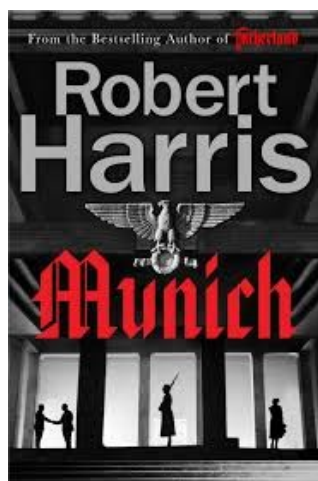


HISTORY BULLETIN

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I regularly raise the issue of the role of historical fiction in the History Bulletin— is it helpful to a historian? How should we treat it? Here is an example which is well-worth reading. Firstly, its eminently readable—a page turner. Secondly, the history of key events is accurate. Harris takes the Munich conference at which the democracies caved in to Hitler’s demands on Czechoslovakia as his subject matter. He explores the position of those in Germany who wished to stop Hitler and the role of appeasers in Britain. Lord Halifax plays a key role—as he does in *The Darkest Hour* at a cinema near you now!

HOW DEMOCRACIES DIE

You can not study history without studying politics and it is hard to study history and ignore the politics of today. That’s why a new book with the somber title *How Democracies Die* is especially pertinent. It is hard to avoid alarmist stories in the media about threats to liberal democracy. A’ level students will be able to make comparisons with the rise of populists in the 1930s which brought democracy crashing down spectacularly in much of the western world.

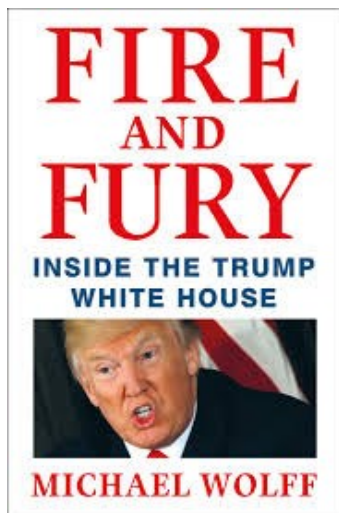
How Democracies Die is written by Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, two political scientists. After newspaper scare-stories comparing Trump with the unhinged Emperor Nero, they take a sober and measured look at the reasons why democra-

cies have failed. Their only emotional outburst is to describe Trump as a ‘serial norm breaker’ - surely one of the milder things he has been called.

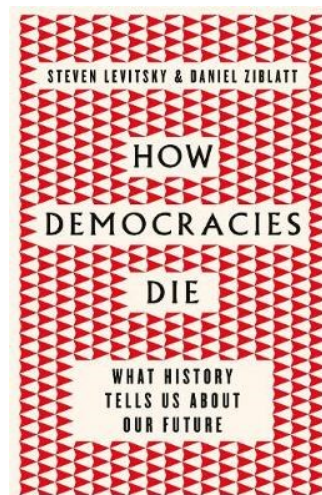
One of the points made by Levitsky and Ziblatt is that populists and demagogues rise to power when traditional parties fail to do their job properly. Franz von Papen failed in 1933 when he bragged that Hitler had been ‘hired’ by the supposed puppet masters in Germany; the Republican Party failed in its duty to stop Trump from claiming their nomination—they thought he would burn himself out and they were wrong-footed when his campaign gained momentum. *How Democracies Die* lists four warning signs for a leader who may tip towards au-

thoritarianism: a weak commitment to democratic rules; denying the legitimacy of an opponent; toleration of violence; and a willingness to curb civil liberties. A useful checklist for students of history.

There is another factor at play however, the examination of which leads to a more positive appraisal of the strength of democracy. Do democratic institutions function well? In this regard the contrast between the USA today and Germany in the 1930s is great. The checks and balances in the U.S. system (which you will have covered in your GCSE) are strong. The willingness of judges to speak out, the FBI to investigate irregularities, and freedom of the press all suggest that democracy is not about to die across the Atlantic.



Far less measured—in fact it is a jaw-dropping read— is Wolff’s account of Trump’s first year in the White House. Wolff is a journalist; many of his sources are unnamed, so you need to decide how much of the hype around this book is true. However, the picture painted of chaotic government, competing power blocs, a flexible agenda and a leader interested only in his own popularity is thought-provoking. This is a compelling study in leadership , with insights into what makes government work—and what prevents it from working.



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LECTURES AT THE BRITISH LIBRARY

The British Library is more than a book collection and exhibition space. It has a wide-ranging programme of lectures such as **Storytelling and Politics: How History, Myth and Narratives drive our decisions**. Shared myths, accepted legends, historical assumptions: storytelling has a huge influence on politics. How can we make rational decisions in the so called post-fact era, when we are so dominated by the narratives handed down to us?

Mark Laity is the Director of Communications at SHAPE, NATO's military headquarters. At a time when the influence of information and the internet on international security is rising, Mark is regarded as one of NATO's foremost experts and thinkers on communications, with extensive experience in conflict zones such as Afghanistan. Also, as a former BBC Defence Correspondent, he reported from the frontlines of many wars, and he is a sought-after speaker on the role of information in modern conflict.

Monday 19th February



OPERA: PASSION, POWER AND POLITICS

What can historians learn from studying the music of an age? A new exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum suggests we can learn a lot. It has been fantastically well reviewed. Seven operas are explored in the context of the composers' lives and the cities in which they lived. The works range from Handel's eighteenth century London to Moscow in 1934 when Shostakovich's **Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk** was described as 'noise not music' by Stalin. Not a verdict a composer would wish to hear. The exhibition experience is immersive. Visitors walk through the exhibition with headphones as a hi-tech sound system plays a constantly shifting musical or spoken commentary on the displays. You don't have to enjoy opera to make sense of this. Go with an open mind. If you are new to opera, you are likely to be shocked by its impact whatever you think of the music. Sets and costumes by artists like Salvador Dali and Versace are a commentary on the times which gave birth to their work.

Charles I did not have a happy reign. Parliament considered his extravagant spending on art for his personal collection to be profligate. It was broken up and sold on Charles' death.

This landmark exhibition at the Royal Academy, organised in partnership with Royal Collection Trust, will reunite one of the most extraordinary and influential art collections ever assembled. During his reign, Charles I (1600–1649) acquired and commissioned exceptional masterpieces from the 15th to the 17th centuries, including works by Van Dyck, Rubens, Holbein, Titian and Mantegna, amongst others.

Charles I was executed in 1649, and just months later the collection was offered for sale and dispersed across Europe. Although many works were retrieved by Charles II during the Restoration, others now form the core of collections such as the Musée du Louvre and the Museo Nacional del Prado. This exhibition will reunite around 150 of the most important works for the first time since the 17th century, including 91 works from the Royal Collection, providing an unprecedented opportunity to experience the collection that changed the appreciation of art in England.

The exhibition is at the Royal Academy from the end of Janu-



ary until mid April. The BBC has made some accompanying documentaries which have been on BBC4. These are now on *Click-view* for Haileybury students. Useful for historians and anyone interested in the History of Art.