Summary of Argument in Peter Fritzsche’s *German into Nazis*

**Introduction**
p. 6: “World War I occupies such a prominent place in modern history because it created new social formations organized around a national identity that was defined in increasingly populist and racial terms.”

p. 8: “It should be stated clearly that Germans became Nazis because they wanted to become Nazis and because the Nazis spoke so well to their interests and inclinations. Given the illiberal aims and violent means of the Nazis, this popular support is a sobering, dreadful thing.”

p. 8-9: “The Nazis won such decisive pluralities in the 1932 and 1933 elections, not because they provided the operating instructions to carry out what was already on everyone’s mind, but because they departed from established political traditions in that they were identified at once with a distinctly popular form of ethnic nationalism and with the basic social reforms most Germans counted on to ensure national well-being.”

**July 1914**
World War I created a myth of national unity; it enabled people to “reimagine the nation as a more inclusive and less hierarchically bound collectivity.” (p. 25)

p. 28: “More than anything else in the twentieth century, World War I transformed German nationalism by giving it emotional depth and tying it to social reform and political entitlement.”

**November 1918**
The November Revolution both confirmed the widespread desire for a more popular version of national politics and, at the same time, failed to fulfill the dream of national unity: “It is just this self-authorization that makes the German revolution such a significant event for social groups. November 1918 lacked the unanimity and national purpose of August 1914, but both war and revolution promoted the search for new political forms.” (p. 107)

**January 1933**
a. Chapter Intro
There is the culminating chapter, where the whole argument of the book is pulled together. There are several points here where he states, and restates, his argument. One early example is:

p. 148: “For conservatives and Stahlhelmers, for Tory workers and rural protesters, as well as for Hitler’s voters, long years of opposition to the Weimar Republic had finally culminated in the victory of January 1933, a moment which overcame the shame of November 1918 and restored the promise of August 1914, when Germans had pulled together for the national cause. In other words, the National Socialists tapped into a more generic ‘national socialist’ consensus that extended well beyond Hitler’s party and his electorate.”

Rest of chapter intro then goes through the standard explanations of Nazism (rejection of Treaty of Versailles and reaction to material deprivation of Great Depression) to suggest limitations of these arguments.

b. From Hindenburg to Hitler
Fritzsche here argues that there was a large coalition of different forces in search of a dream—the myth of World War I, in which national unity was combined with a popular version of politics. This coalition first came together in the vote for Hindenburg: “A remarkably broad coalition of civic groups, patriotic associations, and bourgeois parties carried the April 1925 campaign from below.” (Note here the emphasis on political activism at the grass-roots level, especially by the Stahlhelm. This is important for Fritzsche argument that this is a kind of popular and populist politics). Hindenburg ultimately was too aristocratic and old-fashioned to truly represent this vision of the future.

c. Splinter Parties and People’s Movements
Fritzsche here argues that the appearance of a large number of splinter parties even before the Great Depression suggests that the middle class was fundamentally dissatisfied with the traditional political parties (the German Democratic Party, the German People’s Party, even the German National People’s Party). Not getting what they want from these parties; identified too strongly especially with big business, “horse-trading” in parliament. People at first were drawn to single-interest groups, but fundamentally many were in yearning for a broad movement that could both appeal to their specific interest and at the same time claim to represent the nation as a whole.
d. Enter the Nazis
p. 184: “What most burghers [that is, the German middle classes], and a
great many workers besides, were looking for was a political movement that
was unabashedly nationalist, forward-looking, and social inclusive, that
recognized the populist claims of constituents without redividing them on a
basis of occupation. The party that adhered most closely to this formula was
Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist German Workers’ Party.”

p. 192: “Basic elements of the Nazi message spoke to the political
aspirations that burghers had held for more than ten years.”

i. “In the first place, the Nazis were unmistakably opposed to the Social
Democrats.”

ii. “At the same time, National Socialists tried hard to fit into the folksy
sociability that burghers had created since the end of the war.” (p. 193)

iii. “For all the neighborliness, however, the Nazis insisted that theirs was a
political movement with a national purpose. National Socialists speeches
and propaganda repudiated the narrow politics of the ‘reactionary’ bourgeois
parliamentarians and the proliferating interest groups and splinter parties.”
“Aesthetic of mobilization” created sense of energy, urgency, motion

e. the Nazi Revolution
p. 213: “National Socialists captured the political imagination of the almost
one in every two voters because they challenged the authoritarian legacy of
the empire, rejected the class-based vision of Social Democrats and
Communists, and both honored the solidarity and upheld the chauvinism of
the nation at war.”

May 1933
Sort of a conclusion, where Fritzsche talks about success of Nazis in
maintaining their popularity after 1933, despite some failure to convince
everyone and some disappointment with results. If anything, though, Nazis
probably became more popular as time went on. Why? Well, successes of
Hitler played a big role. But, strangely given the totalitarian nature of the
regime, “for many citizens, National Socialism ‘felt’ more democratic than
Weimar and certainly than Wilhelmine Germany.” (p. 227)