

Introduction

Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller

THE QUESTION “How green were the Nazis?” is likely to evoke a different response from Germans than from non-Germans. In Germany, the question sounds downright provocative. The Green Party stands solidly on the left end of the German political spectrum, and its members are active in the fight against neo-Nazism. The Greens, moreover, view themselves as a new political force—one that emerged out of the student and environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s—with no roots in the Nazi past.¹ Outside Germany, by contrast, the question probably arouses more puzzlement than passion: the Nazis are associated with nationalism, militarism, and racism, but not with environmentalism. “Eco-fascism,” of course, has become a media buzzword, and occasionally one actually comes across environmentalist factions that espouse an ideology with Nazi undertones.² But such groups reside on the outer fringes of modern-day politics, their antics more annoying than dangerous.

National differences aside, the question “How green were the Nazis?” is laden with linguistic ambiguities: neither “green” nor “Nazi” is easily defined. Green generally carries a positive connotation, but its meaning is highly elastic. The media use the word *green* to describe a multitude of diverse political groupings, institutions, and associations. Advertisers market their products as green, no matter how noxious they actually are for

the environment. Multinational corporations—even oil companies and paper mills—try to dress themselves in green garb. Nazi is a term of opprobrium with a more straightforward meaning: it is clearly associated with Adolf Hitler, World War II, and the Holocaust. Yet even this term is more elusive than meets the eye. Scholars have shown that Nazi leaders represented a ragbag of opinions, not a unified ideology. Rarely did Hitler forge a comprehensive approach to a problem or push a clear legislative agenda. Most of his policies emerged in piecemeal fashion, usually after a long and bitter clash of personalities, interests, institutions, and ideas. While the foundation stones of Nazi ideology—racism and anti-Semitism—were already laid in 1933, it was by no means clear whether, how, or how soon they would be translated into what the world came to know as war and genocide.

Given the terminological ambiguities, it makes no sense to blithely claim that “the Nazis were proto-Greens,” or that “the Greens are latter-day Nazis,” even if these assertions occasionally pop up in polemical discourse. Those who make them want to establish a simple linear relationship between today’s Greens and yesteryear’s environmentalists, either in order to demonize Green politicians or to find laudable elements in an otherwise damnable dictatorship. Scholars too have sometimes succumbed to this temptation, most famously Anna Bramwell, who claimed in 1985 that the Nazi Party had a “Green wing.”³ Most experts, however, feel that this interpretation is not supported by the evidence and does little to enhance our understanding of today’s Greens. Equally unsubstantiated, albeit with a different political bent, is Ramachandra Guha’s bold assertion that “To be Green—then or now—is not connected with being Nazi.”⁴

The most obvious and fundamental feature of almost all pre-1945 environmentalist movements was their parochialism: for the most part, environmental concerns were local, regional, or state-centered. By contrast, most environmentalists today make the connection between the local and the global a major part of their rallying cry. We do not mean to downplay the important connections between colonialism, imperialism, and environmentalism in the pre-1945 period that environmental historians are examining today. Rather, we are simply pointing out that the physical boundaries of the nation-state largely shaped the mental worlds of most conservationists and environmentalists until after World War II came to an end.⁵

The essays in this book steer clear of polemic, just as they shy away from a monolithic interpretation. They simply ask whether there was an

overlap between the goals of National Socialists and environmentalists in the first half of the twentieth century, be it at the level of policies, persons, institutions, or methodologies; and, if so, whether that overlap translated into laws and policies that had a lasting impact on the German landscape. Germany offers a particularly fertile field for exploring these interconnections. First, the nature-protection movement was more powerful and articulate in Germany than elsewhere in Europe, and many Nazi voters were sympathetic to its agenda. Second, the Nazi seizure of power opened up new and long-desired opportunities for green ideas finally to come to the forefront. These new opportunities and the sheer fact that both green and brown ideas enjoyed widespread support in Germany in the 1930s make the question “How green were the Nazis?” worthy of investigation. The topic becomes all the more fascinating when one keeps in mind that National Socialism—both as a movement and as a governmental force—reflected the hopes and failings of modern society in its most extreme form.⁶

