

Against a 'world of enemies': the impact of the First World War on the development of Hitler's ideology.

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Against a 'world of enemies': the impact of the First World War on the development of Hitler's ideology

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International Affairs, Volume 90, Issue 2, 1 March 2014, Pages 317–336,

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12111>

Published: 14 March 2014

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Abstract

Adolf Hitler's experiences during the First World War have been much discussed, with historians tending to concentrate on his involvement in the fighting and the operational lessons he later claimed to draw. Much less has been written about the impact of the war on his world view, though recent work has tended to suggest that his paranoid anti-Semitism was not yet visible during the conflict. Drawing on this latest research, but also on newly discovered sources and previously underused material, the author shows that Hitler's main preoccupation during the war and its immediate aftermath was the overwhelming power of Great Britain and its American ally. He associated these two powers with the alleged international Jewish economic conspiracy that had crushed the German empire. Hitler's anti-Semitism thus originated in an anti-capitalist, rather than anti-communist, discourse. He blamed Britain and the US for the rigours of the Versailles peace settlement, a moment which was far more politically formative for him than the experience of defeat itself. His encounter with American soldiers in the summer of 1918 also marked his first engagement with the global power of the United States and the start of a belief in the demographic weakness of the German empire which inspired his plans for *Lebensraum* in the east.

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Online ISSN 1468-2346

Print ISSN 0020-5850

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