

Comparing the histories of American parkways and German alpine roads further reveals some striking similarities that allegiance to different political systems helped conceal. First, in both countries scenic road building was not market driven and, in most cases, it was not economically profitable. Public investments enabled such construction. Second, although differently motivated, scenic roads were landscapes of exclusion. In Nazi Germany, efforts to build a racially defined consumer culture barred access to Jews and other minorities. In the USA, mountaineering and outdoor recreation was associated with Whiteness, making parkways inaccessible to most African-Americans. Third, in both cases, scenic routes were products of a national culture, glorifying landscapes that were framed as nationally distinctive. Parkway elevated “wilderness” to a primordial and typical American scenery, while the Alpine Roads (Deutsche Alpenstraßen) racially codified the alpine landscape of Bavaria. And fourth, both countries silenced local protest to these projects. However, while the Nazis employed drastic measures, in a democratic society like the USA protesters had many more opportunities to express their grievances.

After World War II, voices that challenged scenic road building only amplified, marking the decline of such projects. Utilitarian aspects finally gained the upper hand in road construction, which aimed at transporting people and freight in the most efficient way. Also, conservationists, who initially were lured by the ecologic potential of cars, realized that directing mass motorization over high peaks would not ensure the protection of the landscape. This lost story that Zeller captures is still relevant today. It offers a telling example of how one generation’s solution ended up being the next generation’s problem. Beautifully written and well organized, *Consuming Landscapes* operates on various scales (local, national, and international) to bring together actors and groups of different ideological strands, social belonging, and professional activity, who promoted the same cause. It ultimately reveals a paradox: although the campaign for “roadmindedness” was successful, it failed to deliver on its main promise to reconcile automotive infrastructure with nature.

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On a Knife Edge: How Germany Lost the First World War

By Holger Afflerbach. Translated by Anne Buckley and Caroline Summers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xiii + 557. Hardcover \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1108832885.

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Given the relative economic resources of Germany and its enemies, and its inefficient constitutional structures, scholars have often viewed German defeat as the likely outcome of World War I. Even the close-run offensives of summer 1914 and spring 1918 did not, on closer scrutiny, have much chance of delivering a decisive strategic advantage to Germany. Focusing on strategic decision-making, Holger Afflerbach takes issue with the interpretative schema of an almost inevitable German defeat: “This war could have ended in a draw . . . and the German leadership had to commit very serious mistakes to lose it” (6). He concludes that, from the German perspective, “catastrophic strategic mistakes” (423) hobbled the war effort. The editor of Moriz von Lyncker’s papers, Afflerbach is deeply versed in the high politics of Imperial Germany and an adept guide to the different characters,

personal intrigue, and competing strategic visions that informed military and diplomatic decision-making.

German military leaders had entered the war confident of victory, but the offensive in the West came to a halt with defeat at the Battle of the Marne. Erich von Falkenhayn, who replaced Moltke as Chief of the General Staff, quickly recognised that the war would now become one of attrition. Henceforward, Afflerbach argues, German leaders were particularly sensitive to the anxiety that time and the relative resources of the Central Powers and the Entente were working against Germany. This strategic pessimism, combined with a persistent belief in the operational superiority of German forces, “would provoke a number of spectacular strategic errors” (85). Afflerbach identifies several key mistakes. The resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare that brought the United States into the war in April 1917 undid any advantage to Germany from the collapse of Russian power in early 1917. Continued American neutrality, combined with Russia dropping out of the war, would have “guaranteed a tolerable end to the war for the Central Powers” (247). Instead, poorly informed about the United States and its military potential, German leaders believed submarine warfare would quickly threaten Britain with starvation. Again in early 1918, having secured a peace (of sorts) in eastern Europe with the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Erich Ludendorff planned a spring offensive, an “enormous gamble” (349), based on a newly acquired fear of American military mobilization and an unfounded belief in the possibility of a decisive breach through Entente lines. The German spring offensives made substantial ground but lacked the mobility to exploit these gains for decisive strategic advantage. Even worse, the offensive wasted soldiers’ lives and surrendered excellent defensive positions that might have enabled Germany to hold out for a negotiated settlement with its tiring French and British enemies.