The notion that National Socialism belongs to “modernity” is relatively new to Nazi studies. National Socialism was a criminal regime, one of the most brutal and rapacious in human memory. The longstanding tendency, therefore, has been to interpret Nazism as a wholly reactionary system, a throwback to premodern times. The Nazis themselves encouraged this interpretation, intentionally or not, by repeatedly expressing nostalgia for the world that existed before the era of the Enlightenment, before the triumph of rational thought, before the birth of modern science. The Holocaust further reinforced the perception that Nazi Germany was nothing more than a horrendous aberration of German (and Western) history. Of course, Germans could not deny that the Nazis drew on traditions and practices that clearly predated 1933, but they could also point to many other traditions that put the German past in a more positive light. In fact, the Federal Republic of Germany (1949–present) has often been held up as proof that there were “good” German traditions upon which a peaceful and democratic German state could be built. Outside Germany, the task of turning the Nazis into a historical aberration required fewer intellectual acrobatics: nearly everyone was predisposed to believe that fascist policies had nothing to do with what was “truly” modern in their own societies.

Today the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. Over the past two decades, more researchers are inclined to regard National Socialism largely as an offshoot and the pathology of modern society, not merely

as a reaction to it.⁷ They point out that, in some arenas, Nazi Germany was more modern than other European governments—for instance, in its use of propaganda techniques and in its promotion of technology.⁸ In other arenas, it was at least on par with other societies—for instance, in the realm of scientific research and in nature conservation.⁹ It must be kept in mind, after all, that Hitler did not win elections, or solidify his control over Germany, by promising a return to a past clouded by nostalgia and myth; and he did not sustain his domestic popularity for so many years by offering up old-fashioned nostrums and reactionary rhetoric. Quite a few Germans supported the political persecution, aggressive nationalism, anti-Semitism, and unchecked militarism which were part and parcel of his political agenda. But many were just attracted to the promise of full employment, the policies to overcome class differences, and the promotion of scientific advances and technological breakthroughs. Hitler's vision of Germany was largely dynamic, goal-oriented, and forward-looking—but often this pragmatic approach conflicted with Hitler's and the party's ambitions for a well-ordered, "organic" Germany that was to combine an imagined common history with features of modern life.¹⁰ Agricultural policymakers, for instance, spent a good deal of time promoting organic techniques even while they struggled mightily to feed an ever-growing urbanized population through the use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides. A similar mixture of atavistic and avant-garde ideas could be seen in other arenas as well.

It serves little purpose to weigh the positive and negative aspects of National Socialism on a mental scale; the horrors of war and genocide make a mockery of any such attempt. It also serves little purpose to pit the positive and negative achievements against each other. As the following essays will amply demonstrate, they are far too intertwined to separate. The Nazis, for instance, introduced social policies that adumbrated a modern welfare state (albeit a racially defined one) that far surpassed those of its predecessor, the Weimar Republic. Social historians who write about Germany's modern welfare state must therefore avoid demonizing every measure that the Nazis envisaged and implemented simply because that regime was fundamentally evil. To miss the positive features of National Socialism is to miss why it appealed to so many people. The same holds true for environmental historians: they must see the positive as well as the negative aspects of Nazi conservation policies.

National Socialism was a novel and (in many ways) strange force in German politics, but not an alien one. Nazis, as a rule, did not start from

scratch when they forged their policies: they took their cues from debates already taking place within the larger frame of German politics, society, and science. Most of those debates began long before the Nazis were on the political scene. More precisely, the Nazis emerged from within Germany, not from without, and Nazi leaders held a variety of viewpoints, not a unified one. There were, of course, some core beliefs, most importantly racism and anti-Semitism.¹¹ In addition, the belief in the *Volk*, an almost mystical faith in the goodness of the ethnically pure “common German,” was very important. The concept of the *Volk* colored all aspects of German political, social, and intellectual life after World War I—the nature protection movement most of all—and it was largely through this folkish ideology that green and brown began to blend.

