had become routine for them. Fewer people than in previous years attended the “communal radio reception” in Saxony. The *Sopade* reports interpreted any deviation from official plans as lack of enthusiasm and dissent, but at a time when real wages were still lower than they had been in 1929, the lack of working-class enthusiasm was palpable.⁴²

As the official German news agency proudly reported, celebrations were held across the world by German expatriates in places like Sydney, Rio de Janeiro, and Helsinki. In Nanking, soon to be the site of Japanese atrocities, the crew of the German light cruiser *Emden* appeared as ambassadors of the Third Reich, rubbing shoulders with the Japanese, with whom Nazi Germany had concluded the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936. At a local cinema, the ship’s captain read out a personal message from Hitler. After Mussolini’s proclamation of an Axis in November 1936, Nazi Germany had intensified links with fascist Italy, and reports emphasized the celebrations in Rome and Milan. Germans across the world were coming together in their commemoration of the beginning of a new era in German history, claimed the German news agency.⁴³

³⁹ *Fehrbelliner Zeitung*, January 31, 1936.

⁴⁰ HStAD, G 15 Heppenheim, B 79, Anzeiger der Hessischen Landesregierung, January 25, 1936.

⁴¹ See the note in PA AA, RAV 26 I/1984, January 28, 1936. In Berne, the embassy was closed on January 30, the occasion of the anniversary.

⁴² For the instructions, see *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro*, no. 106 and no. 110, January 26, 1937, copies in PA AA RAV 26 I/1984; Klaus Behnken, ed., *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (Sopade) 1934–1940* (Frankfurt/Main: Zweitausendeins, 1980), 4:143–48; for context, see Bernd Stöver, “Loyalität statt Widerstand. Die sozialistischen Exilberichte und ihr Bild vom Dritten Reich,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 43 (1995): 437–71; see more generally, Ian Kershaw, “Consensus, Coercion and Popular Opinion in the Third Reich: Some Reflections,” in *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes*, ed. Paul Corner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33–46; for the economy, see Richard Overy, *War and Economy in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 39, 43, 45, 57.

⁴³ *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro*, special edition, January 31, 1937; for the Italian-German alliance, see Christian Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler: The Forging of the Fascist Alliance* (New Haven, 2018), 69–70; for the Axis more generally, see Daniel Hedinger, *Die Achse. Berlin Rom Tokio* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2021).

Surrounding the Third Reich's fourth birthday, considerable propagandistic efforts underlined January 30, 1933, as a watershed that separated a period of German suffering, allegedly caused by the Jews, with a new era of hope and glory, spearheaded by Hitler. The Nazi party's publishing house chimed into this refrain and issued a popular history of Hitler's achievements, titled *Give Me Four Years' Time! (Gebt mir vier Jahre Zeit!)*. It was distributed widely and reached its sixth edition in 1938. In the preface, Goebbels declared that "the past four years [had] stood in the name of the Führer." They would enter the annals of history as a "time period of his first great construction period (*Aufbauperiode*)."⁴⁴ His achievements would be "everlasting" (*unvergänglich*), a variation of the Nazi view of the timelessness and eternity of the German *Volk*. Now that the first four years of rapid and comprehensive domestic consolidation were over, it was time for another Four-Year Plan. The new plan's aim, outlined in Hitler's August 1936 memorandum, was to prepare Germany for a long-planned war, due to start in four years, to conquer living space in eastern Europe. In line with the choreography of Nazi party ceremonies where Hitler appeared last after long anticipation, the commemorative book ended with a reprint of Hitler's January 30, 1937, speech.⁴⁴

As part of its growing self-confidence, the self-historicization of the regime intensified. Thus, in 1937, the regime staged a major exhibition with a quotation from Hitler's 1933 speech in the title. Approximately 1.5 million saw *Gebt mir vier Jahre Zeit* between April and June 1937 at Berlin's trade fair grounds. Exhibitions were a popular form of Nazi propaganda because they allowed the regime to disseminate specific messages in an emotionalized way about Nazism's achievements. In 1932, a similar, much grander exhibition had opened in Italy, the *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the fascist regime in Italy. In their quest for national uniqueness, the Nazis did not acknowledge that the idea of an anniversary exhibition was copied from Italy, a regime that claimed to be rooted in ancient Rome—unlike the Nazis. The presentation of myths about the origins and achievements of Hitler and Nazism was intended to give visitors a deep and emotive insight into the historical inevitability of the Third Reich in the flow of German history.⁴⁵

January 30 functioned as a bridgehead that connected the past with the future. One of the most notorious Hitler speeches took place on January 30, 1939. It began with a lengthy justification of the 1938 annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland, stepping stones toward the conquest of living space in eastern Europe. In the most infamous part of the speech, which some later saw as an explicit order that culminated in the murder of 6 million Jews during the war, Hitler threatened the extermination of Europe's Jews if Germany were pushed into a war. Hitler's threat set the tone for the antisemitic policies of the regime, which had entered a more radically violent phase with the *Anschluss* and the November 1938 pogrom. Nazi pressure on the Jews to leave Germany had increased dramatically. Hitler's violent rhetoric was an attempt to put other countries under pressure to accept more refugees from the Reich. At the time, foreign observers paid less attention to Hitler's remarks about

