

Reading Questions for Peter Fritzsche, *Germans Into Nazis*

Introduction

1. Try to find a passage that represents Fritzsche's thesis statement for his book.
2. What did the "August days" signify to their participants? Why is it important that the historian account for this?
3. Why does Fritzsche insist that 1914, rather than 1918, is the right starting point for explaining the success of the Nazis?
4. Is Fritzsche proposing that the sentiments of the August days were unanimous? or that they outlasted the trials of the war?
5. In describing his explanatory strategy, Fritzsche uses terms like "national identity," "imagination," "ideas and desires." What is he getting at? Why should historians pay attention to such things?

Chapter One: July 1914

1. "More than anything else in the twentieth century, World War I transformed German nationalism by giving it emotional depth and tying it to social reform and political entitlement.... During this public emergency traditional allegiances to the monarchy withered while new conceptions of the national community ranging from utopian socialism to crude Aryan racism proliferated" (28). Explain what Fritzsche is getting at.
2. Why does Fritzsche think that it is inaccurate to ascribe the "war euphoria" of July 1914 "to the bogeyman of German militarism, which somehow took hold of its victims and marched them off to war" (19)? Are you persuaded by his reasoning?
3. In light of Fritzsche's narration, how would you say that German nationalism had changed since unification in 1871? (Hint: what is "official patriotism" (23)?) What do you make of the fact that so many ordinary people were so enthusiastic about the outbreak of war, given the fact that so many of them had experienced the German state as oppressive?
4. From the perspective of ordinary Germans, much about the "war euphoria" of 1914 was new, much was old and familiar. How would you weigh the balance between old and new? Was the "war euphoria," in your opinion, a profoundly new departure from the past? Or was it an expression and continuation of older patterns of life and experience?
5. How would you weigh the same comparison from the authorities' point of view? What was new to them? How did their experience of the "war euphoria" reflect well-established patterns of thought and behavior?