

# Young Arthur Junior

**A Life in the 20th Century:  
Innocent Beginnings, 1917-1950**

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Houghton Mifflin / 557 pages / \$28.95

REVIEWED BY  
**Mark Falcoff**

**A**rthur Schlesinger, Jr. requires no introduction. He is the best known public intellectual in the United States, and arguably the most vigorous. Teacher, historian, and publicist, he is also high priest of the Democratic Party's far-flung constituency among intellectuals or would-be intellectuals. And, as no one needs reminding, he is also court historian of the line of Kennedy pretenders. This, the first volume of his autobiography, tells the story of his life from his birth in 1917 to 1950, when he published his most important political treatise, *The Vital Center*.

Although in his public role Schlesinger has not been a particular favorite of mine, nor, I trust, of most readers of this magazine, I am forced to confess that I found his autobiography absorbing and at times even charming. It is, admittedly, very long—at times excessively prolix even for someone of my own particular interests. But Schlesinger has done much, known many fascinating people, and witnessed much history, often close up. Or perhaps I am merely reassured by meeting the Schlesinger of pre-Kennedy days. (Could that be the “innocence” referred to in the subtitle?)

Son of a well-known historian, Schlesinger spent his childhood and adolescence in academic communities, eventually matriculating at Harvard whence his father was called in the late 1920's. After graduation he did a year at Peterhouse College, Oxford, returning to teach at his alma mater where he produced an important biography of Orestes Bronson. World War

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II found him physically unfit for military service, so he went into the Office of War Information, then the OSS, first in Washington, then in London. After the war he spent a season in Washington as a writer for *Fortune* magazine before returning to teach at Harvard. It was during this period that he produced his Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Age of Jackson*. He also helped to found Americans for Democratic Action and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and played a vital role in the political and ideological struggles that attended the early days of the Cold War. Ahead lay the first volumes of his monumental *Age of Roosevelt*.

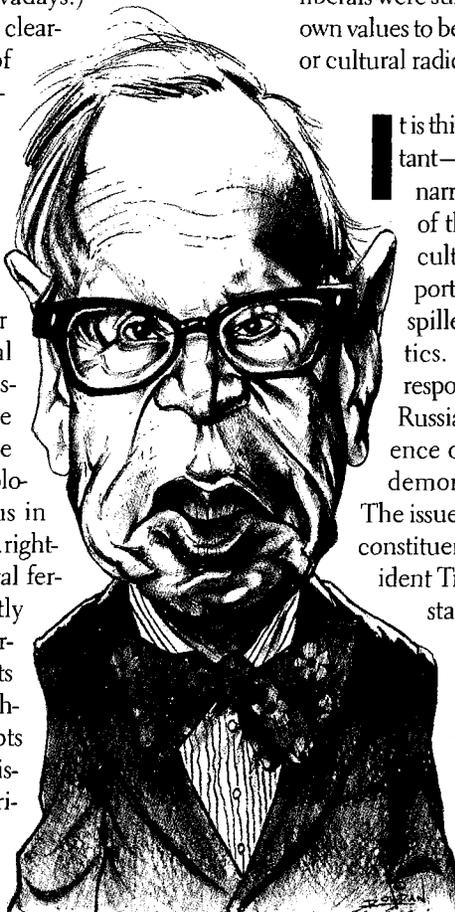
So much for the story in outline. Far more interesting is the texture. Schlesinger is not merely an academic, but that rarest of things in our midst—an intellectual of the European type. Which is to say, a *homme à lettres* unafraid of power or proximity to it. (Contrast that with the exaggerated postures of alienation struck by most American academics nowadays.)

Moreover, he is clearly a product of the pre-PC period of American university life, and unapologetically so. He considers much of what now passes for modern social history as excessively “aggressive in its ‘from the bottom up’ ideology...pretentious in its vocabulary...righteous in its moral fervor.” He is flatly anti-multiculturalist, and rejects the currently fashionable attempts to prettify the history of the American Communist Party. He also pooh-

poohs the New Left versions—which, alas, are now largely regnant—of the decision to drop the atom bomb on Japan, the origins of the Cold War, the guilt of Alger Hiss. (“Stalin probably killed more innocent people than Hitler did,” he writes, “but the defenders of Stalin, unlike the defenders of Hitler, were somehow deemed within the circle of civilized people.”) Indeed, reading these and similar passages I could not help wondering if a younger version of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., fresh from Harvard, could find a place today on any history faculty in the United States, major or minor. (I suspect at times he must wonder too.)

The narrative also underscores the degree to which America has changed during the author's lifetime. There was a time—yes, there really was—when professors and their wives gathered to dine in black tie and long dresses in college towns in the Midwest. Or when the most emblematic figures of the Democratic Party were Adlai Stevenson, James Forrestal, Thomas Finletter, or Averell Harriman, instead of Alan Dershowitz, David Geffen, Al Sharpton, or Hillary Rodham Clinton. Or when liberals were sufficiently confident in their own values to be unintimidated by political or cultural radicalism.

