

# Dorothy Thompson

*From the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:*

*Dorothy Thompson (1893–1961) was a prominent American reporter, columnist, and radio personality. Throughout the 1930s and '40s, she urged her fellow Americans to pay attention to the threat that Nazi Germany posed to democracy and to Europe's Jews. In 1939, Time magazine called Thompson and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt "undoubtedly the most influential women in America."*

- In 1931, the Nazi Party invited Thompson to interview Hitler for *Cosmopolitan* magazine. She expanded the interview, publishing it along with her impressions in a book, *I Saw Hitler!*, which was released before Hitler was appointed German chancellor in 1933.
- Thompson's searing criticism angered Hitler, who personally ordered her to leave Nazi Germany in 1934. She was the first American journalist to be expelled from the country by the Nazi regime. "As far as I can see, I was really put out of Germany for the crime of blasphemy," she said upon disembarking in the United States. "My offense was to think that Hitler is just an ordinary man, after all. That is a crime in the reigning cult in Germany, which says Mr. Hitler is a messiah sent of God to save the German people."



*At the February 1939 German American Bund rally at Madison Square Garden in New York City, Dorothy Thompson heckled the pro-Nazi speakers, and had to be escorted out of the arena for her own safety.  
Keystone/Hulton Archive/Getty Images*

The following are excerpts from Thompson's 1931 interview:

[What questions should we be asking after learning about the work of Dorothy Thompson and her 1931 – and subsequent – pieces of writing?]

So I went to see not a little political leader, but a probable dictator "as certain to come to power as that I stand here," he had told some newspaper men a few days before. A man who owns an army. A man who terrorizes the streets. A man who predicts the constitution of a new, dangerous, and awakened Germany.

I was a little nervous. I considered taking smelling salts.

And Hitler was late. An hour late. Waiting in the upstairs foyer of the Kaiserhof Hotel I saw him shoot by, on the way to his rooms, ac-like Al Capone. Minutes pass. Half an hour. I go around to the room of the press chief: Ernest Hanfstaengel, son of the lady from Murnau, Harvard graduate, famous among his classmates for his piano playing and his eccentricities. Fussy. Amusing. The oddest imaginable press chief for a dictator.

I waited in Dr. Hanfstaengel's room. An Italian journalist precedes me. No wonder. Hitler, contemplating power, already has a foreign policy: A German-English-Italian alliance to crush the power of France on the continent. I wait. America is only a creditor, one of the weakest positions which a nation can hold in the world today.

When finally I walked into Adolph Hitler's salon in the Kaiserhof Hotel, I was convinced that I was meeting the future dictator of Germany. In something less than fifty seconds I was quite sure that I was not.

It took just about that time to measure the startling insignificance of this man who has set the world agog.

He is formless, almost faceless, a man whose countenance is a caricature, a man whose framework seems cartilaginous, without bones. He is inconsequent and voluble, ill-poised, insecure. He is the very prototype of the Little Man.

A lock of lank hair falls over an insignificant and slightly retreating forehead. The back head is shallow. The face is broad in the cheek-bones. The nose is large, but badly shaped and without character. His movements are awkward, almost undignified and most un-martial. There is in his face no trace of any inner conflict or self-discipline.

And yet, he is not without a certain charm. But it is the soft, almost feminine charm of the Austrian! When he talks it is with a broad Austrian dialect.

The eyes alone are notable. Dark gray and hyperthyroid—they have the peculiar shine which often distinguishes geniuses, alcoholics, and hysterics.

There is something irritatingly refined about him. I bet he crooks his little finger when he drinks a cup of tea.

The interview was difficult, because one cannot carry on a conversation with Adolph Hitler. He speaks always, as though he were addressing a mass meeting. In personal intercourse he is shy, almost embarrassed. In every question he seeks for a theme that will set him off. Then his eyes focus in some far corner of the room; a hysterical note creeps into his voice which rises sometimes almost to a scream. He gives the impression of a man in a trance. He bangs the table.

On the subject of the constitution Hitler was more explicit, though there again, I had to interrupt an address to an unseen gallery. "I will get into power legally. I will abolish this parliament and the Weimar constitution afterward. I will found an authority-state, from the lowest cell to the highest instance; everywhere there will be responsibility and authority above, discipline and obedience below."

So that's that for the Republic.