⁴⁴ Alfred-Ingemar Berndt, *Gebt mir vier Jahre Zeit! Dokumente zum ersten Vierjahresplan des Führers*, 6th ed. (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf., 1938), 7, 211–19, 220–53; for the Four-Year Plan, see Wilhelm Treue, "Dokumentation: Hitlers Denkschrift zum Vierjahresplan 1936," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 3 (1955): 184–210; Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2006), 203–43.

⁴⁵ For the exhibition, see the cursory treatment in Hans-Ulrich Thamer, "Geschichte und Propaganda. Kulturhistorische Ausstellungen in der NS-Zeit," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 24 (1998), 349–81, here 366; see also Sven Schultze, "Die visuelle Repräsentation der Diktatur. Berlin, sein Messias und die Propagandaschauen im Nationalsozialismus," in *Berlin im Nationalsozialismus. Politik und Gesellschaft 1933–1945*, ed. Rüdiger Hachtmann, Thomas Schaarschmidt and Winfried Süß (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011), 113–31, here 127–28; Christoph Kivelitz, *Die Propagandaexposition in europäischen Diktaturen. Konfrontation und Vergleich. Nationalsozialismus in Deutschland. Faschismus in Italien und die UdSSR der Stalinzeit* (Bochum: Verlag Dr. Dieter Winkler, 1999), 92–95; Clark, *Time and Power*, 192–93; for the Italian exhibition, see Marla S. Stone, *The Patron State, Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); for fascist Italy and ancient Rome, see Joshua Arthurs, *Excavating Modernity: The Roman Past in Fascist Italy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

the Jews and focused instead on his copious references to Benito Mussolini, leader of fascist Italy, with whom he wanted to enter a formal military alliance in order to “rescue Europe from the threatening Bolshevik extermination.”⁴⁶ Reports on popular opinion, compiled by agents of the exiled Social Democratic Party, highlighted that many saw Hitler’s speech as an omen to war, but the report remained silent about the chronological-political aspect of the speech.⁴⁷

Wartime Celebrations

After the beginning of the war, celebrations continued. A small, but significant detail changed in 1940. Hitler spoke at the Sportpalast instead of the Kroll Opera House’s Reichstag chamber. Inside the Sportpalast, images of huge crowds, handpicked by the Nazi party’s organizations, provided a stronger visual and sonic backdrop to newsreels and radio broadcasts of the speech than the few hundred Reichstag members. In mid-January 1942, Hitler had ordered that the 1942 anniversary was to be celebrated “in a small setting” (*in kleinem Rahmen*), as the German advance against the Soviet Union, a war of racial conquest, had stalled outside the gates of Moscow. His speech at the Sportpalast went ahead because it had become part of the Nazi ritual that audiences expected to go ahead.⁴⁸ The *Schutzstaffel* (SS) Security Service predictably boasted that the “German people” had responded enthusiastically to the speech, as Hitler’s first public appearance in a while had given them hope in the tough struggle against Bolshevism and Churchill and Roosevelt, allegedly marionettes of international Jewry. Nevertheless, the report insinuated that some Germans had been disappointed with the speech because Hitler had remained formulaic about the anniversary of January 30 instead of discussing concretely how the war would progress.⁴⁹

In German diplomatic missions in neutral, occupied, or pro-German countries, the celebrations also continued during the war. In 1941, the Nazi party’s foreign organization and the foreign ministry coordinated Nazi speakers for the events in major pro-Nazi or neutral countries such as Turkey, Italy, Hungary, and Portugal. The purpose of such events was to boost morale among German expatriates and to put down a marker that Germany’s victory was inevitable, given the Nazi victory over the “Weimar” system in 1933.⁵⁰

As Germany’s military fortunes turned in late 1942/early 1943, Nazi propaganda officials planned bombastic celebrations for the Third Reich’s tenth anniversary on January 30, 1943, to boost morale. In late December 1942, Goebbels issued detailed instructions for the central celebrations. The key message was that “we will win because Adolf Hitler leads us!,” as Hitler had “always remained the winner in the end.” The instructions highlighted the repetitive commemorative strategy of the Nazis for January 30 that was adapted for the particular political-military context. As the tide had begun to turn against the Nazis in the war in

⁴⁶ Domarus, *Hitler*, 2/1, 1047–67; for context, see Hans Mommsen, “Hitler’s Reichstag Speech of January 30 1939,” *History and Memory* 9 (1997): 147–61; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler’s “Prophecy” and the Final Solution* (Burlington, VT: Center for Holocaust Studies, 2002).

