

**Refugee Historians from Nazi Germany:
Political Attitudes towards Democracy**

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MONNA AND OTTO WEINMANN LECTURE SERIES
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THE MONNA AND OTTO WEINMANN ANNUAL LECTURE focuses on Holocaust survivors who came to America, and on their families. Born in Poland and raised in Austria, Monna Steinbach Weinmann (1906–1991) fled to England from Vienna in the autumn of 1938. Otto Weinmann (1903–1993) was born in Vienna and raised in Czechoslovakia. He served in the Czech, French, and British armies, was injured in the D-Day invasion at Normandy, and received the *Croix de Guerre* for his valiant contributions during the war. Monna Steinbach and Otto Weinmann married in London in 1941 and immigrated to the United States in 1948. Funding for this program is made possible by a generous grant from their daughter Janice Weinman Shorenstein. The Monna and Otto Weinmann Annual Lecture is organized by the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

When I was first invited to give the Weinmann lecture, it was suggested that I speak about the impact that the experiences under Nazism had on the refugee scholars, particularly the Jewish ones, that led them to become involved as I was in the struggle for racial equality and civil rights in the United States. But I had to disappoint my hosts because very few of the Jewish refugee scholars who came to this country followed such a path and my own case was atypical because I was only eleven when I arrived in this country and received almost all of my education here. I suggested that instead I talk about the attitudes towards democracy that these scholars held before their emigration from Germany and the role, if any, the scholars had in forming democratic attitudes in post-1945 Germany and critically re-examining Germany's past. Briefly, we can distinguish between two groups of émigré scholars. One consisted almost entirely of persons of Jewish ancestry who no longer considered themselves to be Jews and who had converted to Protestantism or been born into families that had converted earlier.¹ Some held political ideas hostile to Weimar democracy, in some cases even close to Nazi ideology, but had to leave Germany because of their Jewish ancestry. The second group consisted of committed democrats who had to leave because of their political views. Some in this latter group were not of Jewish ancestry, but the majority had

converted to Protestantism or had left the Jewish community. I shall begin with the first group and restrict myself to the historians, the group that I know best.

The idea exists in the United States that Jews in Germany were almost totally assimilated, that they had almost entirely broken with Jewish religion. This idea was not quite true, although it was frequently the case in the upper middle class, and particularly among intellectuals who played an important role in German culture. In fact Jewish life was still vibrant in the Jewish middle class, as distinct from the upper middle class. There were still Jewish cultural, social, and sports organizations. There was also an active Jewish intellectual life. The Jüdische Lehrhaus for Jewish studies created by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig in Frankfurt in the 1920s was famous. There existed a number of Jewish publishers such as Jüdische Verlag, Philo Verlag, and Schocken Verlag. There was already a sizable Zionist movement prior to 1933. As a matter of fact, the Jewish community was split between Zionists (who published a weekly *Jüdische Rundschau*) and non-Zionists (organized as the Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith), each with its own athletic groups, the Zionist *Makkabi* and the non-Zionist *Schild* sports club, and youth groups. In the years before the Nazi accession to power the non-Zionists still believed that Jews could be good Germans and be accepted as such, while the Zionists considered this idea an illusion and called for a Jewish national identity and a Jewish homeland.

Jewish religiosity in Germany differed from that in Eastern Europe and in North America. The Jewish Enlightenment began in Germany in the late eighteenth century with philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. Early in the nineteenth century the Liberal movement sought to overcome the gap between traditional orthodoxy and modern German culture. It simplified the religious service, loosened the attachment to ritual, and introduced the German language into the liturgy while also keeping Hebrew. Modern Orthodoxy, initiated by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in Frankfurt, appeared in the mid-nineteenth century as a counter movement insisting on the strict observance of Jewish laws, but believing that it could be combined with participation in German culture. The basis of the service was the traditional Jewish prayer book, but the sermons were in German, not Yiddish or Judeo-German. The German Liberal movement was in many ways closer to the Conservative movement in the United States than to Reform Judaism. As a child I was shocked by what I learned in the U.S. about Reform Judaism, which appeared to me as dangerously close to Protestantism. I myself grew up in a Jewish family in Hamburg. My father had been raised in an Orthodox home in