This brings us to the heart of the question: what possible meaning can the phrases “green movement” or “green ideas” have within the context of the first half of the twentieth century? No movement or ideology carried that label. The same can be said for “environment” (*Umwelt*) and “environmental protection” (*Umweltschutz*): neither was part of the discourse. Nonetheless, there were numerous personalities and (after 1904) a sprawling organization, the Deutscher Bund Heimatschutz (“Homeland Protection Association of Germany,” or DBH), that embodied certain ideas of “homeland protection” (*Heimatschutz*) and “nature protection” (*Naturschutz*) that today would be subsumed under the green label. These protectionists did not speak in an abstract or universal way. They used the language of protecting the German homeland (*Heimat*) and preserving the German landscape (*Landschaft*). In their view, Germany’s mountains, meadows, and rivers bore the peculiar imprint of German history, German culture, and German tastes. German traditions, habits, and attitudes shaped the German countryside just as German architectural styles and building preferences shaped the German city. A new appreciation of local and regional history, architectural preservation, and the conservation of landscapes thus went hand in hand, as educated urban middle classes formed lobbies to protect what they deemed worthy from the encroachments of industrialization and urbanization.¹² Protection carried with it an idea of management and human interference, as long as it was the kind of stewardship favored by the conservationists. Also, as a new way of experiencing nature for middle-class urbanites, the youth movement, with its Wandervogel wing of weekend hikers, exposed an entire generation to organized outings that combined education and recreation. While politically multivalent, the youth movement

often served as social cement for those who attained positions of power after 1933.¹³

Homeland and nature protectionists saw it as their task not only to protect rare plants, endangered animals, and natural monuments, but also to preserve local customs and national traditions, following the dictum “keep the German people [*Volkstum*] strong and wholesome.”¹⁴ What kept Germans powerful and pure, in turn, was the strength Germans drew from preserving their traditions, monuments, and land. Folk, homeland, and nature were intertwined, each defining the other, and it was only by remaining bundled together that they could survive the universalizing onslaught of the industrial world. Such attitudes embodied, from the outset, a strongly developed sense of nationalism. They also carried a whiff of racism: Ernst Rudorff, the founder of the Homeland Protection Association, struggled with the question as to whether Jews should be allowed to join his organization (though ultimately two Jews signed its founding charter, one of whom was his longtime friend and fellow musician Joseph Joachim).

The Homeland Protection Association had two wings, one mostly concerned with preserving the German past, the other more concerned with shaping the German future. Many of the most important founding members longed nostalgically for the old days. Their ideal was the Germany of 1800 or earlier—before the impact of the industrial revolution and the emergence of big cities—when (in their minds at least) German traditions and customs were in full bloom. Other founding members took a more modernist perspective, among them Paul Schultze-Naumburg, who greatly influenced the organization for many years and later joined the Nazi Party. Human-induced transformations in the landscape were, for him, not automatically a fall from grace. Rather they offered opportunities to shape a future where German traditions and characteristics could be taken into account. The gap between those who looked backward and those who looked forward grew in subsequent decades. Both sides, however, were united in their belief in the power of the Volk, and folkish ideology would help keep them united (and indeed radicalize them) as the years passed.¹⁵ Another source of tension was the ideological tenet of *Heimat*, a term that had connotations that went beyond the local landscape to include anti-centralist regional visions as well as notions of national unity.¹⁶

Folkish ideology emerged during the Second Reich (1871–1918), but it was World War I, the Versailles Treaty, and the crises of the Weimar Re-

public that elevated it to a position of supreme importance in the 1920s and 1930s. The crushing defeat of 1918 led not only to a short-lived revolution and the establishment of a democracy, but also to an aggressively conservative and nationalistic countermovement—a countermovement with a strong folkish tinge. Those who believed in the redemptive power of the Volk saw little prospect that Weimar Germany would be capable of throwing off the “humiliation of Versailles.” The battle between capitalism and socialism, they felt, only weakened the nation without providing any solution; hence they saw little purpose to Germany’s parliamentary debates. Western democracies added to the problem: first they saddled Germany with the entire responsibility for the war, and then they treated Germany as a pariah in world affairs. The Western world did not, in any case, provide a good model. It was too materialistic and too lacking in cultural traditions. Only the German nation itself—as embodied in the German Volk—offered a way out of its humiliation. The Volk stood for something that was above ideology and above class conflict. It embodied all that was great in Germany: pristine strength, genuine traditions, and a sense of community.