⁴⁷ Behnken, *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (Sopade) 1934–1940*, 6:122–24.

⁴⁸ For the 1940 speech, see Domarus, *Hitler*, 2/1, 1452–61; for the 1941 speech, see Domarus, *Hitler*, 3/1, 1657–64; for the 1942 speech, see Domarus, *Hitler*, 3/1, 1826–34; for the 1942 directive, see BAB, NS 18/765, Bl. 1: Vorlage für den Herrn Minister, January 18, 1942; for the politics of sound, see Epping-Jäger, “Lautsprecher Hitler.”

⁴⁹ Heinz Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich. Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938–1945*, 17 vols. (Herrsching: Pawlak, 1984), 9:3233–36.

⁵⁰ For example, see the report in PA AA RZ 214/99110, Bl. 457–58: Deutsche Gesandtschaft Lissabon, February 6, 1941; for the list of speakers, see PA AA RZ 214/99110, Bl. 384–88: Der Chef der NSDAP-AO to Auswärtiges Amt, January 16, 1941; for Ribbentrop’s approval, see PA AA RZ 214/99110, Bl. 389: Mitteilung für Parteigenossen Dr. Garben, January 18, 1941.

the East, the instructions insisted that Nazism's triumph on January 30, 1933, had set the basis for "the victory of arms in the struggle of the German people for a new, just order of life, for freedom and bread."⁵¹

Weekend festivals were to be held across Germany, including Nazi rallies, radio broadcasts, theater performances, and film screenings. For instance, in Strasbourg, annexed by Germany after the victory over France in 1940, the Nazi district leadership (*Kreisleitung*) scheduled political speeches, a match of Paris-based German soldiers against an Alsatian team, and a popular concert.⁵²

Centrally planned events included a commemorative ceremony at the tomb of Horst Wessel, the Nazi party's key martyr figure, and a march past and display of the "blood standard" at Munich's Nazi memorial for the fallen "martyrs" of the Nazi movement. The intersection with other Nazi history projects and sites of memory returns us to the Nazi historical imaginary. To underline Nazism's roots in the First World War, a ceremony was scheduled at the Tannenberg Memorial in East Prussia, site of a key victory of Germany against Imperial Russia and of Reich President von Hindenburg's grave. The draft program lists a reception of the *Gauleiter* and members of the Nazi party's youth organizations by Hitler at the Reich Chancellery and a Hitler speech at the Sportpalast.

An official delegation of the Italian Fascist party was invited to attend the celebrations, in return for the visit of a Nazi delegation on the twentieth anniversary of the Fascist March on Rome. This arrangement, which included an audience with Hitler, reflected the close ranks between fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, whose alliance was, in reality, increasingly tense. It gave the anniversary of January 30 a European dimension in line with the Nazi message that the war was a European crusade against Judaeo-Bolshevism. Reich stage designer Benno von Arent designed the sets for some of the largest events. Many of the events were to be broadcast live on the radio and recorded for posterity. Some events, such as Goebbels's speech, were also to be filmed and preserved as part of the historical record. Tickets were distributed to selected audiences to ensure an enthusiastic display of consent. The Security Police, part of the SS, was to check the tickets at all venues and be guarded by other police units. The Nazi officials in charge knew that Allied air raids might disturb the ceremonies and asked the air defense staff to be particularly vigilant and inform the organizers of the events immediately in the eventuality of an attack.⁵³

Plans for the major anniversary included mass rallies and a day off for workers so that they could participate in the festivities. A commemorative stamp was issued by the Reich post office. Goebbels's propaganda instructions included an account of the historical achievements of Nazism, replete with references to the key themes of Nazism: antisemitism and

⁵¹ Archiv des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte Munich, Db 22.25: 30. Januar 1943. 10. Jahrestag der Machtübernahme. Anweisungen des Reichspropagandaleiters der NSDAP. Zusammengestellt vom Hauptamt Propaganda (Amt Grossveranstaltungen) der Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP (Berlin: Hauptamt Propaganda, n.d. [1942]), 4; available in English translation by Randall Bytwerk at <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/30jan1943.htm#g>.

⁵² For theatre plans, see BAB R 55/20098, Bl. 232: Aktenvermerk, December 11, 1942; 10. Jahrestag der Machtübernahme. NSDAP Kreisleitung Strassburg. Folge der Veranstaltungen, poster, available at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b102096318#dclid=1625147099051&p=1>; for German rule over Alsace, see Elizabeth Vlossak, *Marianne or Germania? Nationalizing Women in Alsace, 1870–1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 253–91.