Frankfurt; my mother in a religiously indifferent family, although her grandfather had been the cantor and shames in the Temple, the important Hamburg Liberal congregation. My parents managed to find a middle way. Under the impact of the Nazis I became very observant and Zionist although the two did not logically fit together. However, they did in my circle of Jewish friends. We dreamed of going to Palestine, Eretz Yisrael as we called it, and joining a kibbutz, which would break with the stuffy atmosphere of the urban, bourgeois world of our parents. When I came to America, I was shocked by the commercialized culture that differed so much from the kibbutz that I idealized. Although I considered myself Orthodox, I felt more at home in the Conservative congregation I found in Richmond, Virginia, where we settled, than in American Orthodox ones. In the meantime some American Orthodox congregations have moved closer to Conservatism, while American Reform Judaism has returned to a more traditional outlook and liturgy.

Beginning in the early nineteenth century many German Jews had themselves baptized as Protestants. What did it mean to be baptized? To many it meant very little emotionally. They had been alienated from a Jewish religiosity, which they considered medieval, and wanted to be part of mainstream German society. The poet Heinrich Heine, who converted as a student in 1825, explained his baptism as “the ticket to European culture.”² Conversion meant a good deal professionally at least in the first two thirds of the nineteenth century before a religious anti-Judaism yielded to racial antisemitism. Converted Jews occupied important places in German academic life relatively early. Friedrich Julius Stahl (1802–1861) became the main exponent of an official conservative Protestant theory of the state. Johann August Wilhelm Neander (1789–1850), who changed his name from David Mendel upon conversion, was appointed professor of Protestant theology in Berlin in 1813. It was virtually impossible for non-converted Jews to be appointed to professorial posts. Departments of mathematics and medicine began to do so in the mid-nineteenth century, but for a long time it did not occur in the humanities, least of all in history. Harry Bresslau, who in 1890 became the first non-converted Jew to be appointed to a professorship in history, had earlier been considered for a professorship in Berlin, which he turned down when he was asked to convert. But ultimately he had his children baptized. Hermann Cohen in 1876 became the first non-converted Jew to be appointed to a professorship in philosophy. Cohen, who identified with liberal, ethical Judaism, wrote that modern liberal Judaism “has in fact entered a cultural historical liaison with Protestantism. Just

as the latter has cast off the shackles of the Church, so we have cast off those of the Talmud...and in all spiritual questions think and feel in the Protestant spirit.”³ Gradually in the Weimar Republic a few of the new more liberal universities, such as Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Cologne, ceased to discriminate when making appointments.

But what did it mean to be a Protestant? The German Evangelical Church—the official name of the Protestant Church in Germany after 1817, which emerged during the Reformation and was strongly influenced by the theology of Martin Luther—saw itself within the spirit of modern civilization, freeing itself from older fundamentalism and later in the nineteenth century embracing modern science. Many of its intellectual exponents viewed the German Evangelical Church as a modern cultural form of Protestantism (*Kulturprotestantismus*). Part of this modern Protestantism was the close identification with the German nation. However, Germany had not had a revolution in the French, English, Dutch, or American sense. Rather the movement for national unification involved the close cooperation of the emerging middle classes with the semi-autocratic Prussian Hohenzollern dynasty. Two aspects of Luther’s theology continued to play a central role in the thinking of the new nationalism. The first stressed the centrality and divine character of the state. Luther took over Paul’s admonition in the Epistle to the Romans that “the powers that be are ordained by God. Whosoever resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God.”⁴ Obedience to the Church was replaced by obedience to the prince. The Church became an arm of the state. In the age of nationalism, Luther’s reliance on Paul was seen to mean that the German nation possessed a divine mission, a belief that legitimized the wars Bismarck had waged to unify Germany under Prussian hegemony and also legitimized Germany’s role in World War I. The second component of Luther’s theology, which concerns us here, was his anti-Judaism. After having failed in his efforts to convert the Jews, Luther in his broadside *The Jews and Their Lies* (which was later enthusiastically accepted by the Nazis to legitimize their persecution of the Jews) condemned them and called for the destruction of their synagogues and their extirpation. For the German Evangelical Church during the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century past the Nazi period, Judaism was not a religion with which one could communicate; rather Jews were collectively responsible for the death of Jesus. Their only salvation was conversion, although it soon no longer sufficed. As emancipated Jews climbed the social and educational ladder and increasingly played important roles in the modern economy and culture, religious anti-Judaism after the 1870s turned into racial

