

*Drunk on Genocide: Alcohol and Mass Murder in Nazi Germany*. Edward B. Westermann. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021. 294 pp. \$32.95. Hardcover ISBN: 9781501754197.

Westermann's work focuses on the use of alcohol by the German SS and police forces in the occupied East. His study examines how alcohol connects with extreme violence and genocidal actions, as well as how alcohol was a vital part of Nazi hypermasculinity. The author argues that alcohol was not primarily used as a coping mechanism for Germans in the East and cannot be used as an alibi for genocide. Instead, alcohol was used to celebrate, bond comrades and built group solidarity, and reinforce masculine identity.

Westermann's work is incredibly thoroughly researched with a rich amount of survivor testimony that gives voice to the victims. While the book's title suggests a focus on alcohol, Westermann incidentally also writes a compelling gender history of hypermasculinity in the Third Reich. The Nazi male had to be able to drink heavily or else his masculinity was in question. The Nazi man was expected to be tough and cruel, and both of these traits could be bolstered by heavy drinking. Westermann has many examples of how men needed to drink heavily and be able to hold their liquor in order to be viewed favorably by their comrades. Performative masculinity and building a hypermasculine identity were vital for the Nazi man. He could achieve this by drinking, having sexual conquests, committing acts of cruelty, and boasting of toughness, such as killing more Jews or serving near the front lines. Westermann also discusses Nazi power over victims and the manner in which these men got drunk on power and/or blood, and both of these types of "drunkenness" relate to Nazi masculinity. The Nazi man had to force his masculinity over his victims, whether they were Jewish or Slavic. Alcohol was heavily used by the Germans in celebrations. Westermann brings up examples such as fellowship nights, where men came together as comrades and drank in good cheer. He also speaks of promotion parties, holidays, both German and Jewish, and evenings after a mass murder, where the men would drink all night long, sometimes with blood or bone still on their uniforms. Survivor accounts describe the atmosphere as wedding-like, that is, of a happy and carefree occasion. Typically, these accounts also speak of the use of food along with the alcohol. SS men would drink in between shooting Jews, and might take a break for lunch, before resuming their "work." Westermann also records an example when men went out and killed, then came back for breakfast without any apparent strain on their appetite. Drinking was one way to solidify unit cohesion. Fellowship nights were well supplied with alcohol to encourage the Germans to build camaraderie. Drinking after "actions," that is, mass shootings, was another way to build camaraderie. Westermann discusses how drinking in this situation might have been coping, but often it was also celebratory, as noted above. In the rare cases of coping, or of a man that disagreed with the work, they were not excused from not drinking. Not participating would signal more than a rejection of the actions, but rather a rejection of the group, or personal effeminacy.

There comes a point when Westermann seems to become redundant in his argument, constantly reminding the reader of certain points such as alcohol leading to violence or the nonchalant nature of the drunk Germans who murdered and enjoyed dinner at the same time. Since

his study examines the SS, the Order Police, and the Wehrmacht, and his conclusions remain the same across these groups, it began to feel like re-reading the same chapter.

*Drunk on Genocide* seems to build on the earlier work done by Christopher Browning in *Ordinary Men*. Browning kept his study focused on the German Order Police actions in the East, while Westermann expands that to include the SS, both camp guards and open-air shooters, the *Einsatzgruppen*, the Wehrmacht, and the Order Police. The use of alcohol and drunkenness of the police was also considered by Browning, though he did not go into great detail. Westermann goes more in-depth into the drinking habits of the German auxiliaries, while Browning, who does mention them, does not do as deep of an examination.

Overall, *Drunk on Genocide* is a compelling work with a well-researched argument. It bolsters the study of the Holocaust with a focus on the open-air shootings that killed so many people, and rightfully deprives the Nazi soldiers in the East an excuse for their actions. The depravity of some of these Nazis who could celebrate murder, or even seek it out for fun, is well documented in the light of day instead of an archive. This work is beneficial for German historians, Holocaust specialists, gender historians, sociologists, and psychologists. Westermann's book manages to study alcohol and violence, power and masculinity, and genocide and colonial conquest effectively. These perpetrators were "intoxicated with their control over life and death" (208), and cannot blame alcohol for their crimes, only themselves.

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