⁵³ BAB, NS 18/10, Bl. 4–9, Grundsätzliche Hinweise zum Arbeitsplan, undated; for the final programme, see BAB, NS 18/10, Bl. 4–9, Grundsätzliche Hinweise zum Arbeitsplan, Bl. 27–38; for the draft, see also BAB, NS 18/781, Bl. 1–7: Vorlage. Betrifft: vorläufiges Programm für den 30. Januar 1943, December 9, 1942; for the Italian delegation, see the correspondence in BAB, NS 18/9, Bl. 1: Reichspropagandaleiter Hauptamt Propaganda—Reichshauptamtsleiter Pg. Tiessler, November 27, 1942; for the final draft of the program, see in BAB, NS 18/9, Bl. 26–7; for Italy's and Germany's alliance, see Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 237–38; for Nazi martyrs, see Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden*, 361–85; Jay W. Baird, *To Die for Germany. Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); for the Nazi cult of Horst Wessel, see Daniel Siemens, *Horst Wessel. Tod und Verklärung eines Nationalsozialisten* (Munich: Siedler, 2009); for Tannenberg, see Anna von der Goltz, *Hindenburg: Power, Myth, and the Rise of the Nazis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 182–91.

anti-Bolshevism. Millions of Europe's Jews had already been murdered by the Nazis. Goebbels's text justified Nazi antisemitism with the alleged Jewish hegemony before 1933. As Allied mass bombings increased and news of relatives being killed or wounded in action reached the home front, Nazi propaganda expressed a strong confidence in victory bordering on fanaticism.⁵⁴

How central Nazi orders trickled down to the local level becomes clear from a cache of files of the Seligenstadt Nazi party. In this small town near the industrial Offenbach am Main, preparations had begun in early December 1942 when the district propaganda leader (*Kreispropagandaleiter*) ordered local Nazi groups to prepare for music performances on January 30. Lyrics were to be distributed in advance to the audience so that the songs would reflect the unity of the Nazi party with the German people. Songs included the Horst Wessel Song and "Do You See the Morning Red in the East" (*Siehst Du im Osten das Morgenrot*), an illustration of the German campaign in the East.⁵⁵

Given the significance of Hitler's tenth anniversary in office, festivities were to be held over three days, starting on January 29 and ending on January 31 with rallies of Nazi youth organizations representing Germany's future. Local Nazi groups had to have their programs approved by the district leadership to ensure consistent messaging. Relatives of those who had died for the Nazi movement, but also those who had lost loved ones in the war and those who had lost their homes in bombing raids, were to be invited. But the locally organized events were not to be solely about politics and the war. The typical Nazi propaganda cocktail of linking political messages with light entertainment was put to use. Local Nazi groups were encouraged to organize outdoor concerts with Nazi party bands playing "elated music" (*beschwingte Musik*), an idea that would symbolize Nazi domination over the German soundscape.⁵⁶

In order to display unity and strength, the Reich Youth Leadership (*Reichsjugendführung*) demanded that all German schoolchildren older than ten listen to a speech by Reich Youth Leader Arthur Axmann on January 30. The initial plan was to send schoolchildren and teachers home after the speech. On January 27, the authorities suddenly ordered that school would have to continue after all. Sending children home, the authorities feared, would be felt as inappropriate by Germans living the experience of total war.⁵⁷

Events on the eastern front, where Nazi Germany suffered severe setbacks, concerned the Nazi leadership, who always kept an eye on popular opinion. Hitler personally intervened on January 22, 1943, as the Soviets were closing in on Stalingrad, and ordered that January 30 would not be a day off for workers. Nor were flags to be hoisted. On January 22, 1943, the Nazi party's chancellery issued an order that the press should not report the awarding of golden party pin, a Nazi distinction regularly awarded by Hitler on January 30 to reward Nazi party members.⁵⁸ At Stalingrad, the German Sixth Army, surrounded by a rebounding Red Army, was about to suffer total defeat.⁵⁹ Despite the hopeless military situation, General Friedrich Paulus, commander of the Sixth Army, congratulated Hitler on the leader's tenth anniversary in power. Paulus promised that he would never capitulate. In return, Hitler promoted Paulus to field marshal with the expectation that Paulus would commit suicide rather

⁵⁴ 30. Januar 1943. 10. Jahrestag der Machtübernahme, available at <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/30jan1943.htm#g>.

⁵⁵ HStAD, N1/1215, Der Kreispropagandaleiter, December 9, 1942; for the command structure of propaganda institutions, see Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden*, 313–15.

⁵⁶ HStAD, N1/1215, Der Kreispropagandaleiter, January 14, 1943.

⁵⁷ HStAD, G 15 Heppenheim, B 79, An die Schulleiter des Kreises, January 27, 1943; compare the previous instructions in HStAD, G 15 Heppenheim, B 79, January 25, 1943.

⁵⁸ BAB, R 43 II/1627a, Bl. 107: telegram Lammers to Terboven, January 22, 1943; BAB, NS 18/237, Bl. 1: Notiz für Pg. Wächter, 22 January 22, 1943.