antisemitism. The conception of Jews as medieval fossils was replaced by the notion of Jews as heralds of a modernity that economically threatened craftsmen, small shopkeepers, and peasants, and culturally threatened traditional values and ways of life.⁵ Discrimination then turned against not only non-converted Jews but against anyone of Jewish ancestry. Racial antisemitism, not the discrimination and persecution of the Jews as such, ultimately split the Protestant Church during the Nazi period. The Nazis attempted to create a German Protestant Church that would exclude all persons of Jewish origin and remove the pastors who had converted or come from converted families. At this point the Confessional Church was founded (in 1933) in opposition to the Nazi imposition of racial doctrine on the Church. But the Confessional Church did not protest against Nazi policies towards the Jews in so far as they did not affect its members. Pastor Martin Niemöller, who was later hailed as a courageous opponent of the Nazis, still preached in 1935 that the Jews deserved the suffering inflicted on them by the Nazis because as long as they did not convert to the true faith they bore responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus.⁶

The affirmation of a society modern in outlook in many ways yet clinging to traditional attitudes of authority (which marked cultural Protestantism) was also important for the formation of the German historical profession in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁷ History played a significant role in the creation of a sense of national identity, and became a professional discipline at Protestant German universities in the first half of the nineteenth century. The historians for the most part considered themselves to be liberals in the sense that on the economic and social planes they wanted the removal of older barriers to a free market economy and an end to feudal class divisions. On an intellectual level they wanted a free exchange of ideas and on a political level the participation of the educated middle classes in the governance of the nation. The historians played an important role in the movement leading to the 1848 Revolution that strove for national federation and a constitutional monarchy. The setbacks in the 1848 Revolution led to a reorientation on the part of a majority of the historians, reflecting the outlook of broad segments of the middle classes. They increasingly believed that German unification could not come from a revolutionary movement from below but only in alliance with the autocratic Prussian Hohenzollern dynasty; not through resolutions but, to quote Bismarck, through blood and iron. At the same time, looking at the French example, and therefore afraid of revolution, they repudiated democracy and sought a solution in a compromise between constitutional

government favoring the propertied classes and a strong monarchy that could keep revolutionary stirrings in check and establish Germany as a major world power. In a period of rapid industrialization and concomitant social conflicts, a strong Marxist-inspired Social Democratic working-class party endorsing democratization emerged as the main challenge to the established order. Under the impact of the First World War, the supporters of the German status quo formulated what may be called a “German Ideology”⁸ to justify Germany’s cause in the war and to pitch the German “Ideas of 1914” against the democratic “Ideas of 1789” of the Western Allies. Part of this ideology included the belief in the superiority of German *Kultur* with its idealistic roots over the supposedly rationalistic and commercialized *Zivilisation* of the West. This outlook also proclaimed the superiority of German culture over that of the Slavic peoples in the East and justified German expansion and domination of Eastern European peoples. The German cause in the war was given religious legitimacy through the Protestant doctrine of the state.

