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**Evan Burr Bukey.** *Jews and Intermarriage in Nazi Austria.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 232 pp. $85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-107-00285-2.

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## Confusing the Nazis

Evan Burr Bukey opens this fascinating book with a startling statistic: when the Nazi leadership planned to complete the genocide of European Jewry at the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942, fully two-fifths of the discussions were taken up with what to do with the relatively small group of intermarried couples (one Jewish spouse and one non-Jewish) and their âmixedâ offspring. The answer, which might surprise many, was that not much was done with them, at least in terms of the exterminationist policy that was otherwise meted out to European Jewry. On the one hand, for the Reich, and also for Vienna, according to the statistics outlined by Bukey, between 85 and 90 percent of Jews with non-Jewish spouses survived the Holocaust. On the other hand, as Bukey also shows, the survival of so many intermarried Jews and their *Mischling* children was not achieved without many attempts by Nazi radicals to overcome what they saw as this blemish on German racial purity, nor without much suffering of persecution, and fear of deportation and death, on the part of the intermarried couples and their âmixedâ children, especially toward the end of the Nazi regime.

The main reasons that more decisive action was not taken against those âstanding âin betweenââ appear to have been fear on Adolf Hitlerâs part of popular unrest, but also genuine confusion on the part of many in authority, whether within the Nazi apparatus or the ministerial and court hierarchies, as to who was or was not a âJewâ (p. 199). Bukey provides a very useful chart that outlines the definition of Jewish identity according to the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. What is striking about these identifications is the fact that this supposedly race-based approach to the exclusion of Jews from German society was in key points one in which religious definitions, reflecting much more traditional notions of Jewish identity, played the central role. Hence, those with one Jewish parent and one (non-Jewish) German parent were regarded as *Mischlinge* of the First Degree, and hence not Jews as such, unless they were members of the Jewish religious community, when they were defined as âcounting as Jews,â or *Geltungsjuden* (p. xv). At first sight this might not seem so odd, given the Nazi wish to exclude anything or anyone âJewishâ from society, but what it did mean was that âraceâ could be defined by culture and belief, rather than the biological determinants that race theory called for. Hence there were cases where culturally produced marking trumped racial identification. One victim of this paradox was the illegitimate son of an Aryan mother and Jewish father, born in 1920, who was brought up Jewish, but then left the religious community some time after the Anschluss; thinking himself, as a *Mischling* who had left the religion, as no longer a Jew, Eugen G. then had an affair with a non-Jewish girl, and in 1941 was arrested by the Gestapo for âracial defilementâ (*Rassenschande*). He passed all the biological tests–which purported to look for âJewishâ racial features–and was found by Viennaâs premier racial scientist, Josef Wastl, free of any such Jewish taint, but the judge sentenced Eugen G. to eighteen-months penal servitude for racial

defilement, because his circumcision âshould have made him aware of his Jewish identityâ (p. 170). Hence a culturally produced (albeit physical) marking trumped race, even in cases of *Rassenschande*, where race should have been the prime concern.

Intermarried couples and *Mischlinge* also confused Nazi thinking by their very existence. As Bukey remarks, âthe idea of being part-Jewish and part-German made little sense in a society based on notions of discrete racesâ (p. 80). This was primarily a problem for those caught in between, but it was also a theoretical and policy problem for the party, the state, and legal authorities. The inclusive âboth/andâ logic of intermarriage could turn the âeither/orâ logic of the racist nationalism of National Socialism on its head. Hence radicals might want to eradicate all trace of Jewish blood in German society, but others worried about losing the *German* blood that the half-Jewish/half-German *Mischlinge* did after all have. Immediately after the Wannsee Conference, the representative there of the Interior Ministry, Wilhelm Stuckart, pointed out in a memo that âdeporting the half-Jews would mean abandoning the half of the blood which is Germanâ (p. 144). There were *racial* reasons for being solicitous of *Mischlinge*, because they were–partly–German. The consequence of this thought of thinking can be seen in a case in November 1942 in Vienna, where two sisters, Jewish Roman Catholic converts married to Aryan men, were shown leniency âout of concern for the children of a mixed marriageâ (p. 153). Where some Nazis wanted to obliterate all trace of Jewish race, others within the various hierarchies of power were more concerned to protect and foster those with German blood.

