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Kathryn S. Olmsted. *The Newspaper Axis: Six Press Barons Who Enabled Hitler*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022. Pp. 314. Cloth \$30.00.

While the subjects of her study are six publishers who controlled anti-interventionist newspapers in Great Britain and the United States in the run-up to World War II, Kathryn S. Olmsted draws a throughline from newspapers then to media now. She observes that both in the 1930s and more recently, influential news outlets promoted conspiracy theories, chauvinism, and unilateralism with disastrous results, ranging from the appeasement of Adolf Hitler to the election of Donald Trump. Although Olmsted tends to understate the complexity of the relationship between the press and public opinion, *The Newspaper Axis: Six Press Barons Who Enabled Hitler* offers chilling evidence of the antisemitism and white nationalism that circulated in popular British and American newspapers in the interwar years.

Distinguishing herself from many historians, who have argued that “isolationist” oversimplifies a multiplicity of antiwar sentiments, Olmsted uses the term as it was intended by one of the publishers, the British Lord Beaverbrook, who promoted “splendid isolation” as a route to national greatness (9–10). Beaverbrook and the five other newspaper barons asserted that Great Britain and the United States could prosper apart from continental Europe—the former by ruling its empire, the latter by dominating the Western Hemisphere. They predicted that collective mechanisms to contain Germany would draw their nations into a disastrous war. And they supported efforts to keep Great Britain and the United States overwhelmingly Christian and white.

Although she points to similarities between the four American publishers (William Randolph Hearst, Robert McCormick, and Eleanor and Joseph Patterson) and the two British ones (Lords Beaverbrook and Rothermere), Olmsted does not oversimplify. The first half of the book focuses on each publisher’s

biography, their domestic politics, and their reactions to Nazi aggression through to 1936. We learn that they followed different approaches to downplaying the fascist threat. For instance, Rothermere of the *Daily Mail* welcomed the Nazi seizure of power as an expression of triumphant youth and dined with Hitler in Berlin in 1934. By contrast, McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune* did not praise Hitler directly. Instead, he presented Nazi aggression as an understandable response to the punishing terms of the Treaty of Versailles. By charting the publishers' diverse reactions, Olmsted makes a broader—and important—point: there were many ways to enable a murderous dictator.

The transnational scope of this study allows Olmsted to examine interactions among publishers. She describes a remarkable relationship between Beaverbrook, who presided over the *Daily Express* in London, and Joseph Patterson, who owned the New York-based *Daily News*. One crisis followed another in the late 1930s and early 1940s—and the second half of the book mirrors this atmosphere, with fast-paced chapters analyzing the magnates' positions on major events, including the Munich agreement, the invasion of Poland, and the Lend-Lease bill. In the changing geopolitical landscape, Beaverbrook and Patterson maintained their ethos of cooperation. For instance, when Kristallnacht prompted some Britons to question Neville Chamberlain's strategy of appeasement, the *Daily News* published excerpts of a letter from Beaverbrook, decrying the influence of Jews within British public life. And one month before the invasion of Poland, the *Daily Express* ran articles by Patterson, assessing Germany as unready for war and asserting that Nazi violence against Jews had "generally ceased" (155).

As indicated by these examples, Olmsted takes seriously the publishers' antisemitism. Her analysis of language is revealing. The *Daily News* spread conspiracies involving "internationalist[s]" who had a purportedly un-American interest in the fate of their fellow "alien[s]" in Europe (190, 224). The conspiracy ran deeper still, the *News* suggested, since a debilitating European war would facilitate the onward march of the "yellow race" (190). By examining how the Pattersons, McCormick, and Hearst inflamed racism and antisemitism, Olmsted augments the findings of Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman (*FDR and the Jews*, 2013), who showed how American policymakers' fears of an antisemitic backlash curbed the president's responses to the Holocaust.

A curious reader will wonder what the Nazis made of their apologists in Great Britain and the United States. Drawing on secondary literature and American sources, Olmsted notes that German propagandists made use of flattering stories that appeared in the isolationist press. But a more complete analysis of the

interactions between the Anglo-American publishers and the Nazi regime awaits a scholar who can investigate the German records as thoroughly as Olmsted has mined the British and American ones.

In Olmsted's telling, the six magnates had a singular ability to influence policymaking through the lever of public opinion. Influence is not easy to quantify. Olmsted leaves no doubt about the publishers' reach, estimating that, in the late 1930s, sixty million Britons and Americans accessed their news through the six media empires. But her conceptualization of the relationship between the press and the public is largely unidirectional: public opinion was "malleable," she writes in one place, suggesting that the newspapers "shaped" plastic minds (140). Here she understates the dynamic relationship between citizens and the fourth estate. In the 1930s, there was a widespread conviction that, only two decades prior, Britons and Americans had been duped into fighting—and dying in—an amoral war on the European continent. Olmsted's arguments about influence would have benefited from a fuller acknowledgment of how the mass-circulation newspapers reflected, as much as they produced, their readers' deep-seated fears of another world war.

There is much to appreciate in this empirically rich and accessible book. Olmsted examines important vehicles for anti-interventionist—or, as she would have it, isolationist—sentiment in Great Britain and the United States and is particularly attuned to the antisemitic, anti-Asian, and white nationalist dimensions of these newspapers' discourses. Her book expands our understanding of the 1930s, while offering sobering insights into how hatred can flourish in climates of ignorance and fear.

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