This type of political rhetoric reverberated in homeland-protection circles. Landscape and Heimat preservation experienced something of a renaissance after World War I, and the Homeland Protection Association and its sympathizers had reason to believe that their message was finally being heard. To begin with, the Weimar constitution included for the first time an article that made “nature protection” a national task. Meanwhile, a series of economic and political crises (as a retrospective analysis put it) “made people aware of the need to protect their natural areas and landscapes in their locales.” These crises created a “strong spiritual readiness” that “helped foster” nature protection: “for every hundred people that once bemoaned the disfigurement and destruction, there are now a thousand.”¹⁷ There were other indices as well. For instance, when the well-known homeland poet Hermann Löns died in 1914, he had sold a mere twenty thousand books. Twenty years later, sales had topped five million.

Unfortunately, the high hopes of the homeland protectionists were not fulfilled. Constitutional protection did not translate into a change in economic policy, let alone into passage of new protection laws. On the contrary, the German landscape continued to deteriorate. Worse yet, from the viewpoint of the Homeland Protection Association, the upsurge in interest in Heimat was all too short-lived. The association continued to sponsor event after event designed to promote German traditions, the

singing of folk songs, and a sense of conviviality and belongingness, but attendance at such events was never large. Young people in particular were turned off by the backward-looking nostalgia. The bright lights of the big city and new forms of entertainment such as film, dance, and sport had a much greater allure. The decline triggered different reactions among different homeland protectionists. Some withdrew from the movement, disappointed and embittered. Others, such as Schultze-Naumburg, blamed the failure on the racial decline of the German people. These latter responded by radicalizing their position through race-based notions of rejuvenation of Volk and Heimat. Still others pinned their hopes on technological solutions that entailed even greater interventions in the landscape. In their minds, dams, cities, and other human-created structures should be built in a manner more in keeping with German traditions. It is important to point out that the last two groups really reinforced rather than competed with each other: one provided a technological framework for sculpting the German landscape, while the other provided a race-based rationale for doing it. These synergies became all too apparent during the Nazi era.¹⁸

With the Nazi triumph in 1933, Volk, racism, and conservation became integrally linked, opening up new vistas for those who wanted to transform the German landscape. As in other arenas, however, Nazi leaders held no unified viewpoint on what was meant by “nature” and “landscape,” and therefore the implications for homeland and nature protection were not entirely clear. It was one thing to use the notion of Volk to blur the lines between conservationism and National Socialism. It was quite another to mold the ideas and beliefs that stood behind these words into a coherent whole.

It was in this political and ideological wilderness that Germany’s Reich Nature Protection Law of 1935 (Reichsnaturschutzgesetz, or RNG) was finalized. The fact that Hitler’s government was the first to pass such a comprehensive piece of legislation is often cited as proof of Nazism’s pro-environmental face (even though it has long been recognized that much of the law’s stipulations were drafted during Weimar and reflected the longstanding concerns of the Romantics). In “Legalizing a *Volksge-meinschaft*: Nazi Germany’s Reich Nature Protection Law of 1935,” Charles Closmann provides a fresh perspective on this law. He notes that a vast amount of political maneuvering went into its passage and that its terms only served to paper over the differences between the goals of Nazi leaders

and those of the conservationists. The high hopes of the conservationists turned to frustration as they realized that Nazi Germany honored the law mostly in the breach, especially once war preparations came to dominate policy in the late 1930s. Nonetheless, as Closmann makes clear, the Nazis deserve some credit for recognizing the importance of the legislation and for securing its passage.

A similar gap between rhetoric and reality characterized Nazi forest practices, as Michael Imort makes clear in “Eternal Forest—Eternal *Volk*: The Rhetoric and Reality of National Socialist Forest Policy”: even as Nazi leaders extolled the virtues of Germany’s forest in bombastic terms, they exploited the country’s timber resources aggressively. Imort notes that some Nazi leaders expressed a sincere interest in forest conservation (most notably Hermann Göring), but that most others did not. Inasmuch as they thought about Germany’s forests at all, they thought in terms of propaganda: it provided an opportunity to meld the Romantic “love of the woods” to Nazi thinking. Imort notes that it was largely because of Göring that the forestry doctrine known as *Dauerwald* (“eternal” or “perpetual” forest)—first enunciated in the early 1920s—increasingly began to insinuate itself into timber management. It was largely because this practice proved profitable that many timber owners were willing to implement it. The Nazis, however, were not interested in turning Germany into a tree farm: Hitler’s military-industrial machine required vast quantities of natural resources, forests included, and it consumed Germany’s timber reserves just as it consumed those elsewhere in Europe. As a result, the conservationist principles associated with the concept of *Dauerwald* were not enshrined in law until the 1970s—long after the Nazi era was over.

