

3-1-2007

Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany, by Alan E. Steinweis

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Peer Reviewed

Repository Citation

Rosenfeld, Gavriel D., "Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany, by Alan E. Steinweis" (2007). *History Faculty Publications*. 18.

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Published Citation

Rosenfeld, Gavriel. "Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany, by Alan E. Steinweis." *Central European History* 40.1 (Mar 2007): 178-181.

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ministerial records and memoirs, the artwork produced by children in concentration camps and the case files of children in Nazi asylums. But Stargardt takes a giant step further, translating evidence into narrative and interpretation. The result is a powerful reminder that during the Second World War, as Karl Jaspers wrote in the year after it ended, “suffering differ[ed] in kind” (Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E. B. Ashton [New York, 1961]), and for Stargardt, those differences are crucial. He makes clear that chronology, causality, and context are important. The bombing of Hamburg follows the bombing of Warsaw. The deportation of Jews to ghettos and concentration camps precedes the Soviet attempt to rid eastern Europe of ethnic Germans. He is not out to set up a moral calculus, but he does warn against a “blanket term of ‘collective trauma’ for all the different kinds of loss and hurt children suffered” because of the Second World War. He cautions us to be sensitive to “different kinds of loss” and insists that equating different forms of suffering “does not help our historical understanding . . . Behind such a search for emotional equivalence lurks the danger of making facile moral and political comparisons between all the groups of people who suffered in the war and the Holocaust” (p. 366). He has written a book that makes facile comparison impossible. At a moment when discourses of victimization are once again in vogue in the Berlin Republic and what Norbert Frei has called the “battle over memory” continues to rage, this is an extremely important message. Stargardt illuminates the “social order as a whole” in ways that forced me to rethink the multiple meanings and moral complexity of the Second World War. *Witnesses of War* is a major achievement.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0008938907000489

Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany. By Alan E. Steinweis. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2006. Pp. 203. \$29.95. ISBN 067402205X.

The subject of Alan Steinweis’s lucid and tightly argued volume is even more intriguing than its subtitle might suggest. Rather than merely focusing on “scholarly anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany”—a phrase that seems to promise an analysis of the fairly well-studied topic of German university professors’ anti-Jewish views during the Third Reich—*Studying the Jew* focuses on the less extensively researched topic of “Nazi Jewish Studies.” For anyone familiar with the dozens of Jewish studies programs that have been established on American college campuses in the last several decades, the very phrase “Nazi

Jewish Studies” (or what the Germans called *Judenforschung*) is a jarring one that seems impossibly oxymoronical. Steinweis, however, makes a convincing case for its existence, tracing the development of this specialized branch of German academic scholarship, whose main representatives tried to square the circle by producing “objective” analyses of the Jews that simultaneously fit into the Nazi regime’s overall ideological crusade against them.

In exploring the origins of Nazi Jewish Studies, Steinweis loosely embraces a functionalist explanatory paradigm, pointing out that the field emerged through improvisation rather than central direction. More than a dozen different research institutes and organizations, headed up by competing scholars and party functionaries, were established during the 1930s and 1940s, ranging from Wilhelm Grau’s Research Department for the Jewish Question (headquartered in Walter Frank’s Institute for History of the New Germany) to Alfred Rosenberg’s Institute for Research on the Jewish Question. Significantly, the Nazi party had to exercise a direct role in founding most of these research institutes, as German academics were slow to direct their scholarly attention toward the Jewish question of their own accord. This fact notwithstanding, plenty of German academics—historians, sociologists, linguists, anthropologists, demographers, and others—found that Nazi Jewish Studies provided a welcome opportunity to advance their careers as well as the goals of Hitler’s regime.

After tracing the organizational history of Nazi Jewish Studies, Steinweis devotes the bulk of his analysis to a thematic discussion of four of the main analytical foci of Nazi Jewish Studies specialists. One of the most important tasks for the field of *Judenforschung* was the scholarly effort to “racialize” the Jew. Steinweis discusses the pioneering significance of Hans F. K. Günther’s Weimar-era book, *Rassenkunde des jüdischen Volkes* (1930), which helped to inspire subsequent efforts to confirm more scientifically the Nazis’ belief in Jewish racial otherness. Whereas Günther’s methods derived from physical anthropology, later scholars, such as Eugen Fischer and Fritz Lenz, tried to develop genetic grounding for alleged Jewish behavioral characteristics. More notoriously, some scholars, like August Hirt, at the University of Strassburg, were implicated in the killing of concentration camp prisoners to further their racist research agendas.