Had the Nazis continued in power, it is probable that such niceties would have been swept away by a more single-minded approach, adumbrated by Hitler in his sterner moods, of obliteration. The survival of intermarried Jews and *Mischlinge* was all, as Bukey puts it laconically, âa matter of timingâ (p. 145). Nevertheless, they did present the Nazis with a logic-defying puzzle that produced bizarre moral results: many individuals vastly improved their situations by their mothers claiming that their children were the product of adultery or prostitution, rather than their legitimate children with their Jewish husbands. Illegitimate children were given preferential treatment in the courts when trying to prove that they were not Jewish, and many individuals escaped the fate of being partly Jewish because the policy of the courts was, as a rule, to believe Aryans, including Aryan mothers of the legal sons of their Jewish husbands, even when they âadmittedâ to adultery. It is fairly clear that in many cases this was simply a ruse to help children, because intermarried couples often stayed together despite such admissions of infidelity.

Throughout Bukeyâs careful analysis of the various aspects of the predicament of those âin betweenâ and their treatment at the hands of the Nazis, what is striking are the often absurd situations individuals and couples were put into; the way the system, though often capricious, generally followed the logic of its own procedures, exercising even a form of the rule of law; the ingenious ways in which intermarried couples and their children tried–often successfully–to navigate this Kafkaesque system; the constant dread in which many lived–on the edge of acceptability in Nazi Viennese society; and the considerable courage that the vast majority showed in doing what otherwise would seem a simple thing: sticking to your spouse. Whether he is discussing attempts by individuals to contest their status, as well as the pressures and realities of intermarried divorce, or the attempts of the authorities after 1942 to âtighten the nooseâ around intermarried couples and *Mischlinge*, and the latterâs various responses to this pressure, Bukey never loses sight of the individual fates involved, and his book, for all its intelligent analysis of the ins and outs of Nazi policy, is at its best as a compendium of remarkable, exceptionally painful, but also moving and poignant vignettes of humans reacting to impossible, even insane situations, often with estimable courage and grace.

There are examples of pure evil, as with the Aryan wife who arranged for her Jewish husband to be deported to Poland and then sued for divorce on the grounds of abandonment. There are also choice quotations showing the absurdly pseudo-scientific nature of racial science, as in the description of one individual as belonging to a âmixed race of dark Ostian-Cro-Magnon ancestry with faint Near Eastern-Oriental features found in Russian societyâ (p. 77). Then there are examples of the capricious peculiarity of some Nazi actions, as when the Gestapo picked up an intermarried Jew, Heinrich âIsraelâ Trepler, for picking up cigarette butts in the street. For irritating passersby with this âdisgusting appearance and behaviorâ Trepler was sent to Theresienstadt (p. 160). He was murdered, ultimately, for picking up cigarette butts. It is in the context of such irrationality that the decision of so many couples to stay together, even in ânon-privilegedâ marriages (usually Jewish man/Aryan woman), in the face of immense pressure on the part of the authorities for the couple to divorce, looks more and more admirable.

In the end, the vast majority of Jews who survived

in Vienna did so because they were married to non-Jews. This fact does nothing to mitigate the sheer evil and horror of the genocidal fate of so many Viennese Jews, to say nothing of the murder of the other millions of Jews and others in the Holocaust, but it does say something about the quotidian, quiet courage of both the Gentile men who stood by their Jewish wives and especially the 93 percent of intermarried Gentile women who stood by their Jewish men, with all the increasing persecution that entailed. Bukey dedicates this modest, seemingly analytic and matter-of-fact, yet deeply moving book to the memory of his parents. It is also, implicitly, a book dedicated to parents everywhere, who put their love for each other, and for their children, above all the ideological absurdities that have been the bane of history, modern history, and the Nazi era in particular.

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