

Big Business and the Crisis of German Democracy

Through the colorful world of Berlin's grand hotels, this book charts a new history of German liberalism and explores the changing relationships among big business, society, and politics. Behind imposing facades, managers and workers were often the picture of orderly and harmonious service, despite living in sometimes uncomfortable proximity. Then, during World War I, class tensions rose to the surface and failed to resolve in the following years. Doubting the ability of the Weimar Republic to contain these conflicts, a group of hotel owners, some of the most prominent Jewish industrialists and financiers in the country, chose to let Adolf Hitler use their hotel, the Kaiserhof, as his Berlin headquarters in 1932. From a splendid suite opposite the chancellery, Hitler and his henchmen engineered the assumption of power, the death of the Weimar Republic, and the ruin of their hosts, the Kaiserhof's owners: Jewish liberals now fleeing for their lives. *Big Business and the Crisis of German Democracy* asks how this came about and explores the decision-making processes that produced such catastrophic consequences. This title is also available as open access on Cambridge Core.

Adam Bisno is a historian of modern Germany. This book is based on his dissertation, which won the Fritz Stern Prize from the Friends of the German Historical Institute in 2018.

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Adam Bisno

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Big Business and the Crisis of German Democracy

*Liberalism and the Grand Hotels
of Berlin, 1875–1933*

ADAM BISNO



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I knew my great-grandmother, Henryetta, personally. Like everyone else, I called her by her nickname, Ana, the German pronunciation of Anne. Her parents had descended from Berliners who came to this country in the first wave of German-Jewish immigration to the United States, just after the Revolutions of 1848. Henryetta was elegant, charming, funny, eccentric, and organized – everything a hotelier is supposed to be. This book is about a different sort of hotelier, a different kind of hotel, and a different time and place. It's about businessmen, big business, and the collapse of German urban society in the first part of the twentieth century.

And yet this book offers a tale that might just have resonated with my great-grandmother and her heir, my grandfather: How do you make sense of your hotel's final days? It is the 1970s in Little Rock, downtown is in decline, speculators are buying up what has yet to collapse, and the hotel can't do business as usual. You sell it. Decades pass as the building changes hands several times and finally settles into disuse. In the end, all that remains of the family business, the Hotel Sam Peck, our legacy, are matchbooks, postcards, a few photographs, and a little correspondence. What are we supposed to do now? My answer has been this book.