Beyond examining the issue of race, Nazi Jewish Studies specialists focused on other themes as well. A second was the origins of Judaism itself. Coming mostly from the field of religious studies, scholars such as Gerhard Kittel traced the links between ancient and modern Jews in the effort to determine the origins of the Jewish people’s racial composition and the roots of their “decadent” behavior. Other academics, such as Karl Georg Kuhn, utilized Talmudic sources to explain other negative Jewish behavioral traits, whether argumentativeness or intellectual dishonesty. A third major field of specialization among Nazi Jewish Studies specialists was Jewish-Christian relations and the origins of

anti-Semitism. Much of this scholarship drew upon earlier Jewish and Gentile work but was highly revisionist in its conclusions. Thus, Nazi scholars like Walter Frank criticized nineteenth-century anti-Semites (Adolf Stöcker, for instance) for failing to see the Jewish question as a racial one and not merely a matter of assimilation. Other scholars, such as Wilhelm Grau, published numerous review articles in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, ridiculing the alleged biases of the Jewish studies scholarship produced by Jewish scholars. Finally, a fourth area of emphasis for Nazi scholars was the use of social-scientific methods to arrive at explanations of the inherently “pathological” nature of Jewish behavior. Whether focusing on Jewish patterns of population growth, intermarriage, racial mixing, economic activity, or criminal behavior, scholars such as Friedrich Burgdorfer, Fritz Arlt, and Peter-Hans Seraphim, all underscored the various threats that Jews posed to the German Volk.

In addition to surveying the major research specializations of Nazi Jewish Studies specialists, Steinweis also explores the theoretical question of whether their work can be regarded as genuine scholarship. Steinweis leaves the question open at various points in his analysis, making provocative references, on the one hand, to the fact that some works “were the result of rigorous and meticulous preparation” (p. 113) and others “contained information that sometimes proved useful even to Jewish scholars after 1945 (p. 157).” On the other hand, he argues that, however much Nazi scholars stood above mere gutter-level propaganda and strove to give their work more objective and scientific grounding, they “most definitely fulfilled a partisan ideological function” (p. 157) and sought to “lend intellectual respectability” to the regime’s larger mission of disenfranchising, dispossessing, and ultimately eliminating the Jews from German life. To this end, they committed various scholarly sins, selectively using statistics and other primary sources, failing to take into account conflicting evidence, and generally refraining from adhering to basic standards of “neutrality” (p. 157).

While Steinweis is right to make this point, he also recognizes the relativity of this particular definition of scholarship, conceding that “were we to accept a less positivistic definition of scholarship . . . [that] favor[s] open partisan and ideological engagement, then much of Nazi Jewish Studies might actually qualify (p. 157).” In light of this comment, Steinweis’ multiple references to Nazi scholars’ frequent use of the scholarship of the Jewish social scientist Arthur Ruppin constitutes a disturbing case in point. Ruppin’s sociological work of the early twentieth century was manifestly ideological in the sense of using objectively gleaned statistical data to offer conclusions about the dangers of assimilation to European Jews and the increasing decadence of Diaspora Jewish life. Comparing the agendas of Zionism and Nazism is not the issue here (as it is among certain polemically minded scholars these days), but Steinweis forces us to confront an uncomfortable problem: if Nazi scholarship is to be discounted as genuine due to its ideological character, then Ruppin’s and that of other Zionists (or Marxists,

or any other ideologically committed group, for that matter) might have to be dismissed just as readily. And if Ruppin's work is not to be discounted, then would Nazi Jewish Studies have to be granted greater acceptance?

Had Steinweis wanted to explore this theoretical question more deeply, he could have made comparisons to the question of whether the scholarship of scientists in Nazi Germany was legitimately scientific or merely pseudo-scientific. He might also have compared the ethical distinctions between the permissibility of using Nazi social-science research after 1945 and the prohibitions against using Nazi scientific research based on human experimentation. In the end, though, Steinweis is less concerned with exploring these larger questions than with tracing the career trajectories of the Jewish Studies specialists themselves. In this regard, he makes one final point that is well taken—namely, that most scholars easily found academic homes for themselves in the postwar Federal Republic and seldom gave their Nazi-era activities a second thought. While not a particularly surprising finding, this revelation adds further punch to Steinweis's hard-hitting indictment against German academics and reminds us that even those who, by virtue of their critical temperament, ought to have been able to resist the lure of Nazism were unable or unwilling to do so.

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DOI: 10.1017/S0008938907000490

In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943–1949. By Jeffrey K. Olick. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2005. Pp. xiv + 380. \$29.00. ISBN 0-226-62638-5.

At first sight, a book on debates about the Nazi past and the German prospects after World War II does not seem to fill a yawning gap in scholarly literature. Jeffrey K. Olick, however, proposes a new reading of the postwar discussions about German responsibility, guilt, and the various remedies put forward to reconstruct Germany and re-educate the Germans. His approach is to “read across institutional fields and discursive contexts” (p. 327) and examine seemingly unconnected debates in various academic disciplines, intellectual publications, and politicians' speeches in order to uncover how these debates coalesced to salvage the remnants of a German identity at a time when it was “in many ways profoundly up for grabs” (p. 141). Ultimately, the study seeks to explain why early German memory of the Nazi past took the forms it did (p. 16). To this end, Olick also examines American and, to a lesser extent, British wartime debates on the roots of Nazism since these provided the points of reference (“mnemonic frameworks”) for the later German discourse.