



1932: The Rise of Hitler and FDR--Two Tales of Politics, Betrayal, and Unlikely Destiny

David Pietrusza

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Nominated for the American Library Association (ALA)'s Notable Books Council's 2015 Notable Books List

Two Depression-battered nations confront their destiny in 1932, going to the polls in their own way to anoint new leaders, to rescue their people from starvation and hopelessness. America elects a Congress and a president--ebullient aristocrat Franklin Roosevelt or tarnished "Wonder Boy" Herbert Hoover. Decadent, divided Weimar Germany suffers two rounds of bloody Reichstag elections and two presidential contests--doddering reactionary Paul von Hindenburg against rising radical hate-monger Adolf Hitler.

The outcome seemed foreordained--unstoppable forces advancing upon crumbled, disoriented societies. A merciless Great Depression brought greater--perhaps hopeful, perhaps deadly--transformation: FDR's New Deal and Hitler's Third Reich.

But neither outcome was inevitable.

Readers enter the fray through David Pietrusza's page-turning account: Roosevelt's fellow Democrats may yet halt him at a deadlocked convention. 1928's Democratic nominee, Al Smith, harbors a grudge against his one-time protege. Press baron William Randolph Hearst lays his own plans to block Roosevelt's ascent to the White House. FDR's politically-inspired juggling of a New York City scandal threatens his juggernaut. In Germany, the Nazis surge at the polls but twice fall short of Reichstag majorities. Hitler, tasting power after a lifetime of failure and obscurity, falls to Hindenburg for the presidency--also twice within the year. Cabals and counter-cabals plot. Secrets of love and suicide haunt Hitler.

Yet guile, ambition--and terror--may yet still prevail.

1932's breathtaking narrative covers two epic stories that possess haunting parallels to today's crisis-filled vortex. It is an all-too-human tale of scapegoats and panaceas, class warfare and racial politics, of a seemingly bottomless depression, of massive unemployment and hardship, of unprecedented public works/infrastructure programs, of business stimulus programs and damaging allegations of political cronyism, of waves of bank failures and of mortgages foreclosed, of Washington bonus marches and Berlin street fights, of once-solid financial empires collapsing seemingly overnight, of rapidly shifting social mores, and of mountains of irresponsible international debt threatening to crash not just mere nations but the entire global economy.

It is the tale of spell-binding leaders versus bland businessmen and out-of-touch upper-class elites and of two nations inching to safety but lurching toward disaster. It is 1932's nightmare--with lessons for today.

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