In these discussions the historians played a crucial role.⁹ The historical profession as it developed after the 1848 Revolution focused on the state, identified the state with the Prussian Hohenzollern monarchy, and saw the 1871 unification of Germany (under the leadership of Bismarck with the exclusion of Catholic Austria) as the high point of German history. This outlook constituted a form of orthodoxy that presented Germany’s path into the modern world; a path in which the maintenance of a semi-autocratic regime pursuing many of the social and economic aspirations of the middle classes offered an alternative superior to the Western democracies. The collapse of the Hohenzollern monarchy and the establishment of the democratic Republic in the fall of 1918 did not mark the end of this orthodoxy. Rather the majority of historians at the German universities rejected the Republic and the democracy it embodied, continued to adhere to the orthodox view of German history, and advocated the restoration of Germany’s dominant place in the world, if need be by military means.

Now, where did the historians, whom the Nazis ultimately drove to emigrate, stand?¹⁰ We can distinguish between several groups among academics with Jewish ancestry that correspond closely to a similar division among historians who had no such ancestry and who in Nazi terminology were Aryans. There were those who vehemently opposed the Republic and rejected a reconciliation with the Western states that had imposed the Versailles Treaty on Germany. One key myth of this group was that Germany had been unbeaten on the front in 1918, but had been stabbed in the back by

elements in Germany, who with their wartime demands for democratic reforms and their opposition to German war aims, had disrupted the national unity with which Germany had gone to war in 1914. Social Democrats, Communists, and frequently also the Jews were considered to be the culprits. Hans Herzfeld in a 1928 book¹¹ gave scholarly respectability to this accusation, without, however, mentioning the Jews. Herzfeld, who with a Jewish grandparent fitted the Nazi definition of a Jew, did not emigrate and managed to survive the Nazi years in Germany. Two refugee historians, Gerhard Masur and Dietrich Gerhard, as young men in 1919 joined the ultra-nationalistic, proto-fascist *Freikorps* militia. But Gerhard a few years later moved in a more democratic direction.

Among the right-wing, nationalistic historians a generational divide, however, occurred in the Weimar Republic. The older generation firmly established in the universities was criticized by younger historians who reacted against the narrowly politically oriented historical view of their elders and wanted a new history that dealt with the many aspects of life of the broad masses of the population. They understood this population not in terms of a civil society, but as an organic community that knew no social divisions but represented an ethnic nation, the German *Volk*, defined in terms of race.¹² Jews had no place in this community, nor did non-Germans. Calling for heroism and sacrifice, the advocates of a *Volk*-oriented history saw the world in terms of struggle and the war as a fight to the death against other ethnic groups. In the place of the Germany forged by Bismarck, they foresaw a Greater Germany that would include not only Austria but all the settlements of ethnic Germans along and beyond the borders of Germany, particularly in Eastern Europe. The cultural superiority of racial Germans, they believed, gave them the right and the obligation to dominate the non-German areas of the East. Apart from this movement, with a different constituency, was the circle of elite intellectuals around the poet Stefan George, who expressed his contempt for modern bourgeois civilization, which he identified with the Jews, and called for a new spiritual awakening free of the rationalist outlook that these intellectuals believed marked the contemporary world. Despite his antisemitism, he was surrounded by a group of admirers of Jewish ancestry, including literary scholar Friedrich Gundolf and at the time still young historians Arnold Berney and Ernst Kantorowicz. Berney on the one hand followed the orthodox direction of Prussian history, later writing a hagiographic biography of Frederick the Great, hoping despite his Jewish origins to have a successful academic career, but at the time of the Hitler

Putsch in 1923 admiring the Nazis who he believed would fix the ills of German society. Without giving up his admiration for the Nazis, he noted disappointedly in his diary: “Suddenly it occurred to me that (for the Nazis) I am a Jew.”¹³ He did not emigrate to the United States after 1933, but discovered his Jewish national identity and went to Palestine. Kantorowicz, in the vein of Stefan George, published in 1927¹⁴ a history of the thirteenth-century Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II in which he consciously avoided a footnote apparatus to challenge the scholarly establishment and created the myth of a great national leader who would some day redeem the German people. A swastika appeared on the cover of the book. Hitler is said to have admired the work and to have read it twice, and despite Kantorowicz’ Jewish ancestry the book was republished under the Nazis. Kantorowicz did emigrate to the United States and there revised his attitudes in a democratic direction.