⁵⁹ Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort* (London: Penguin, 1998), 154–85.

than capitulate. Paulus and the Sixth Army eventually surrendered and went with fewer than 100,000 German soldiers, a tenth of their original strength, into captivity.⁶⁰

Instead of bombastic celebrations of the Third Reich's tenth anniversary, the regime held scaled-down celebrations to keep the momentum going. Congratulatory telegrams reached Hitler from across Germany and abroad, including from Mussolini. News of the correspondence was published in the press to reaffirm that Germany and its Allies would win the war. In the files of the Reich Chancellery, the Central Committee of the Inner Mission, the welfare branch of the Protestant Church, which had an ambivalent stance toward the Nazi regime that included participation in the euthanasia murders, telexed that they "assure[d] the Führer of their unwavering loyalty and allegiance until the final victory."⁶¹

To mark the closing of ranks among Hitler, the Nazi party, and the German people, bound together in the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the Nazi party's official news agency issued a commemorative booklet, couched in typical Nazi rhetoric that highlighted the individual opportunities provided by the *Volksgemeinschaft*. The booklet presented the life stories of twenty-seven Germans from different regions and social classes. They claimed that January 30, 1933, had been a watershed at both individual and communal levels, marking the end of unemployment, national humiliation (allegedly caused by the Jews), and despair. That day had ushered in a new era of upward social mobility, higher profits for business owners, national pride, and the creation of a *Volksgemeinschaft* from which Jews were excluded. In light of the worsening military situation, the booklet insisted to Germans "that no price is too high, no sacrifice too costly and no burden too heavy for us to defend the National Socialist Reich and its completion, that no power should frighten us and no hour should see us weak, let this be our common confession ten years after January 30, 1933, and our thanks to the Führer."⁶²

German diplomatic missions abroad continued in their usual celebrations to echo the message that Germany would stand firm against the Allies. Amid increasing tensions with fascist Italy, the German embassy in Italy put on a much larger celebration than in previous years in the Teatro Argentina in Rome. Leading representatives from the Fascist party and the Italian army, of which a small contingent fought at Stalingrad, were in the audience, alongside German expatriates. To save face, the report by the German envoy Prince Otto von Bismarck glossed over the imminent defeat of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad and the increasing military losses of the Axis powers.⁶³

Against the expectations of Germans who had become used to a Hitler speech on January 30, Hitler did not appear or speak in public that day in 1943. He did not want to be associated with the massive blow of Stalingrad and tried to maintain the myth that he stood above day-to-day politics. He still granted an audience to a delegation of the Italian Fascist party at his military headquarters to demonstrate the invincibility of the Axis. Many Germans began to have doubts over whether the war could be won. Nazi propaganda, in its inflexibility, was unable to turn the tide of declining popular opinion and boost

⁶⁰ Christian Goeschel, *Suicide in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 142–43; Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), 419.

⁶¹ BAB, R 43-II/165a, Bl. 213, Telegramm, February 11, 1943; for the inner mission in the Third Reich, see Jochen-Christoph Kaiser, *Sozialer Protestantismus im 20. Jahrhundert. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Inneren Mission 1914–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1989), 227–443; Domarus, *Hitler*, 2/2, 1981–82.

⁶² A copy is held at Archiv des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte Munich, Db 21.0127, *Zeugen eines beispiellosen Aufstiegs. Was wir der Partei verdanken ... und was wir gegen feindlichen Vernichtungswahn verteidigen. Der Wandel des deutschen Lebens im Spiegel des menschlichen Schicksals/Dokumente nationalsozialistischer Leistung seit dem 30. Januar 1933. Eine Reportagenserie zum 10. Jahrestag der Machtergreifung der NSDAP* (Sonderausgabe der NSK. Nationalsozialistische Parteikorrespondenz, Folge 18, 22. Januar 1943, Blatt 2–32), Bl 3; for the individual appeal of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, see Wildt, "Volksgemeinschaft"; Moritz Föllmer, "Was Nazism Collectivistic? Redefining the Individual in Berlin, 1930–1945," *Journal of Modern History* 82 (2010): 61–100.

⁶³ PA AA RZ 214/99110, Bl. 186-7: report by Bismarck, February 4, 1943; for press coverage, see Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Zsg 117/47, copy of *Il Popolo d'Italia*, January 31, 1943; for context, see Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 237–38.

civilian morale.⁶⁴ To paper over the awkward situation that Hitler had not appeared in public, the *Völkischer Beobachter* printed a full-page digest of Hitler's previous speeches on January 30.⁶⁵ Goebbels instructed the press on January 23, 1943, to prepare Germans for the crushing defeat of the Sixth Army with headlines about the "epic song" of Stalingrad.⁶⁶