Closmann and Imort raise the “continuity” question: does it even make sense to label the Reich Nature Protection Law and the *Dauerwald* doctrine as “National Socialist” when both predated 1933 and both continued to impact policy after 1945? Neither was the brainchild of a Nazi ideologue, and neither was totally in sync with other Nazi goals and ideas. Had Hitler never triumphed, one could well imagine a scenario in which Weimar politicians would eventually have passed a law not all that different from the RNG, just as one could imagine *Dauerwald* ideas slowly percolating their way into the minds of forestry officials. Perhaps the pace of change would have been slower, but that does not inherently mean that the German landscape would look fundamentally different today if the

Nazis had never triumphed. And yet, as all the contributors make abundantly clear, the Nazis did in fact impact the landscape in ways far out of proportion to the short twelve years they were in power.

Thomas Lekan’s “‘It Shall Be the Whole Landscape!’: The Reich Nature Protection Law and Regional Planning in the Third Reich” examines in detail just how far-reaching the Nazi impact was on the Rhineland Province. The Rhineland was famous both for its awesome beauty (the “romantic Rhine”) and its astonishing industrial output (the coal-rich “Ruhr region”). It also had one of the most vibrant Homeland Protection Associations in the country. As Lekan notes, Rhineland conservationists initially embraced the RNG—and with it a Nazification of the conservationist movement—with great enthusiasm, as did their counterparts elsewhere in Germany. Conservationists had long chafed under the decentralized traditions of the past, whereby each city, region, and state was allowed to protect (or, more often, *not* protect) its own territory as it saw fit. They quickly discovered, however, that centralization had its disadvantages as well, especially in the hands of a regime that championed nature protection mostly for its propagandistic value. Under the Nazis, conservation policies emanated from Berlin, with little or no input from regional conservationists, and they came out in cookie-cutter fashion, not always with much appreciation for local conditions and needs. Once among the avant-garde of German protectionists, Rhinelanders suddenly found themselves on the sidelines, powerless to shape (let alone thwart) Reich policies. Lekan’s article is a cautionary tale reminiscent of the advice to “be careful what you ask for”: Rhineland conservationists wanted a top-down approach to landscape preservation but got a command-and-control approach to natural-resource exploitation instead.

Homeland and nature protection under the Nazis might well have benefited from more of a bottom-up strategy. Yet, as Frank Uekötter points out in “Polycentrism in Full Swing: Air Pollution Control in Nazi Germany,” that was not always the case: air pollution policies under the Nazis might well have benefited from a more comprehensive (and more comprehensible) top-down approach. Despite their much-vaunted ability to ride roughshod over enemies and friends alike, the Nazis were never able to hammer out an umbrella law for air pollution similar to the one they passed for nature protection. There were, as Uekötter points out, simply too many conflicting ideas coming out of too many warring agencies and bureaucracies for a unified policy to emerge. In 1933, for instance, the Munich-based Academy for German Law (*Akademie für*

Deutsches Recht) began the task of bringing air pollution laws and regulations into conformity with the Nazi concept of *Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz* (the common good above the individual good). The Reich Food Estate (Reichsnährstand, or RNS), by contrast, was mostly interested in ensuring that individual farmers continued to get adequate compensation for any crop damage caused by industrial pollution. Other bureaucrats, meanwhile, spent their time making sure that air pollution laws did not interfere in any way with Hitler's rearmament program. Given the bureaucratic conflicts, enforcement of Germany's air pollution policies (most of which predated 1933) was haphazard at best. What civil servant was going to try to convince Hitler that farmers—the quintessential Volk—were not central to Germany's resurgence as a world power? What judge was going to decree that rearmament did not encode the notion of the common good? As Uekötter points out, no uniformly applied standards for air pollution policy ever emerged. Instead, Nazi policy was characterized by “a bureaucratic routine that was semiconscious at best.”