But among the historians who emigrated to the United States, Hans Rothfels had the closest Nazi contacts after 1933. He was unique among the refugee historians in having grown up in a family in which both parents were non-converted Jews. His father for a while was even head of the Jewish community in Kassel. As a university student Rothfels converted and became an ardent nationalist. In 1926 at a relatively young age he became a full professor of history at the University of Königsberg in East Prussia where he taught a number of the most promising young historians who pursued a *Volk*-oriented history. Two of his most important students, Theodor Schieder and Werner Conze, after 1939 advised the Nazi government on plans to evict Poles to make space for German settlers and to free Eastern Europe of the presence of Jews. Rothfels moved away from the orthodox position of Germany as the Bismarckian state to an extended Germany in which Eastern Europe would be organized along new ethnic lines and where the Germans, whom he considered culturally superior, would dominate. Nevertheless, in 1934 he was removed from his professorial chair because of his Jewish ancestry and assigned to an undefined position in Berlin despite protest in the Nazi party, not only because of the important role he played in Königsberg furthering German ambitions in the East but also because of his international contacts with influential right-wing persons abroad, particularly those friendly to Nazi Germany. Joachim Ribbentrop, later the Nazi foreign minister, intervened personally with Hitler on his behalf. Rothfels made two unsuccessful attempts to be recognized as an honorary Aryan. Had he succeeded he would have been the only circumcised Nazi historian. Still hoping to make an arrangement in Nazi Germany, he finally left Germany for England

in August 1939, shortly before the outbreak of the war and managed in 1946 to receive a professorial appointment at the University of Chicago.¹⁵

There was also a small minority of historians who were committed democrats, but who had only marginal positions in the profession. They rejected the orthodox view that saw the highpoint of history as Bismarck's semi-autocratic state, and instead sought to broaden the historical perspective away from a narrow focus on politics to a concern with social factors. All of the historians of this democratic orientation, some of them not Jewish, fled Germany after 1933, mostly for the United States. Among an older generation there was Veit Valentin, not Jewish, who rewrote German history from a critical democratic perspective¹⁶ and who in 1917 was stripped of his right to teach at universities. Alfred Vagts, also not Jewish, dealt with the role that economic interest-groups asserted on German foreign policy. Arthur Rosenberg,¹⁷ a Marxist who in the early 1920s was an important spokesman for the German Communist Party in the Reichstag but broke with the party when it succumbed to Stalin, wrote a history of the origins of the Weimar Republic in which he pointed out why Bismarck's German empire was bound to fail from the beginning. Rosenberg, of Jewish origin, was baptized a Protestant as a child but left the church as an adult. As an avowed atheist he never joined the Jewish community, but under the impact of antisemitism discovered his Jewish identity and even became a left-oriented Zionist. Hedwig Hintze¹⁸ devoted herself to a largely taboo topic, the positive aspects of the French Revolution. Of Jewish ancestry she was a baptized Protestant, and was also the wife of the eminent historian Otto Hintze, who during the Weimar Republic had moved away from his earlier Prussian orientation to a comparative approach to social history, which led to a sober re-evaluation of the character of the state in modern society. Hedwig Hintze was offered a professorship at the New School for Social Research in New York, but was unable to obtain admission to the United States and died in her Dutch exile in 1942 as she was about to be deported.¹⁹

A younger group of critical social historians gathered in the seminars of Friedrich Meinecke at the University of Berlin. Almost all of the participants in this group were at least in part of Jewish ancestry, but none, except Ernst Simon who migrated to Palestine, identified themselves as Jewish. Meinecke was firmly devoted to the orthodox Prussian line, but differed from this orthodoxy on two important points: He moved away from a narrow concentration on politics to a concern with the impact of political ideas. And although, because of a sense of patriotism, he was an ardent