Instead of Hitler, Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, who was Chief of the Luftwaffe, Prussian Minister President, and widely seen at the time as second-in-command to Hitler, delivered an "appeal to the Wehrmacht" on January 30, 1943, broadcast over the wireless. Göring praised the sacrifice of the Spartans, led by Leonidas, to fend off the Persian contingents at the Thermopylae as an example for Germans to keep fighting heroically, if necessary, until the last bullet, to keep the Red Army at bay. This attempt to give the imminent defeat of Germany on the eastern front some historical legitimacy was outlandish and failed to resonate widely with a German population that increasingly felt the strain of the war. Yet the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) popular opinion reports chimed in nonetheless with the dubious propaganda refrain that Göring's speech had given Germans some hope that the Soviets might be defeated after all, although the SD also admitted that few Germans had listened to Göring's declarations because it was broadcast when people were at work.⁶⁷

At a mass rally at Berlin's Sportpalast, Goebbels read out a proclamation by Hitler that remained formulaic and repetitive, including the usual references to the Nazi party's struggle to free Germany from Bolshevism. This struggle, Hitler's text insisted, set a precedent for continuing to fight the Soviets and the other Allies. Had Hindenburg not appointed Hitler in 1933, the speech declared, then Germany would have been doomed, given the threat provided by the "plutocratic" democracies and the Bolshevik Soviet Union.⁶⁸ Goebbels boasted in his diary that the audience had interrupted him with rapturous applause, typical of Nazi party rallies. Even an Allied bombing raid on Berlin during the speech allegedly did not bother the enthusiastic, handpicked audience, fervent Nazi supporters who, he hoped, would fight until "final victory," a sentiment repeated in the SD report on popular reactions to Goebbels's speech.⁶⁹

At the local level, scaled-down celebrations went ahead. Nazi officials used the occasion to make a stand of their own authority. Offenbach am Main's Nazi party district leadership ordered that no flags were to be hoisted—unlike in previous years. But a wreath had to be placed at the Offenbach war memorial. Festivities already planned for January 31 were canceled.⁷⁰ Speeches at the remaining, scaled-down local celebrations had to be solemn "in light of the heavy struggle on the eastern front" and had to focus on the "heroic" and "sacrificial" fighting of German soldiers. The central tenor of a draft speech circulated by the leading regional Nazi propaganda official (*Gaupropagandaleiter*) was an antisemitic counterfactual history. If Hitler had not come to power in 1933, then a "criminal community," made up of the "war-mongering Jews of New York" and "world revolution Jews of the Kremlin," would have crushed Germany a long time ago. "The Soviet revolutionary avalanche" would have brutally

⁶⁴ For the audience, see Domarus, *Hitler*, 2/2, 1981–82; for a press report of the Italian delegation's visit, see BAB, R 901/59920, *La Stampa*, February 1, 1943; for propaganda, see David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London: Routledge, 1993), 106.

⁶⁵ For the running order and the digest of speeches, see *Völkischer Beobachter*, Vienna edition, January 30, 1943; for Hitler's proclamation, see Domarus, *Hitler*, 2/2, 1976–80.

⁶⁶ Marlis G. Steinert, *Hitler's War and the Germans: Public Mood and Attitude During the Second World War*, trans. Thomas E. J. de Witt (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977), 185.

⁶⁷ For background, see Helen Roche, *Sparta's German Children: The Ideal of Ancient Sparta in the Royal Prussian Cadet Corps, 1818–1920 and in National Socialist Elite Schools (The Napolas), 1933–1945* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2013), 23; Helen Roche, "Mussolini's 'Third Rome,' Hitler's Third Reich and the Allure of Antiquity: Classicizing Chronopolitics as a Remedy for Unstable National Identity?," *Fascism*, 8 (2019): 127–52; Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 12:4732–33.

⁶⁸ Domarus, *Hitler*, 2/2, 1976–80; for popular opinion, see Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth"*, 192–93.

⁶⁹ Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Teil II: Diktate 1941–1945. Band 7: Januar–März 1943* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1993), diary entry for January 31, 1943; Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 12:4732–33.

⁷⁰ HStAD, N1/1215, Der Kreispropagandaleiter, January 26, 1943.

extirpated Germany. Therefore, Germans had to fight the war with bitter zeal. This was a typical Nazi racist fantasy that did not mention that it was Germany who was exterminating Jews and Slavs on the eastern front.⁷¹ In Seligenstadt, the local Nazi party still held its main ceremony on the night of January 29 at a cinema, located in the appropriately named Adolf-Hitler-Strasse, “to prove that we all stick loyally to the Führer.”⁷²

As the war reached the home front through increasing casualties and Allied mass bombings of German towns, Hitler did not appear in public on January 30, 1944, either. There was a clear drop in popular morale. Hitler’s charismatic authority began to disintegrate in the first half of 1944, given the lack of military successes, and marked by the loss of the battle of Stalingrad, the fall from power of his central ally Mussolini, and Italy’s armistice with the Allies.⁷³ He wanted to avoid associations with bad news and therefore remained at his military headquarters. His radio broadcast underlined his conviction that without his appointment on January 30, 1933, Germany would never have been able to pull together as a strong nation to stop Bolshevism from destroying Europe. His exhortations to Germans to continue fighting to keep the historical momentum of Nazism going reflected his increasing fanaticism as a German victory became ever more unlikely.⁷⁴