Diplomatic and political errors compounded Germany’s strategic problems. German leaders missed opportunities to explore a negotiated settlement. In contrast to other scholars, Afflerbach argues that Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg’s December 1916 peace initiative was genuine. However, the Proclamation of Polish Independence in November 1916 proved an “unmitigated disaster” (210) and destroyed any possibility of negotiations with Russia. At the very least, Bethmann Hollweg’s initiative might have served to exacerbate growing tensions between the Entente and the United States, but the decision for unrestricted submarine warfare undid any chance of this. In the negotiations with the Soviets at Brest-Litovsk, Max Hoffmann demonstrated great skill in exploiting the principle of self-determination to expand German influence and control over nascent nation-states in eastern Europe, but the “fundamental dishonesty” (319) of German strategy proved short-sighted as Brest-Litovsk bolstered the Entente and American perception that Imperial Germany was irredeemably militaristic.

Why did German leaders make such a succession of misguided decisions? The people in charge mattered, and Afflerbach offers deft sketches of vain men unaware of their own limitations. Personal flaws sharpened the structural problems of the German constitution. Limited by his bureaucratic instincts, Bethmann Hollweg was unable to speak out effectively against the generals’ and admirals’ dash to unrestricted submarine war in early 1917, because he considered the issue as largely one for military and naval control. Throughout, Afflerbach adds telling details – for instance, Wilhelm II had only met Bethmann Hollweg’s successor, Michaelis, once before his appointment as Chancellor and “thought him small, a dwarf” (290). The constitutional structures of Imperial Germany required careful managing of Wilhelm II’s personality. John Röhl has long made this argument, and Afflerbach expands this line of analysis into World War I. The Emperor proved a disastrous leader. He was more than a figurehead, particularly with his power of appointment, but he proved incapable of taking timely decisions, so that “outright chaos” (291) characterised high politics. These flaws had been evident as early as the July Crisis, when Wilhelm II had dithered, indulging in speech-making and depriving others from contributing to the discussion and decision.

Other belligerents displayed similar issues – deeply flawed leaders, vicious rows between civilian and military leaders, and a lack of strategic coordination. These flaws contributed to the defeat of the Habsburg and Romanov regimes and arguably laid the basis for the collapse of liberal Italy in the early 1920s. Tens of thousands of French and British soldiers died in ill-conceived offensives between 1915 and 1917. However, their access to economic resources in North America and their empires ensured that the costs did not prove fatal to the French or British regimes. In the German context, poor decisions determined the fate of the regime, which did not have access to the same level of resources to compensate for strategic errors. In addition, German leaders’ own perception of their long-term economic weakness relative to the Entente and the United States led them to gamble on military solutions to underlying strategic problems. Holger Afflerbach’s deep insight into German high politics refreshes the debate about the outcome of the war by reminding scholars of the importance of decision-making and the dreadful human costs of miscalculation.

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Ein “bündischer Kulturmarkt” entsteht. Die deutsche Jugendbewegung und Jugendmusikbewegung als Katalysator für den Aufbau von Kulturmarktunternehmen 1918-1933

By Franziska Meier. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2022. Pp. 319. Paperback €64.00. ISBN: 978-3515133043.

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Franziska Meier has produced a rich study of bourgeois youth-movement culture during the Weimar Republic. That this book appears in Franz Steiner’s economic history series is no accident: its exploration of how culture and capitalism intertwined adds a new element to the historiography on German youth movements. By the mid-1920s, entrepreneurs from within the movement established what Meier calls a “bündischer Kulturmarkt” that supplied the goods needed for hiking, camping, and singing. Her main actors are idealistic publishers driven by the idea of rejuvenating the nation by rejuvenating its youth through music-oriented practices. They were also businessmen, interested in profits insofar as these allowed them to continue their work for the movement. The songbooks, periodicals, and books they produced were both marketplace commodities and tangible expressions of movement culture.

After an extended discussion of key concepts, the book’s thematically organized chapters explore these publishers’ social networks, economic activities, and intellectual property challenges (chapter 2); the *bündisch* idea as product, marketed and distributed by writers and publishers (chapter 3); the operations of specific publishers (chapter 4); and the dissemination of the *bündisch* idea through music pedagogy (chapter 5). Meier draws mainly on surviving publishers’ records and archives of the youth movement. She makes particularly good use of photographs, analyzing them both as documents of participants’ activities and as visual evidence of participants’ values.