supporter of the war in 1914, he together with a small group of intellectuals including Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch soon urged a moderate line and after November 1918 supported the Weimar Republic. Although he remained a monarchist at heart, his sense of reality made him accept the Republic. He was also tolerant of other views. In an academic atmosphere in which the majority in the profession passionately opposed democracy and harbored antisemitic prejudices of which Meinecke himself was not entirely free, he was willing to work with young scholars whose views differed from his. His students thus included young people who were on the political level committed democrats, but also methodologically separated not only from the orthodox Prussian fixation on the state, but also from Meinecke's emphasis on political ideas, and moved to a greater attention to the role of social and economic factors on politics. Three names should be mentioned in particular, Hans Rosenberg who despite his Jewish ancestry was a Protestant, and two Gentiles, Eckart Kehr and Hajo Holborn, whose wife, however, was Jewish. Holborn, although an active Social Democrat, was the first and only person in this group to be appointed to a professorship, namely at the newly established *Hochschule für Politik* (University for Political Science). Kehr,²⁰ the *enfant terrible*, as the most radical of the group in his critique of German political and historiographical traditions, received a fellowship from the American Rockefeller Foundation despite opposition from members of the German professoriate who wanted to block his career. He unfortunately died in May 1933 shortly after his arrival in the United States. All of the persons in this group, including Dietrich Gerhard and Gerhard Masur, whom I have already mentioned, felt forced to leave Germany after the Nazi accession to power, for political reasons, because of their Jewish ancestry, or both. Thus a new generation of innovative scholars was expelled, leaving the German historical profession under the exclusive control of the traditional historians, who, although generally not party members, felt quite comfortable with the Nazis and in many cases cooperated with them. These young scholars made important contributions to the study of modern German history in the United States and to the exploration of how it was possible for the Nazis to come to power. In addition, three scholars of Renaissance studies, Hans Baron (a student of the already mentioned Ernst Troeltsch), Felix Gilbert, and Oscar Kristeller, played important roles in the revitalization of Renaissance studies in the United States.

Starting over in America was difficult professionally for most of these émigrés, although there were some exceptions. Holborn moved relatively rapidly from an

assistant professorship at Yale University to an endowed chair. Rothfels after tenuous employment at Brown University went to the University of Chicago; Kantorowicz to Berkeley; Felix Gilbert from Bryn Mawr College to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton; Arthur Rosenberg to Brooklyn College, where he taught until his early death in 1943; Hans Rosenberg also to Brooklyn College and ultimately to Berkeley; Dietrich Gerhard to Washington University in St. Louis; and Gerhard Masur after an initial stint in Venezuela to Sweet Briar College. George W. H. Hallgarten, who had written an important analysis of German imperialism in the context of global capitalism,²¹ found no permanent position, which may have been as much a consequence of his very difficult personality as of his political views.

The decisive breakthrough came only in the course of World War II with the creation by the U.S. government of a special office to discuss how to deal with Germany after the war. In 1942 the “Foreign Nationalities Branch” was founded within the newly established Office of Strategic Services,²² the forerunner of the CIA, and within it a special section dealt with Central European affairs. Leading American specialists such as William Langer, H. Stuart Hughes, Carl Schorske, Franklin Ford, Eugene Anderson, Walter Dorn, Gordon Craig, and Leonard Krieger met regularly with German émigré scholars including Hajo Holborn, Felix Gilbert, and social theorists Franz Neumann, Herbert Marcuse, and Otto Kirchheimer among others. Marcuse and Kirchheimer were associated with the neo-Marxist Institute for Social Research, the so-called Frankfurt School headed by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who also emigrated to the United States. Neumann had just published *Behemoth*,²³ the first major analysis of the rise of Nazism that took into account the impact of economic interests. For the participants the key questions were: how was it possible for Nazism to assume power and to carry out its terrorist and genocidal program, and, looking into the future, how to lay the foundations for a democratic Germany. Although none of these scholars maintained that Nazism was the inevitable result of German history, they nevertheless were convinced that Nazism had roots in Germany’s failure to combine national unification under Bismarck with democratization. They thus established the basis for German studies and henceforth there was a close cooperation between American and German émigré scholars. Hajo Holborn at Yale trained a younger generation, mostly American, but also young émigrés, who later occupied the most important chairs of German history in this country.

