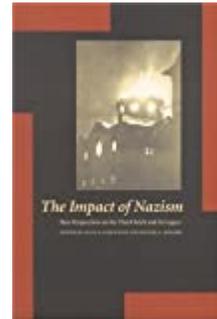


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Alan E. Steinweis, Daniel E. Rogers, eds. *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. xvii + 260 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-4299-9.



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If an essay collection is difficult to review, a Festschrift is usually impossible. The latter frequently lacks cohesion because its organizing principle is more often than not a person and not an historical question or issue. Honoring an eminent scholar—while admirable—does not generally lend itself to an integrated historical analysis, especially when the contributors have only the honoree in common. *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and its Legacy*, a collection of essays edited by Alan Steinweis and Daniel Rogers in honor of the pre-eminent German scholar Gerhard Weinberg, is an exception. The contributors of this volume, all scholars in their own right, are also former students of Weinberg and thus their research and his, have much in common.

As the title suggests, the book is a collection of thirteen essays devoted to an examination of the impact of Nazism on various individuals, national groups, social institutions, and political movements. While the essays are not clearly delineated by chapters (this is not unexpected as one essay does not a chapter make), themes can be easily identified. Not surprisingly, many of the essays deal specifically with the effects of Nazi racial and population policy on various groups in and outside of Germany. For instance, Johnpeter Horst Grill, in “The American South and Nazi Racism,” offers an examina-

tion of the ways in which Nazi racial policy influenced the debate about social equality in the southern United States, especially the discourse about the place of African Americans in American society. His study finds that for those people who already harbored racist attitudes, Nazi racial policy was embraced as an example to emulate, whereas for liberals whose tendency it was to promote social equality and justice, the opposite was true. Alan Steinweis’ “Antisemitic Scholarship in the Third Reich and the Case of Peter-Heinz Seraphim” takes a longer view than Grill in his study of the lingering effects of Nazi antisemitism on the German academy. In his examination of the ways in which German scholars contributed to the persecution of European Jewry, Steinweis concludes that the antisemitic “scholarship” of contemporaries such as Seraphim—a leading Nazi Jewish scholar—had a profoundly negative impact on the development of Nazi racial policy during the Third Reich as well as a lasting effect in contemporary Germany which manifested in the absence of the legitimate study of Jewish life and culture in universities until relatively recently.

Two essays on the impact of population and resettlement policy, “A Reassessment of Volksdeutsche and Jews in the Volhynia-Galicia-Narew Resettlement” by Valdis Lumans and “The Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe and the Collapse of the Nazi Empire, 1944-1945” by Doris

Bergen, are particularly illuminating. Lumans offers a reassessment of his earlier analysis (1993) of the role of resettlement policy on the origins of the “Final Solution” in light of recent scholarship on the subject. In particular, Lumans challenges Goetz Aly’s position about the functionalist origins of the Holocaust, acknowledging the important but nonetheless limited role local officials played in the execution of Nazi racial policy in the region, while emphasizing the centrality of Berlin in the decision-making process. Bergen, on the other hand, offers a case study of the immediate and long-term effects of population policy on the ethnic Germans of eastern Europe which, in her view, was disastrous. She notes that the ethnic Germans of this area found their fate intimately linked to, and affected by, the German war effort and the regime’s genocidal policy in more than material ways. Not only did Nazi resettlement policy cause a permanent shift of population transfers and ethnic boundaries, it also caused the erasure of ethnic coexistence. During the earlier years of the war, the Nazis emphasized racial hostility and competition, but at war’s end, when it was fairly clear that the Germans would lose, ethnic Germans who had benefited from the earlier policy simply refused to abandon these ideas and found themselves, as a result, struggling to find a satisfactory place within their new communities.

A second, but equally important focus of the book includes those essays devoted to issues of the internal organization of the Third Reich, especially the role of the military and paramilitary organizations in the functioning of the state and the execution of the “Final Solution.” In one essay of particular interest to this reviewer, Edward Westermann’s “Shaping the Police Soldier as an Instrument for Annihilation,” Westermann offers a new interpretation of the reasons for the behavior of the police units on the eastern front, in the genocidal campaign that began with Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 and culminated in the European-wide murder of the Jews. Largely in response to the debate generated by Goldhagen’s so-called ordinary Germans and Browning’s ordinary men, but also building on his earlier work on Police Battalion 310,[1] Westermann posits an alternative explanation for why German policeman became exceptional killers. The answer is, in part, organizational. The forced militarization of the German police, coupled with their merger into the SS and subsequent indoctrination, meant that when the time came to carry out the racial war in the east in 1941, the Nazis found themselves with police battalions that were already well prepared “instruments of annihilation.” Westermann’s conclusions are reinforced in a sub-

sequent article by David Yelton, “The SS, NSDAP, and the Question of *Volkssturm* Expansion.”

A third theme of the collection, the nature and functioning of power in the Third Reich, is highlighted in a comparative essay by Alan Wilt on the High Command structures of Germany, Britain and the United States. Here, Wilt emphasizes Hitler’s influence on the command structure of the German military and the negative impact this had on military strategy and ultimately the outcome of the war. Yelton’s essay on the creation and expansion of the *Volkssturm*, on the other hand, clearly illustrates the polycratic nature of the regime and the fierce competition that resulted from it, in this instance between the NSDAP (Bormann) and the SS (Himmler). The collection fittingly ends with a lengthy discussion of the legacy of Nazism in the legal, economic and political arenas in the context of war’s end and the emergence of the fledgling Federal Republic. Daniel Rogers’s concluding essay about the confrontation by the postwar German Chancellors with the Nazi past (particularly the Holocaust) suggests that the challenges posed by such a negative history have not yet disappeared. Because the troubling legacy of Nazism has not dissipated over time, what is certain, according to Rogers, is that at the highest levels of government the debate about the place of the Third Reich and its genocidal policy in German history will remain ambiguous.

Admittedly, this collection contains a wide variety of essays on divergent aspects of the history of the Third Reich. As a result, it is perhaps not as focused as a collection that is devoted to a single theme might otherwise be. Nonetheless, *The Impact of Nazism* is an important book for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the high level of scholarship by the authors of this collection and the substantial contribution to the field of modern German history that each author makes individually and the book makes collectively. There is no doubt that the essays highlighted here add new insight into persistent and vexing questions about the place of the Third Reich in German history, the nature and functioning of the Nazi state, and the development and impact of population, racial, and foreign policy. Whether you are interested in the character of European fascism and the impact that Nazism had on fascist movements outside of Germany or the ways in which Germans confronted their recent past, there is an essay here for virtually everyone. On a more personal level, the book might be more appropriately titled, “Gerhard Weinberg’s Legacy” which, in the form of a coterie of young, enthusiastic, and committed scholars, is indeed an impressive and important one. I recom-

mend this book to anyone interested in learning more about how Nazism impacted a wide-range of people in different countries and in different aspects of their lives. I also recommend it to those who teach advanced level courses on the history of the Third Reich because many of the essays here could be easily incorporated into various themes of such a course. Finally, the collection should be read by experts whose research intersects with the contributors of this book because, as I have suggested, the essays in this collection indeed add new perspectives to old interpretive questions of the functioning and legacy of the Third Reich.

Note

[1]. Edward Westermann, " 'Ordinary men' or 'ideological soldiers'? Police Battalion 310 in Russia, 1942," in *German Studies Review* 21 (February 1998), pp. 41-68.

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