Nazi Germany, of course, was not just a web of warring bureaucracies. It was also a labyrinth of rival personalities. In “Breeding Pigs and People for the Third Reich: Richard Walther Darré's Agrarian Ideology,” Gesine Gerhard takes a new look at the Nazi leader most often identified as a proto-Green: Hitler's first minister of agriculture, Richard Walther Darré. Darré popularized the phrase “blood and soil”—a takeoff on Bismarck's “blood and iron”—in order to highlight the continued centrality of agriculture to the strength of Germany. But as Gerhard amply demonstrates, it is a stretch to view Darré as a proto-ecologist or an apostle of organic farming on the basis of his agrarian policies: “soil” was for him merely “a part of agricultural property,” in which environmental considerations played a negligible role. By contrast, “blood” was fundamental to his thinking, as it was to other Nazis—and it served as a justification for Hitler's exterminatory “resettlement” policies in eastern Europe.

Alwin Seifert is the other prominent Nazi most often portrayed as a proto-Green. An outspoken Munich landscape architect, Seifert is best remembered today for his role in co-designing the autobahn network. In “Molding the Landscape of Nazi Environmentalism: Alwin Seifert and the Third Reich,” Thomas Zeller analyzes the career of this eccentric landscaper, placing him squarely within the confused jumble of Nazi infighting. Seifert's self-portrayal—especially in his grandiloquent autobiography—tends to embellish his influence over Nazi landscaping policies, while minimizing his role as a Nazi ideologue. As Zeller points

out, however, Seifert's influence on the autobahn and similar projects was actually quite limited. In fact, Seifert spent much of his time embroiled in personal and institutional battles with his rivals, not landscaping the autobahn. While Seifert's provocative publications did give rise to intense debates on agriculture, water policy, and highway design, his impact was much more circumscribed than he ever admitted. In the end, as Zeller notes, Seifert played the role of Nazi "environmental court jester and Cassandra rolled into one."

Darré and Seifert were active participants in the Nazi political structure, men who were preoccupied with the day-to-day details of bureaucratic life. In "Martin Heidegger, National Socialism, and Environmentalism," Thomas Rohkrämer turns his attention to a different type of personality: Germany's most famous philosopher during the Weimar and Nazi periods. It is now well known that Heidegger was a Nazi and that he served briefly as the rector of Freiburg University, during which time Jewish professors lost their jobs. He withdrew from politics after 1936, but never denounced the Nazis and never apologized for lending his prestige to Hitler's murderous regime. As Rohkrämer points out, however, his meditations on the environment came to maturity mostly after his enthusiasm for Nazism had subsided, and his writings reflected a growing distrust of all societies (capitalist, socialist, and, to a lesser extent, fascist) that deified science and technology. While he absorbed much of the conservationist rhetoric of his era, his writings have influenced the post-1945 generation far more than Darré and Seifert because his ideas far transcended the blood-and-soil mentality of the Nazi era.

In "Blood or Soil? The *Völkisch* Movement, the Nazis, and the Legacy of Geopolitik," Mark Bassin reexamines the influence of geopolitical ideas on Nazi expansionist policies and racial goals. Geopolitical concepts had been prominent in Nazi circles ever since Hitler came across the works of Karl Haushofer while writing *Mein Kampf*, and because of that connection many scholars have assumed that Haushofer was the "master magician" behind Nazi military strategy. Bassin, however, goes beyond the clichés of Social Darwinism, "blood and soil," and Lebensraum ("living space," a term the geographer Friedrich Ratzel borrowed from ecological theory) to show that Haushofer's theories (like those of Heidegger) were far too sophisticated and complex to fit easily into the Nazi ideological framework. Haushofer, for instance, sought a genuine alliance with the Soviet Union, not the sham Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939, and he embraced a foreign policy based on notions of space (*Raum*), not race

(*Rasse*). As Bassin points out, Nazi ideologues selected only those aspects of geopolitical thinking that flattered their predispositions, and they ended up employing an eclectic mix of theories that lacked any sense of coherence.