Several of the refugees who had come as children or adolescents and received the majority of their education in the United States turned to the study of Germany posing the same question of what had gone wrong.²⁴ Their work focused less on social and economic factors than on the role of attitudes and ideas that had marked German politics and society since the eighteenth century. George Mosse in *The Crisis of German Ideology* and other works traced the role of *völkisch*, that is racial, thought from the German political romantics to the Nazis, linking it in his later works to sexual, male-centered attitudes. Fritz Stern in *The Politics of Cultural Despair* analyzed the political and cultural thought of three ideologues who had prepared the way to the Nazi revolution. Peter Gay dealt with a much broader sphere of German culture from Stefan George to psychoanalysis, not restricting himself to the extreme right. My *The German Conception of History* dealt not with the cultural revolutionaries on the far right but with the illiberalism of the mainstream scholarly establishment since the early nineteenth century that, although not directly leading to the Nazis, created an outlook that made it easy for German academics to accept the Nazis. Two Austrians who belong to this generation should be mentioned, Gerda Lerner, who did pioneer work in feminist history from a critical social perspective, and George Kren, who approached the Holocaust from a psychoanalytical angle.

Now let us look at Germany after 1945, more specifically at West Germany.²⁵ With the innovative historians gone, the conservative school had a clear monopoly. Nazi racist ideology was abandoned, indeed was taboo, yet nevertheless the majority of the historians, even after the defeat of Nazism, saw Bismarck's semi-autocratic solution of the German question, which rejected a Western style democratic order, as the positive outcome of German history. Few accepted responsibility for Nazism. Of the historians who had emigrated to the United States only Hans Rothfels returned permanently, nor were the others particularly welcome. On the other hand, historians who had been deeply involved with the Nazi regime were in most cases very soon reintegrated into the profession. Rothfels, who in West Germany played an important role as a political intellectual, as a professor at Tübingen University and as a director of the newly founded Institute for Contemporary History,²⁶ offered an interpretation in his book *The German Opposition to Hitler*²⁷ that was widely accepted at the time. According to him the only true opposition to Hitler was that of the military men and the aristocrats involved in the assassination plot of July 20, 1944. Nazism, he argued, was a European phenomenon with roots in the French Revolution, and not peculiarly German.

It arose in Germany not because Germany had been too little democratic, but because in the Weimar Republic it had been too democratic, permitting the masses to place the Nazis into power. There was a tendency in the two decades after the end of the war to focus not on the crimes that the Germans had perpetrated but to see the Germans as victims of the bombings and the expulsions. Rothfels, together with the already mentioned Schieder, was an editor of a multi-volume document project (sponsored by the West German government) on the expulsion of the German population from Eastern Europe.²⁸ These expulsions did constitute crimes against humanity that should have been documented, but the documentation failed to give adequate attention to the German crimes that had preceded them.

Schieder and Conze, who as we know today from recent scholarship were deeply involved as historians in Nazi plans for ethnic cleansing,²⁹ something that was largely hidden at the time, became the two most important mentors of young history students in the post-1945 era. They avoided the racist language of the Nazi period, but still maintained essential elements of their earlier views of history. As mentioned, they had rejected the narrow political focus of the orthodox historians for a broader social history and had abandoned the concentration on the *Volk* and the longing for the agrarian world of the Middle Ages. Instead they focused on modern industrial society. Conze founded the very influential Working Circle for Modern Social History in which many of the young critical historians did their work. But like many of the older German historians, Conze and Schieder, unlike the majority of their students, saw Nazism as an integral part of modern society with few roots in German history.