**I**t is this last which forms an important—indeed crucial—part of the narrative. During the early days of the Cold War, there was a cultural conflict of major proportions in this country which spilled over into electoral politics. At issue was the proper response to the threat of Stalinist Russia, poised to extend its influence over an impoverished and demoralized Western Europe. The issue divided the old New Deal constituency. On one side was President Truman and his secretary of state Dean Acheson, backed by Eleanor Roosevelt, Schlesinger, Hubert Humphrey, and anti-Communist leaders of the labor movement like Walter Reuther. On the other were the friends of the Soviet Union—Theodore H. White,



ISRAEL ROLDAN

Max Lerner, Lillian Hellman, Paul Robeson, Leonard Bernstein, et al. Their hero was former Vice President Henry Wallace, who, first as editor of the *New Republic*, then as presidential candidate of the Progressive Party in 1948, argued that anti-Stalinism “was per se warmongering.” Wallace was also the author of this memorable phrase: “If we define an American fascist as one who in the case of conflict puts money and power ahead of human beings, then there are undoubtedly several million fascists in the United States.” One of the most amusing anecdotes in the book describes a meeting at the *New Republic* in New York between Schlesinger and Wallace which resembles nothing so much as a leftist version of the Mad Hatter’s tea party.

Whatever one may think of his subsequent political choices, Schlesinger cannot be praised enough for the courageous stand he took at this time. As he writes, “premature anti-Communists in the ’forties received as much censure from the left as premature anti-fascists in the ’thirties received from the right.” He might have added that though Wallace has been dead now for many years—and though he subsequently repudiated his pro-Soviet views—revisionists are still trying to rehabilitate him as a selfless martyr to our own alleged Cold War bellicosity (see, for example, John Morton Blum’s *The Price of Vision*).

To be sure, ahead lay further divisions within the American intellectual community, with the anti-Communist faction splitting once again over the Vietnam war and détente. Schlesinger gives us a foretaste of things to come in a painful discussion of his relations with the late Sidney Hook, whom he describes as “a highly intelligent man who permitted anticommunism to consume his life to the point that his obsession, like Aaron’s rod, swallowed up nearly everything else.” In a famous review of Hook’s autobiography *Out of Step*, Schlesinger had made the famous remark that “there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in the anti-Communist philosophy.” That book, and Schlesinger’s review of it, belongs to the Reagan era—which is to say, the period covered by the next volume. One fears its tone and direction will be quite different. ❧

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# Predatory Man

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## **The Third Reich: A New History**

Michael Burleigh

Hill and Wang / 938 pages / \$40

## **Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis**

Ian Kershaw

W.W. Norton / 1040 pages / \$35

REVIEWED BY

**R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.**

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**A**s with the human heart, the human brain never rests, which is not always a good thing. Many of what are called “intellectual debates” exist merely because some third-rate thinker’s brain would not shut down when sleep beckoned or cannabis agitated or an alien idea excited vast cogitations. It is then that the brain needs a rest. Alas, too often it races on, and soon its proprietor is advancing some momentous proposition injurious to the public. Recall, if you will, the momentous propositions advanced by Dr. Joycelyn Elders, the Clinton Administration’s militant condomist (an advocate of godless condomism?) or earlier propositions advanced by Woodrow Wilson or by Marx (Karl, not Groucho).

A well-rested brain might have saved us from the controversies that these goof-ball academics stirred up, as well as from the current controversy over Winston Churchill’s rude treatment of Adolf Hitler. Certain English academics such as John Charmley, a historian at the University of East Anglia, argue that Churchill could have avoided World War II in the spring of 1940 and the consequent dissolution of the British Empire had he then offered to negotiate with the Führer. Accordingly, Churchill blew it again a couple of years later when the Führer, then licking his wounds at headquarters, might have welcomed a hand extended in friendship. By the way, the Führer had named his headquarters the “Wolf’s Lair.” He named

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another the “Eagle’s Nest.” His penchant for such names can be construed differently. Doubtless to a worrier such as Churchill such names suggested the fantasies of a predator. To those academics sharing Prof. Charmley’s sanguinity, they demonstrate yet again the Führer’s fondness for animals. He did not eat meat and contemplated taking strong measures against meat-eaters once the war was over.

Churchill’s latest critics have a knack for overlooking what was unique to Hitler and his Nazi party. While the twentieth century’s other ideological visionaries celebrated “the dictatorship of the proletariat” and other pretty thoughts, Hitler and the jack-booted boys celebrated the predatory life, referred to generally as war. As the Nazis’ chief theoretician and poet, Hitler composed dithyrambs to “the sword.” Sweeping off the Asiatic steppes in the fifth century, the Hun hordes answered to the same predatory impulse and doubtless would have heralded their campaigns with rhetorical masterpieces the equal of Hitler’s at Nuremberg if they could write or stand still long enough. True, in their emotionalism, Nazi racial and scientific theories took on the appearance of a pseudo-religion, as Michael Burleigh points out in his masterful *The Third Reich: A New History*. But for all their pseudo-mysticism, fundamentally the Nazis were a type known to all history: predators, killers.

No European diplomat would have persuaded Hitler to subside, and by the time Hitler had acquired the chancellorcy and the Wehrmacht, Churchill was left no alternative but force of arms. The cantankerous academics now faulting Churchill for the destruction Hitler left behind are as frivolous as the 1930’s Europeans who assumed that they could “deal with” the disgusting little boor from the Austrian down-and-out.

Throngs of Germans adored the hysterical spellbinder, as his most recent and authoritative biographer, Ian Kershaw, demonstrates in the final volume of his