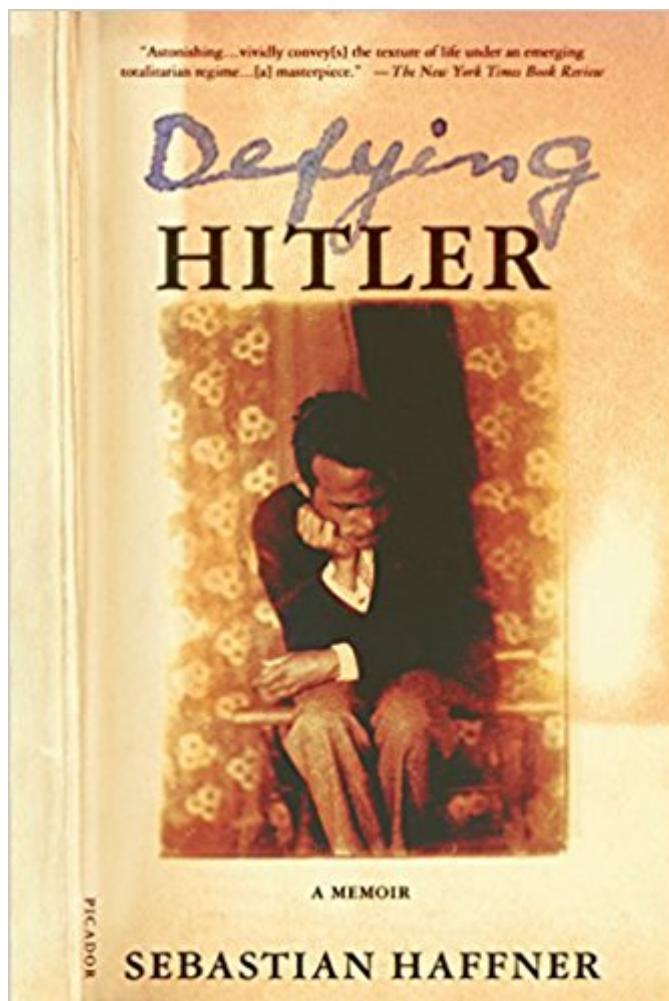


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# Defying Hitler: A Memoir



## **Synopsis**

Written in 1939 and unpublished until 2000, Sebastian Haffner's memoir of the rise of Nazism in Germany offers a unique portrait of the lives of ordinary German citizens between the wars. Covering 1907 to 1933, his eyewitness account provides a portrait of a country in constant flux: from the rise of the First Corps, the right-wing voluntary military force set up in 1918 to suppress Communism and precursor to the Nazi storm troopers, to the Hitler Youth movement; from the apocalyptic year of 1923 when inflation crippled the country to Hitler's rise to power. This fascinating personal history elucidates how the average German grappled with a rapidly changing society, while chronicling day-to-day changes in attitudes, beliefs, politics, and prejudices.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

What was it about Germany that made the rise of Adolf Hitler and his murderous regime possible? That troubling question has occupied many fine minds over the last six decades, few more lucid and thoughtful than the late historian and journalist Sebastian Haffner. In this book, drawn from a manuscript he did not live to complete, Haffner examines the social and cultural conditions that made Germany ill-equipped for democracy and ripe for totalitarianism. Among these, Haffner writes, were a generational war between an apathetic adult population and a youth "familiar with nothing but political clamor, sensation, anarchy, and the dangerous lure of irresponsible numbers games

A sample historical headline: "1890: Wilhelm II dismisses Bismarck." No one's life was disrupted, writes Haffner. "No family was torn apart, no friendship broken up, no one fled their country."

Compare that with "1933: Hindenburg sends for Hitler." In this case, "[a]n earthquake shatters 66 million lives." Thus begins a vivid examination of just how Hitler's ascension affected an ordinary German, a young lawyer with no strong political views, whose career and life were disrupted by the Nazis. Written in 1939, this memoir was not published until 2000, when Pretzel, Haffner's son, brought it out in Germany, where it was a bestseller. Haffner alternates political analysis with accounts of how the rise of the Nazis in the 1920s and early '30s affected his attempts to build a career, keep friendships alive and kindle romantic liaisons. His analysis of the failure of post-WWI German society to create stability is familiar, but Haffner writes with a close familiarity that makes the old new again. And his description of the way the Nazis invaded people's daily lives shines. It becomes clear how many "good Germans" struggled against impossible odds to keep their personal lives politics-free. Unfortunately, Haffner's manuscript ends with 1933 (Pretzel covers the rest of Haffner's life, beginning with immigration to England, in a brief afterword). This intimate self-portrait stands with Victor Klemperer's two-part memoir, *I Will Bear Witness*, as evidence that the personal can offer insight into the political tragedy of Nazism. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is one of the most important books I have read to gain insight into the processes at work in the German community which enabled a gang of thugs to take control of the nation, first by murder and intimidation and then by more subtle methods to capture the loyalty of most of the population for a war that could only end in disaster. It is also a beautiful piece of writing, in stark contrast to the events that the author observed and described with relentless detail.