Yet by the 1960s, when a new generation of historians educated in the postwar period reached intellectual maturity, the political atmosphere had changed. In 1961 Fritz Fischer, who had been associated with a Nazi historical institute, published a book on Germany's responsibility for the First World War, entitled *Germany's Aims in the First World War*,³⁰ which burst onto the German stage like a bombshell. Fischer, on the basis of archival evidence, concluded that the German imperial government bore direct responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, thus refuting the common belief in Germany that war came as a result of the breakdown of the system of alliances in which all sides shared equally. He went further and linked the decision to go to war to the insufficiently democratic structure of Germany in an industrial age. He saw the war as an attempt to escape internal conflicts and to block the demands for democratic and social reforms that would have threatened the status quo. At the same time he

documented the government's plans for extensive territorial expansion (under pressure from economic interest groups) that foreshadowed those of the Nazis.

Independently of Fischer, a generation of historians born around 1930 and educated in the postwar era, saw the course of history very differently from their mentors Conze and Schieder. They went back to criticisms of German history held by Weimar intellectuals who had been forced to emigrate. Hans Rosenberg gave several seminars in Germany in the immediate postwar period that were attended by young historians who would play an important role in the reshaping of historical consciousness in West Germany. While the orthodox historians had hailed Germany's deviation from the course of democratization in the West, younger historians such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Hans Mommsen, Wolfgang Mommsen, Gerhard A. Ritter—not to be confused with the older conservative and ultranationalist Gerhard Ritter—and Jürgen Kocka sought to move Germany in the direction of a modern democracy with a social conscience. They moved away from the anti-rationalism and the nationalism of the older school to a critical historical social science, as practiced by the émigré historians, and to an openness to the world. It is important to note that almost all of the younger historians spent considerable time in the United States and Great Britain and established contacts with social scientists there, as well as with the surviving refugee intellectuals.

Thus the political outlook changed among the historians. Although the German historical profession had been highly regarded throughout the academic world from the nineteenth century until World War I, German historians for the most part had little interest in or regard for historical studies abroad. For the first time West German historians participated actively in international scholarly discussions. A main concern of historical studies in West Germany was the question of how it was possible for the Nazis to establish their reign of terror, and to apply methods of social analysis to explore what went wrong in Germany's development since the nineteenth century. Important contributions to this analysis came from the work of refugee intellectuals. However, the well-publicized Historians' Controversy³¹ of the mid-1980s demonstrated not unsurprisingly that there were dissident voices who sought to minimize German responsibility for the crimes perpetrated under Nazism, but they constituted a minority. It had been predicted that the reunification of Germany in 1990 would lead to a reassertion of nationalist sentiments. This has not been the case. Not only the historians but also the media, particularly television,³² continue to confront the public with

Germany's past. Textbooks in Germany deal extensively and openly with this past so that German school children are made fully aware of the Holocaust, something that had not been the case in the early postwar years. Also considerable attention is being paid to the contribution of Jews to German culture in pre-Nazi Germany and to the rich heritage that was destroyed. Thus in an important way the work of the refugee intellectuals of the Weimar period has not been in vain.

Notes

1. See George L. Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), and George L. Mosse, *Germans and Jews: The Right, the Left, and the Search for a "Third Force" in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1970), particularly ch. 4, "The Influence of the Volkish Idea on German Jewry," pp. 77–109.
2. In German, "Der Taufzettel ist das Eintrittsbillet zur europäischen Kultur," see Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Klaus Briegleb (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 1976), 11: 622.
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Born in Hamburg, Germany, GEORG G. IGGERS emigrated with his parents to the United States in October 1938. He received his B.A. from the University of Richmond and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He began teaching at Philander Smith College, a historically black college in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1950, where he gained admission for his students to the then-segregated Little Rock Public Library. In 1951, he joined the board of directors of the Little Rock branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and became chairman of its education committee. Professor Iggers aided in preparation of lawsuits to bring about the desegregation of public schools, including the suit against the Little Rock Board of Education. Today he remains a member of the NAACP board of directors (Buffalo branch). Professor Iggers is author or editor of nearly two dozen scholarly works on German and European intellectual, social, and political history. His book *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (1968, 1983) was a significant component of the 1960s movement by young German historians to critically examine Germany's past.

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