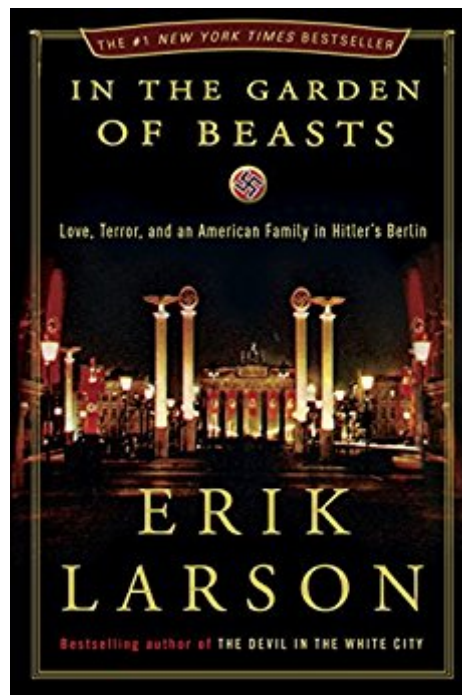




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In The Garden Of Beasts: Love, Terror, And An American Family In Hitler's Berlin



Synopsis

Erik Larson, New York Times bestselling author of *Devil in the White City*, delivers a remarkable story set during Hitler's rise to power. The time is 1933, the place, Berlin, when William E. Dodd becomes America's first ambassador to Hitler's Nazi Germany in a year that proved to be a turning point in history. A mild-mannered professor from Chicago, Dodd brings along his wife, son, and flamboyant daughter, Martha. At first Martha is entranced by the parties and pomp, and the handsome young men of the Third Reich with their infectious enthusiasm for restoring Germany to a position of world prominence. Enamored of the "New Germany," she has one affair after another, including with the surprisingly honorable first chief of the Gestapo, Rudolf Diels. But as evidence of Jewish persecution mounts, confirmed by chilling first-person testimony, her father telegraphs his concerns to a largely indifferent State Department back home. Dodd watches with alarm as Jews are attacked, the press is censored, and drafts of frightening new laws begin to circulate. As that first year unfolds and the shadows deepen, the Dodds experience days full of excitement, intrigue, romance and ultimately, horror, when a climactic spasm of violence and murder reveals Hitler's true character and ruthless ambition. Suffused with the tense atmosphere of the period, and with unforgettable portraits of the bizarre Göring and the expectedly charming--yet wholly sinister--Goebbels, *In the Garden of Beasts* lends a stunning, eyewitness perspective on events as they unfold in real time, revealing an era of surprising nuance and complexity. The result is a dazzling, addictively readable work that speaks volumes about why the world did not recognize the grave threat posed by Hitler until Berlin, and Europe, were awash in blood and terror.

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Customer Reviews

This is an amazing account if the U.S. Ambassador to Germany - Hitler's Germany - in the days he was creating his Reich. Both fascinating and frustrating, the book gives you an inside look at the failings of diplomacy. Only as good as the diplomats we hire, many of the issues brought up in the book remain in the State Department. Employees who believe they are smarter than everyone else, infighting, officials who don't want to "upset" their host government, the list goes on. Ambassador Dodd honestly reported on life and developments under the Third Reich in Germany. His personal belief that Jews were too powerful was, I suppose, a product of his time, but at least he had the gumption to stand up to Nazi and, sadly, U.S. Government pressure. A man I'd never heard of before I read this book, I wish I could have known him.

The political science lesson in *In the Garden of Beasts* is that diplomats are or were as we would fear them to be, people who know people, rich people, superficial bureaucrats that boil down international relations to the number of pretty girls at a party. William Dodd, although not perfect in his political correctness about Jews, was a good ambassador to Germany because of and not in spite of his frugality and modest family origins. His daughter on the other hand, Martha, shows that a good father figure does not always lead to a sensible and disciplined daughter to make him proud. The book is billed for a bestseller list because of the love triangles of Martha, and when the love stories become just a subtext for Dodd's wrestling with the State Department, as well as his "fringe Nazis" like Rudolf Diels, Martha still proves to be a relevant, driving part of the story because Larson doesn't know or focus on fictional, private bedroom details. This book will be a bestseller because of a plainspoken Jeffersonian democrat who took a job nobody else even wanted, only to be second-guessed as too professorial by anti-Semites back home. Himmler and Goebbels didn't like each other. If I already knew that I didn't remember it. Hitler didn't socialize with his high command. If I already knew that I didn't remember it. The

Night of the Long Knives is as I have read, a day time raid of over 700 suspected enemies, chief among them Ernest Rohm, not to mention a music critic who was murdered by clerical spelling error. Perhaps the most enduring concept in the book, something like a Lanny Budd storyline from Upton Sinclair, is the singular face-to-face encounter Hitler had with Martha Dodd. In a play it by ear scenario, she was supposed to romance him, when in fact her Russian lover became her way to double deal with him and Hitler, evidently, never forgot her for the realpolitik she could have played. "In short, the girl should have been subjugated," he once said.

I read this book because I wanted to see just HOW the world could be so unaware of the evil that was Hitler. It was amazing to read how the world economy, the American dust bowl, WWI, political correctness and quiet worldwide antisemitism created the perfect environment for the rise of the Nazis. My only problem with Larson's book is that there is far too much about the romantic & sexual adventures of Ambassador Dodd's daughter. I wish Larson had spent more time with the political environment in Germany circa 1933 and LESS time with Martha's exploits. True, in some cases her romantic involvements were germane to the history...but often it felt like Larson depended too much on her to "fill in the blanks." I still found the book an excellent source of insight to a terrifying era in world events. Read it...but skim through some of Martha's liaisons.

Larson did a good job of putting the reader into the driver seat. I really felt like I was one of the Dodd family watching the horror of the Third Reich unfold under Hitler. Ambassador Dodd was a former professor turned diplomat from Chicago. His passion was for the old south of his youth and spent whatever free time he had writing a book about it. He, along with his wife, son and daughter moved to Berlin in 1932 as he became Ambassador. The book is told from his view and that of his flamboyant daughter Martha. Dodd stood out as he was frugal, academic and somewhat uncouth- he allowed his son Bill Jr. to bring their Chevrolet over to Berlin. Martha went about making friends and lovers, breaking hearts along the way. One of her few redeeming qualities was her devotion to her father and her literary connections back home. The book introduces us to some of the early Nazi leaders and other dignitaries. The Dodds welcomed them into their home. They lived near the Tiergarten park- literally, "animal garden" in German. The title of the book was fitting as we saw members of the SA and SS brutally attack anyone who didn't "Heil Hitler" when he or Nazi party passed by. The climax of the book was June 30, 1934: "The Night of the Long Knives" as it is called. It was truly horrifying to watch characters we came to know through the Dodd's eyes be unfairly murdered in their own homes. The Dodds left Germany before things became worse for the Jews.

Sadly, Dodd was not appreciated in his own country as he should have been, especially after bravely delivering speech on democracy in Berlin and snubbing Hitler by not attending his Nuremberg speech.

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