As the Allies were closing in on Germany, the anniversary celebrations continued. The regime had developed a unique repertoire that communicated the historical message. This message also scripted an imagined future that became ever more valuable as the military context deteriorated. As Alfred Rosenberg, one of the Nazi party’s chief ideologues, declared in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on January 30, 1944, January 30, 1933, had ushered in a “new time,” which had replaced the “Jewish-democratic age.” No return to this old age was possible, he insisted. Some basic celebrations of January 30 had to continue so that officials could boast about the supposedly historical inevitability of Nazism to win the war. For instance, in Salzburg, honor guards of the Waffen-SS, alongside Wehrmacht and Nazi party formations marched through the city before congregating with 6,000 Salzburgers inside the packed festival hall. After a speech by *Gauleiter* and Reich Governor Gustav Adolf Scheel, formerly Reich Student Leader, the entire audience listened to Hitler’s radio broadcast.⁷⁵

Given further German military setbacks, evidence of celebrations of January 30 in 1944 is much sparser than in previous years. Take the case of Ljubljana, since Italy’s September 1943 armistice with the Allies part of the German “Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral” (*Operationszone Adriatisches Küstenland*). Here, the German consulate held a celebration. Guests included German residents, the Higher SS, and Police Leader Erwin Rösener, in charge of brutal German reprisals against partisans, along with members of the 16th *Panzer Grenadier Division Reichsführer SS*, notorious for their ideological commitment and war crimes in Italy.⁷⁶

⁷¹ HStAD, N1/1215, Der Gaupropagandaleiter, January 26, 1943; for counterfactual history, see Richard J. Evans, *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History* (Waltham, MA.: Brandeis University Press, 2013).

⁷² HStAD, N1/1215, NSDAP Ortsgruppe Seligenstadt, January 27, 1943.

⁷³ Kershaw, *The “Hitler Myth,”* 201–25; for the bombing war, see Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2013), 410–85; for the alliance with Italy, see Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 254–90.

⁷⁴ Domarus, 2/2, 2082–86.

⁷⁵ The quotation is in *Völkischer Beobachter*, Berlin edition, January 30, 1943, copy in BAB, R 4902/11200; *Salzburger Zeitung*, January 31, 1944; for Scheel, see Birgit Arnold, “‘Deutscher Student, es ist nicht nötig, daß Du lebst, wohl aber, daß Du Deine Pflicht gegenüber Deinem Volk erfüllst.’ Gustav Adolf Scheel, Reichsstudentenführer und Gauleiter von Salzburg,” in *Die Führer der Provinz. NS-Biographien aus Baden und Württemberg*, ed. Michael Kißener and Joachim Scholtyseck (Constance: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 1997), 567–94.

⁷⁶ PA AA RZ 214/99184, Bl. 219: Deutsches Konsulat Laibach, February 5, 1944; for the SS division, see Carlo Gentile, “Politische Soldaten. Die 16. SS-Panzer Grenadier-Division „Reichsführer-SS“ in Italien 1944,” *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 81 (2001): 529–61; see also Carlo Gentile’s *Wehrmacht und Waffen-SS im Partisanenkrieg: Italien 1943–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012), 201–304; for context, see Filippo Focardi, “Italy as Occupier in the Balkans: Remembrance and war crimes after 1945,” in *Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe*, ed. Jörg Echternkamp and Stefan Martens (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010),

As the Allies closed in on Germany, celebrations continued. On January 30, 1945, the twelfth anniversary of his appointment as Reich Chancellor, Adolf Hitler addressed the German people on the radio from the Reich Chancellery. This would be his last speech. Hitler told the familiar story of how the Nazis had rescued Germany from “the spectre of Asian Bolshevism,” which was just as menacing to the survival of the Germanic race back then as in 1945. Hitler demanded that everyone fight until the last bullet and commit suicide rather than surrender. Within the Nazi leadership, the party’s heroic period of struggle (*Kampfzeit*) during the Weimar years served as a precedent for a ruthless last stand against the Allies. *Kolberg*, the most lavish Nazi propaganda film glorifying the fierce resistance of local residents of that Pomeranian town against Napoleon as a heroic precedent for Germans to keep fighting the Allies, saw its premiere on January 30, 1945. Repression against any alleged defeatists increased and included the mass arrests of Weimar-era political, military, and administrative elites whom the Nazis accused of undermining total war. Some within the Nazi party even blamed the lack of a full reckoning against bourgeois elites in 1933 for poor public morale and the military disaster.⁷⁷

