

absence did not hinder sabotage and espionage activities undertaken by other subjects of the Dual Monarchy.

In the fourth chapter, Bednar gives his “countdown to disaster” (140)—ten events that led to the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Beginning with Austria’s termination of diplomatic relations with the US in response to the US declaration of war on Germany (but not Austria), to what he terms a “finale in five acts” (195), Bednar dissects the interplay between the two countries at key moments. The US does not fare well in this examination. A harsh and unflattering light, although not altogether undeserved, is thrown on US actions.

The last chapter covers the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, lamenting the short shrift Austria received at St. Germain. Here, again, American actions and inactions are examined. Wilson is front and center, ignoring other members of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace (ACNP) as well as the so-called Black Book, a collection of materials, papers, and proposals to be used by the commission. Bednar returns to the conventional view of failure for both the conference and American participation in it.

Transatlantic Relations and the Great War is a novel and fresh examination of an often-neglected topic. Kurt Bednar poses questions rarely considered with regards to the American–Austro-Hungarian relationship. Was the dissolution of Austria-Hungary truly a *fait accompli* with the end of World War I, or could the empire have lived on? Could or should the US have done more to preserve it? Were there other alternatives? This work examines just one of the many strands that compose these knotty questions, but it provides much food for thought for the next generation of historians.

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Peripheries at the Centre: Borderland Schooling in Interwar Europe

By Machteld Venken. New York: Berghahn Books, 2021. Pp. xi + 265. Cloth \$135.00. ISBN: 978-1789209679.

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Questions related to the rights of national minorities were among the thornier challenges confronting Europe as it emerged from the carnage of the First World War. The principle of national self-determination which guided the treaties ending the conflict offered legitimacy to newly created “nation-states” and justified the acquisition of new territory for others. At the same time, it helped bolster national grievances for those who felt cheated by newly established borders, and motivated nationalization policies aimed at making the ideal of the nation-state a reality. As scholarship from the past few decades has demonstrated, these tensions created an environment where, for many, the First World War was only the prelude to continued conflict. In this excellent study, Machteld Venken demonstrates that schools were often the front line of these struggles.

Venken offers a thorough, deeply researched comparison of schooling in Polish Upper Silesia and the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith, and Malmedy in Belgium to illustrate the complexity of education policy in European borderlands in the interwar period. Without question, the quality of this comparison is the book’s greatest strength. Analyses of interwar borderlands tend to prioritize Central and Eastern Europe, while territorial changes in the

West have received scant attention. Even though traditional assessments have assumed borders were more stable in the West, Venken demonstrates that states like Belgium faced similar challenges to newly established states, like Poland. Both had to confront the challenge of incorporating newly acquired multilingual spaces into their states and of making those territories “socially lived spaces” that contributed to the stability and prosperity of the larger nation (20). While trying to achieve this goal, Belgium and Poland each had to establish policies that managed linguistic policy for German-speakers. Complicating matters, both also had to contend with the fact that they were surrounded by larger, more powerful neighbors whose foreign-policy goals often conflicted with the aims of each state. The most important of these neighbors was Germany, whose politicians rarely hesitated to call for the restoration of “lost” territories and offered financial and political support to groups working to undermine the education policies of their neighbors. This reality meant that both Poland and Belgium always faced the possibility that their borders were subject to potential challenges and negotiation.

While these similarities offer a strong foundation for comparison, as Venken deftly shows, there are also limits to any potential parallels. Poland’s international status was more precarious than Belgium’s. Beyond international agreements, like the Treaty of Locarno – which seemed to signal the possibility for adjusting Germany’s eastern border – Poland’s policies were subject to oversight by the League of Nations. In examining the impact of this fact, Venken uncovers the clever ways in which average people successfully employed League oversight to advance their grievances against Polish education policy. Belgium, on the other hand, faced no such supervision and even established a quasi-colonial regime in its formerly German territory, which was responsible for managing its incorporation into the Belgian state.