Coherent or not, the hodgepodge of conservationist and geopolitical ideas that Nazi leaders carried in their heads had far-reaching consequences during World War II, as Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn notes in “Violence as the Basis of National Socialist Landscape Planning in the ‘Annexed Eastern Areas.’” Within Germany, conservationists, Nazi landscapers, and architects had to take into account already existing land-use patterns, city plans, dam structures, and the like. In the vast territories conquered in the east, by contrast, they saw the opportunity to create a better, greener future, combining racist and environmental thinking. On 7 October 1939, shortly after the outbreak of World War II, Hitler placed Heinrich Himmler in charge of these territories so that they could be settled by Germans. Himmler’s immediate order was couched in euphemisms that gave it an innocent ring, but it set in motion a succession of increasingly radical plans that culminated in the Generalplan Ost. At first, the plan only applied to Poland, but then it was extended to eastern and southeastern Europe, then to the Black Sea, and finally to Siberia. These new territories, according to Himmler, were to be remodeled on the basis of the “latest scientific research”; the campaigns would have “revolutionary results” because the aim was not simply to colonize these territories with Germans but to “radically change the landscape.”

World War II was the opportunity that many modernist landscape architects had been waiting for. The Germans, as one of them put it, would be the “first western Volk to implant its very soul in the landscape and thereby achieve for the first time in human history a way of life in which the Volk itself determines its physical and moral well-being in full awareness of local conditions.”¹⁹ In other words, Generalplan Ost was about bringing humans, nature, and race into harmony in order to establish a new agrarian way of life for Aryan colonists. Here green and Nazi thinking came together to a degree not seen elsewhere. In order to achieve this vision, the landscape had to be made anew, first by forcibly removing the Slavic population, then by bulldozing away the past, and finally by moving Germans into the newly emptied space. Annexation exposed a side of Nazi-era “conservationism” that was as ugly as it was logical. It was ugly because it was exterminatory. It was logical because only the clearance of the new territories created the opportunity to build

a new, green Germany. Polish forests were therefore turned into Nazi hunting grounds, eastern agrarian lands were transformed into German settlement areas, and “inferior” Jews and Slavs were weeded out to make room for “superior” Aryans.

Taken together, these papers offer a more nuanced and historically richer answer to the question “How green were the Nazis?” than previous efforts. While certain ideological elements and practical policies of the National Socialist regime overlapped with conservationists’ and ecologists’ agendas, other Nazi goals and practices, especially the rapid rearmament, flew in the face of green ideas. For some green-leaning Nazis, however, that was acceptable. For them the war and destruction were necessary evils since they would bring about a new order that would finally allow the establishment of a better and greener Germany. Put in the context of Germany’s tumultuous twentieth century, it can neither simply be said that all greens were Nazis nor that all the Nazis were greens. But there were many similarities between both ways of thinking and there were some people—especially among those planning for the postwar world—who felt that Nazi and green thinking went hand in hand.

When Thomas Zeller first broached the question “How green were the Nazis?” at a panel during the American Society for Environmental History conference in 1997, he initiated a debate between German and non-German scholars that eventually culminated in this anthology. We hope these contributions will help move the debate beyond the stereotype that Germans were both “nature lovers” and “violent,” and help dispel the notion that there is a clear-cut, black-and-white approach to Nazi-era conservationism. We also hope that our focus on Germany will shed new light on the larger question of twentieth-century environmentalism. The green policies of the Nazis were more than a mere episode or aberration in environmental history at large. They point to larger meanings and demonstrate with brutal clarity that conservationism and environmentalism are not and have never been value-free or inherently benign enterprises.

Notes

1. One of the founding members and erstwhile leader of Germany’s Green Party confessed to feeling embarrassed about Nazi Germany’s green policies. While acknowledging topical continuities, she also stressed the degree to which the Greens mark a rupture from this past. Manon Andreas-

Griesebach, "Kontinuität und Bruch," *Politische Ökologie* 11 (November 1993): 13–16.

2. Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995), try to lump together environmentalism and Nazi Germany in an ultimately ahistoric fashion. For an analysis of German right-wing parties claiming "green" ground, see Thomas Jahn and Peter Wehling, *Ökologie von rechts: Nationalismus und Umweltschutz bei der Neuen Rechten und den "Republikanern"* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1991); and Jonathan Olsen, *Nature and Nationalism: Right-Wing Ecology and the Politics of Identity in Contemporary Germany* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

3. Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's Green Party* (Bourne End, Buckinghamshire: Kensal Press, 1985). See also her follow-up book, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). For a recent critique, see Piers H. G. Stephens, "Blood, Not Soil: Anna Bramwell and the Myth of Hitler's Green Party," *Organization and Environment* 14 (June 2001): 173–87.

4. Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (New York: Longman, 2000), 19.

5. Dick Richardson and Chris Rootes, *The Green Challenge: The Development of Green Parties in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1995); Eeva Berglund, *Knowing Nature, Knowing Science: An Ethnography of Environmental Activism* (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 1998).

6. For a recent assessment in German focusing on conservation, see Joachim Radkau and Frank Uekötter, eds., *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2003). See also Douglas Weiner, "Demythologizing Environmentalism," *Journal of the History of Biology* 25 (Fall 1992): 385–411; Colin Riordan, ed., *Green Thought in German Culture: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997); and Thomas Rohkrämer, "Contemporary Environmentalism and Its Links with the German Past," in *The Culture of German Environmentalism: Anxieties, Visions, Realities*, ed. Axel Goodbody (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 47–62.

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8. Karl-Heinz Ludwig, *Technik und Ingenieure im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf: Athenäum/Droste, 1979); and Monika Renneberg and Mark Walker, eds., *Science, Technology and National Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

9. See the papers in Doris Kaufmann, ed., *Geschichte der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft im Nationalsozialismus: Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven der Forschung*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000); and Margit Szöllösi-Janze, ed., *Science in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); and see Robert Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 120–72.

10. For two competing interpretations regarding National Socialism's modernity, see Jeffrey Herf, "Der nationalsozialistische Technikdiskurs: Die deutschen Eigenheiten des reaktionären Modernismus," in *Der Technikdiskurs in der Hitler-Stalin-Ära*, ed. Wolfgang Emmerich and Carl Wege (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), 72–93; and Anson Rabinbach, "Nationalsozialismus und Moderne: Zur Technik-Interpretation im Dritten Reich," *ibid.*, 94–113.

11. For an overview, see Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany, 1933–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

12. Thomas Adam, "Parallele Wege: Geschichtsvereinigungen und Naturschutzbewegung in Deutschland," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 48 (1997): 413–28. This trend, of course, was by no means unique to Germany. For Great Britain, see James Winter, *Secure from Rash Assault: Sustaining the Victorian Environment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

13. Diethart Kerbs, ed., *Handbuch der deutschen Reformbewegungen, 1880–1933* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1998); Judith Baumgartner, "Licht, Luft, Sonne, Bergwelt, Wandern und Baden als Sehnsuchtsziele der Lebensreformbewegung," in *Die Lebensreform: Entwürfe zur Neugestaltung von Leben und Kunst um 1900*, ed. Kai Buchholz (Darmstadt: Häusser, 2001), 403–6.

14. See Andreas Knaut, *Zurück zur Natur! Die Wurzeln der Ökologiebewegung* (Greven: Kilda, 1993), 69.

15. Edeltraud Klüeting, ed., *Antimodernismus und Reform: Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Heimatbewegung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991); William H. Rollins, *A Greener Vision of Home: Cultural Politics and Environmental Reform in the German Heimatschutz Movement, 1904–1918* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

16. For some examples of the considerable Heimat historiography, see Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

17. Hans Klose, *Fünfzig Jahre staatlicher Naturschutz: Ein Rückblick auf den Weg der deutschen Naturschutzbewegung* (Giessen: Brühlscher Verlag, 1957), 25.

18. Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, *Tschernobyl, 26. April 1986: Die ökologische Herausforderung* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998), 155–78; Karl Ditt, “Nature Conservation in England and Germany, 1900–1970: Forerunners of Environmental Protection?” *Contemporary European History* 5 (1996): 1–28; Joachim Radkau, *Natur und Macht: Eine Weltgeschichte der Umwelt*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Beck, 2002), 294–98; Paul Josephson and Thomas Zeller, “The Transformation of Nature under Hitler and Stalin,” in *Science and Ideology: A Comparative History*, ed. Mark Walker (London: Routledge, 2003), 124–55.

19. Quoted by Gert Gröning and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, *Die Liebe zur Landschaft. Teil III: Der Drang nach Osten* (Munich: Minerva-Publikation, 1987), 30; Mechtild Rössler and Sabine Schleiermacher, eds., *Der “Generalplan Ost”: Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1993), 132. See also Isabel Heinemann, “Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”: *Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).