But even as the Allies were closing in on greater Germany, the Nazi party had little choice but to continue celebrations of January 30, 1933, and *Volksgemeinschaft* rhetoric to save face amid increasing disillusionment that war could be won. In Vienna, for example, Karl Scharizer, the Deputy Gauleiter, spoke at the *Konzerthaus*. He acknowledged the hardship facing the population and the serious military situation and warned about “Bolshevik slavery” if people did not fight as determinedly as the Nazis had done on the road to January 30, 1933. Hitler’s appointment as Reich Chancellor had shown, Scharizer thundered, that Germany was invincible. Less than three months later, the Red Army took Vienna.⁷⁸ In the bombed-out cities and the war-torn countryside, such claims only resonated with die-hard Nazis. The final celebration would be in 1945, as the Nazi regime disintegrated swiftly over the following months, accompanied by waves of terroristic violence against supposed defeatists and Germany’s last remaining Jews. If total victory could not be achieved, “at least defeat could be total,” as the historian Timothy W. Mason noted.⁷⁹

Conclusion

Throughout the Third Reich, the Nazis commemorated January 30, 1933, as a crucial turning point in history to give historical meaning and legitimacy to their rule. Rituals commemorating the “National Socialist Revolution,” a catch-all term, became increasingly self-referential and, from 1943 at the latest, lost touch with ordinary people.⁸⁰ The repetitive nature of the celebrations changed little over time until the military situation worsened in 1943, suggesting that the routines and messages themselves were frozen in time, just as the Nazis saw the German *Volk* as timeless and eternal. Some Nazi activists, especially within the SA, saw Hitler’s rise to power as a revolution and were disappointed when Hitler declared the “victory of the Nazi revolution” in December 1933. In the Nazi historical

135–46; for the mobilization of “ethnic” Germans in Yugoslavia, see Caroline Mezger, *Forging Germans: Youth, Nation, and the National Socialist Mobilization of Ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia, 1918–1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁷⁷ Hans Mommsen, “Die Rückkehr zu den Ursprüngen—Betrachtungen zur inneren Auflösung des Dritten Reiches nach der Niederlage von Stalingrad,” in *Geschichte und Emanzipation. Festschrift für Reinhard Rürup*, Michael Grüttner, Rüdiger Hachtmann and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 1999), 418–34; Mommsen, “Die nationalsozialistische Machteroberung,” 341–42; Goeschel, *Suicide in Nazi Germany*, 149–66; for broader context, see Ian Kershaw, *The End: Hitler’s Germany 1944–45* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), 167–206; for *Kolberg*, see Söseman, “30. Januar 1933,” 267.

⁷⁸ *Völkischer Beobachter*, Vienna edition, January 31, 1945.

⁷⁹ Timothy W. Mason, “Introduction to the English Edition,” in *Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the “Volksgemeinschaft”* (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 1–18, here 12.

⁸⁰ Koselleck, “Revolution,” 786.

and temporal imaginary, January 30, 1933, had restored the natural direction of German history in which the eternal German nation would thrive again in the *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁸¹

Ambivalence over terminology—whether to use the term *Machtübernahme* (power takeover) or *Machtergreifung* (power grab), or post-1945, the categories of revolution or restoration—confirms this sentiment. Reactions from ordinary people to the commemorations reflected their broader attitudes toward Hitler and the Nazi party. Commemorations had to continue until 1945 when a German defeat was imminent, as January 30 gave a sense of historical legitimacy and inevitability to the regime. January 30 had not been a revolutionary event like the storming of the Bastille; instead, it had been a legalistic handing of power to Hitler—amid Nazi violence—by Reich President von Hindenburg at a time of political paralysis and economic crisis.⁸²

Like Nazism more generally, January 30 stood for continuity with old elites and the violent potential of millions of stormtroopers. For the Nazis, January 30 was about a break with the recent post-1918 past, a new beginning, and the realization of a racialized *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁸³ The Nazis knew about the ambivalence of January 30, which is why it never became the central commemorative festival. November 9, the anniversary of the failed Nazi putsch, became much more significant, as the Nazis who had died on that day in Munich could be claimed as martyrs of the cause. The close link between how the Nazis set about constructing their history and the significance of January 30 dates to later historiography is striking. Not least because of its institutionalization as a turning point in Germany and abroad, January 30 widely resonated beyond 1945.⁸⁴

Acknowledgments. I should like to thank the journal's referees, Alexia Yates and Dejan Djokić for their comments on an earlier draft, and Ian Kershaw for his excellent advice.

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⁸¹ For Hitler's declaration of the "end of the Nazi revolution," see the "Law to Safeguard the Unity of Party and State," December 1, 1933 (https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1502); for the SA, see Daniel Siemens, *Stormtroopers: A New History of Hitler's Brownshirts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 117–56.

⁸² Sewell, "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures."

⁸³ Compare Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*.

⁸⁴ Sösemann, "30. Januar 1933," 261; Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*.

Cite this article: Christian Goeschel. "January 30, 1933, in the Nazi Historical Imaginary," *Central European History* 56, no. 3 (September 2023): 397–414. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938922001376>.