There were also considerable differences in the ultimate objective of education policy in each state. Belgium had a long history of accommodating multilingual education, and often the most pressing question related to German-language schools was related to the appropriate time to begin foreign-language education, not the status of German-language schools themselves. Poland, on the other hand, aimed to create a school system that would bolster the Polish nation-state and often established regulations that were designed to diminish the status of non-Polish-language schools.

The success of these policies was limited by both international events and the actions of citizens navigating life in these states. Venken’s ability to explore the behavior and motivations of these individuals is another strength of the book. She shows that most parents living in the borderlands were often more interested in providing the best education for their children rather than fulfilling the ambitions of nationalist or political actors. As a result, Polish-speaking parents often attempted to send their children to German-language schools, while in Belgium, many prioritized the learning of French, regardless of nationality. Others even took the step of sending children across the border, to schools in Germany, when legally possible. In each case, the thought was that this education would allow for greater economic success.

Even if such actions were not motivated by political considerations, they still had profound political results. Venken argues that the ability of parents to circumscribe educational policy demonstrates that governments were often unable to realize a strong, solid border which divided their national space from their neighbors. In fact, she asserts that the weakness of such border constructs often became more pronounced in the face of rigid policies meant to restrict which schools children could attend. To help explain these arguments, Venken thoroughly grounds her analysis in theories tied to borders, territoriality, and human geography. At times, however, the use of these theories threatens to overwhelm or distract from the impact of the book’s findings. For example, Venken uses the book’s second chapter to offer a comprehensive theoretical framework and explain its applicability to subsequent arguments. While such a discussion is important, the fact that it occurs in the second chapter halts the momentum established at the start of the book. It also means

that considerable space is devoted to explaining what the book will do later, rather than folding relevant theories organically into the prose. The book also would have been strengthened through more complete engagement with existing historical scholarship. Considerable work exists on education in prewar and interwar borderlands, which bolsters Venken's findings. While she offers a broad discussion of many of these works in her second chapter, they are not integrated into the book's larger arguments, leaving some important connections undiscussed. These issues do not diminish the overall success of the book, however. Venken offers a valuable contribution to our understanding of the ways in which European states and ordinary people grappled with the challenges of the interwar period and provides a compelling discussion of the development of education in Europe's borderlands.

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Die Hitlerjugend. Geschichte einer überforderten Massenorganisation

By André Postert. Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021. Pp. 458. Cloth \$49.00. ISBN: 978-3525360989.

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André Postert's comprehensive study of the Hitler Youth (HJ) argues that the NSDAP's youth mass organization never lived up to either its aspiration or its self-representation. According to Postert, past studies have often misread propaganda as portrayals of reality, overlooked regional differences, and underestimated the role of individual agency. While readers may disagree with this summative depiction of a vast historiography, Postert's wide-ranging research leaves little doubt that, indeed, "Jugend im Gleichschritt war und ist ein Mythos" (13). This position confirms a considerable body of research that shines light on the gulf between mandate and practice in the Nazi state. Michael Buddrus's *Totale Erziehung für den totalen Krieg* (2003), for example, describes the HJ as a multifaceted construct that perpetually invoked, revised, mobilized, and re-formed the evolving visions and demands of functionaries, members, and detractors alike. Michael Kater's *Hitler Youth* (2004) identifies similar systemic weaknesses in the organizational bureaucracy, while Jill Stephenson's *Hitler's Home Front* (2006) notes the considerable latitude available to both officials and young people in rural communities, and Jaimey Fisher's *Disciplining Germany* (2007) explores how public perceptions shaped postwar *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Die Hitlerjugend fits squarely within this literature. Combining diverse officials' reports, a plethora of oral histories and personal narratives, and extensive German-language scholarship, Postert argues that the HJ was overwhelmed primarily by its own vision and expectations. What began as one of numerous party-affiliated youth groups in the late 1920s became a state-sponsored mass organization *because* it couldn't fulfill its promise—to the Nazi party state or to German children. By the mid 1930s, the HJ's structural fragility created systemic problems that were exacerbated by increasing membership numbers. This persistent disconnect between ideological claims, structural demands, and local circumstances, Postert asserts, stymied implementation of one initiative after another, year after year, in district after district.