This is a memoir written in 1939 by a young German man, who was a child during WW I and grows to be a man during the post war period. As an adult, his views "of the day" during Hitler's move into power are unique and elucidating. It was published by his son after the author's death. The point of view is unique and eye-opening as it was written prior to many of the major battles of WW II. He draws fascinating parallels between the individual German's daily decisions during Hitler's rise to power within Germany to the European nations' decision of similar nature - but on a much grander scale. It is a timeless story and a MUST READ for any election time.

This is a book for any body who is interested in the German society and forces that allowed the raise of Adolf Hitler. Sebastian is a man with extraordinary curiosity, independent views, passion to tell truth, observational and writing skills . He lived through the turbulent years before and after

Hitler's raise to tell the first hand account of it. This is one of best books (without propaganda) available on the market. If you want more truth, look for Douglas Reed's mind-blowing book 'Controversy of Zion'.

This Christmas marks the 70th anniversary of the German medical officer and pastor Kurt Reuber's drawing of what is now known as the Madonna of Stalingrad. It's a simple, beautiful, charcoal drawing, done in the artist-doctor's bunker, on the back of an ordinance map, as a means of bringing hope and comfort to Reuber's men on Christmas Eve, not as soldiers of Hitler's insanity but as human beings destined to die there in the snows. I carry a tiny reproduction of it with me always to remind me of the essential humanity and suffering of us all, an essential humanity that extends to our most ferocious enemies. Until I read "Defying Hitler: A Memoir" I had been incapable of understanding how a man such as pastor Kurt Reuber could have ended up in the Nazi army at Stalingrad. Or how other essentially good, normal men, basically good people, sentient, intelligent, caring human beings, could have in their millions participated actively in the destruction of my people, of Germany, and of Europe. Participated actively in the atrocities or simply watched, unprotesting. What had happened to their souls? Their consciences? Their moral fiber? Haffner's 1939 memoir is not an easy book to read. His analysis of himself, his friends and his society is as precise as his prescience is frighteningly accurate.

I once read this memoir back in 2008, using a friend's copy, and over the years, I have been meaning to read it again because of its remarkable observations and enduring insights, so recently, I purchased it as my very own copy. Growing up, I often learned about the Second World War and a very evil man who goes by the name of Hitler and his ruthless gang of Nazis, but I had never really learned why or how Nazis came into being. Why did they do the things that they did and why weren't they stopped or resisted by the common German people? There was no sense of psychological understandings or insights into such people until I read this memoir by Sebastian Haffner. Not only is it an autobiographical but also a political analysis of Germany before the Second World War. This book was written in 1939 in order to make a living in England after leaving Germany, but Haffner abandoned it to write a new book on the subject of the Nazi Germany during the outbreak of war. That new book was titled *Germany: Jekyll and Hyde: An Eyewitness Analysis of Nazi Germany*. It wasn't until after Haffner's death in 1999 that this 1939 book was discovered by his son, Oliver Pretzel, who eventually translated and published this book (forty chapters; around 300 pages). I am very glad that he did. Haffner began his memoir with the year

1914 up to 1933 to which his eyewitness account gives us a very real picture of Germany in periods of changes: the Great War, Revolution of 1918-19, the Weimar Republic, the inflation, the rise of the Nazis and the Hitler Youth movement, the Reichstag fire, the increasing hatred of Jews, and Hitler's rise to power. It is a story of a duel, as the author wrote in his prologue - a story of struggles between an individual and the state during these years. Even though he was classified as an "Aryan" by the Nazis, he despised the Nazi regime. The name of the title may be referred to the idea of keeping his mind free of Nazi ideology, refusing participation in the senseless crimes, and helping those being victimized by the regime - all of which considered to be defying Hitler himself. Several descriptions of social changes and extremely rapid and violent breakdown of personal freedoms and laws are profoundly disturbing to read because when thugs are in charge, a resistance becomes a non-existence. It's also very difficult to avoid seeing the obvious comparative similarities with certain countries of today. The writing style is fairly easy to read (even though it can be wordy at times) with such clarity. This memoir sheds a remarkable light on the most horrendous and insidious period in German history. I would strongly recommend this book to anyone whose interests are in German history or in the Second World War as well to understand what happens when one is living under a totalitarian state. It's truly a rare read. This memoir can be read along with Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Lobaczewski's *Political Ponerology* and two films: *The Nazis: A Warning From History* and *V for Vendetta*.

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