

German-Speaking Refugee Historians Researching National Socialism and Their Reception in West Germany

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“I studied and taught the German past with American eyes and for American students and readers,”¹ historian Fritz Stern, born in Breslau in 1926, reflected in his memoirs *Five Germanys I Have Known*, published in 2006, explaining the perspective from which he wrote about the past. From the distance of US academia he spent decades observing a once-familiar Germany as one among many scholars who fled National Socialism and went on to shape the discipline of history in their new home country, the United States, during the postwar years.

Stern experienced the loss of his personal freedom when he was a young boy, one of the most influential experiences of his life. After Hitler seized power in 1933, he became burdened by an antisemitism he had not experienced before. Before 1933, Stern, who had been baptized, did not know that his grandparents were Jewish. His father, a renowned doctor, found himself enduring both professional restrictions

¹ Fritz Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known* (New York, 2006).

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2 Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known*, 125–29.

3 Fritz Richard Stern, *Zu Hause in der Ferne: Historische Essays* (München, 2015), 10.

4 Fritz Stern, "German History in America, 1884–1984," *Central European History* 19, no. 2 (1986): 132; Kenneth D. Barkin, "Amerikanische Forschungen (1945–1975) zur modernen deutschen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte," in *Die moderne deutsche Geschichte in der internationalen Forschung: 1945–1975*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Sonderheft 4 (Göttingen, 1978), 12.

established by the NS government and personal antisemitic insults from his would-be colleagues. The middle-class Stern family soon launched into preparing to emigrate, but finding a place of refuge within Europe proved harder than they had expected.² In 1938, shortly after the November Pogrom, the family fled to the United States. Decades after their escape Stern wrote in his memoirs that he perceived their emigration as a chance to start over. In the following years, he was able to watch Germany from a new vantage point.³ Stern studied history and political science at Columbia University in New York City. Only a few years after the end of the war, he began establishing scholarly contacts in his native country and focusing on the history of the recent German past.

In 1984, four decades later, at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA) in Chicago, Stern spoke about his own attempts and those of his colleagues to study German history and "the German problem" by considering specific factors in the German past that had led to the rise of National Socialism. Most of those who researched "the German problem" during and after the war, Stern emphasized, were German-speaking émigrés in Great-Britain and the US.⁴ Stern belonged to a group of émigré historians – including Hans Rosenberg, George L. Mosse and Raul Hilberg – who intended to write the history of their native country in a new manner by challenging the interpretation of those historians who had stayed in Germany. Many émigré scholars regarded these interpretations as inconsistent with their own perspective on Germany's national development, and in particular with their efforts to explain how Germany's national identity produced (as they saw it) the Nazi regime and the Holocaust.

Their native country had become foreign to these émigré historians. After their arrival in the United States, where they were not necessarily welcomed with open arms, they learned to look at the recent German past in a fresh and unobstructed way. They wrote and taught German history in a foreign language and saw themselves as interlocutors between Germany

and the anglophone world. They quickly learned to use their novel perspective – their American eyes – to address the rise of National Socialism, antisemitism, and mass murder in Germany. In so doing, they not only became German-Americans but also translators in both directions between the two cultures. They thought and wrote about German history in an innovative way and thus contributed to the reshaping of the field of history in Germany. On the one hand, refugee historians tried not to focus on their personal background and experiences in their formal scholarly publications but, instead, emphasized their role as scholars and analysts. On the other hand, they wrote about their collective experiences in personal letters and, by the end of their careers, in published memoirs and autobiographical essays.

In my recently published book, *Unerbetene Erinnerung*, I studied how German-speaking émigré historians shaped the study of National Socialism and the Holocaust after 1945 and how their interpretations were received by their contemporaries. How did they recount and interpret National Socialism and the Holocaust in their scholarly work? What response did their interpretations receive in West Germany and the United States?

By dividing these émigré historians into two different generations, I create a narrative that draws on the history of knowledge, the history of experience, and the history of historiography. The protagonists of my study are George W. F. Hallgarten, Hajo Holborn, Adolf Leschnitzer, and Hans Rosenberg, as members of the first generation; and Henry Friedlander, Raul Hilberg, Georg Iggers, George L. Mosse, Fritz Stern, Herbert A. Strauss, and Gerhard L. Weinberg as members of the second generation. A person's emigration had a different impact on the course of their life depending on their age at the time of emigration. For the first generation, emigration interrupted their professional careers. By contrast, emigration represented a more limited break for most members of the second generation, as they were able

5 Trutz von Trotha, *Politische Kultur, Fremdenfeindlichkeit und rechtsradikale Gewalt. Notizen über die politische Erzeugung von Fremdenfeindlichkeit und die Entstehung rechtsradikaler Gewalt in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Beitrag zur Tagung „No Justice - No Peace?“* (Philadelphia, 1993), 6 f. Thomas Herz, "Rechtsradikalismus und die 'Basiserzählung': Wandlungen in der politischen Kultur Deutschlands," *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 37 (1996); Thomas Herz, "Die 'Basiserzählung' und die NS-Vergangenheit: Zur Veränderung der politischen Kultur in Deutschland," *Gesellschaften im Umbruch: Verhandlungen des 27. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Halle an der Saale*, ed. Lars Clausen, 1996.

to complete high school or postsecondary studies in the United States. This made it easier for them to start a career there. However, they experienced the violence and antisemitism of the Nazi regime as children or young adults and later reflected on these experiences more intensively than the older generation.

In the book's three main chapters, I combine accounts of these protagonists' biographical backgrounds with analysis of their main topics of study and their approaches. I studied the contribution of the historians with the aid of five analytical approaches, namely thematic (How did refugee historians examine the topics of National Socialism and the Holocaust from a historical perspective?); methodological (What methods did they use to research these topics?); empirical (On which sources did they base their research?); from the standpoint of academic organization (Did they influence the process of academic institutionalization? And if so, how?); and finally with respect to public resonance (Did their approaches receive public attention?). My study regards the discourses in which these scholars were involved as struggles over interpretive sovereignty in their academic discipline. I therefore combined discourse analysis with field analysis.

In historiographical discourses about the Nazi past, a struggle over the limits of a possible cultural (and, in modern times, also national) self-understanding is evident. This is especially true for West Germany, even though it did not have an explicit national identity. Rather, there is a defensive reaction to the recent past, emphasizing the positive aspects of the national past over unpleasant ones. Thomas Herz, based on Trutz von Trotha, calls this approach the basic narrative. A basic narrative contains the following defining characteristics: (a) it is a construction of the history of a society and culture; (b) it is not just any construction but the dominant one; (c) this is because it has a legitimizing function for the society and culture; and (d) a basic narrative is inert but changeable.⁵ According to

Dogmas of the Basic Narrative	
1	Relativization of the active contribution of Germans in Nazi crimes
2	The Nazis established a coercive regime against which no internal resistance could grow.
3	Germans learnt from the past
4	Germans built a plural democracy after 1945
5	The Holocaust was one crime among many others
6	Germans paid their debts

Figure 1. Dogmas of the West German basic narrative, Thomas Herz; table by Anna Corsten.

Herz, the basic narrative of West Germany after 1945 consisted of the six dogmas listed in the table above.

The notion of the basic narrative is crucial to my work since it functions as a legitimizing narrative that is constructed through the past. Thus, the basic narrative helps to explain how the interpretations of émigré historians have been negotiated among historians in West Germany. It contains coherent and, in some ways, simplifying ideas about how to deal with the Nazi past. The contrasting interpretations advanced by emigré scholars, which were long marginalized in West Germany, can be assessed against this framework, shedding light on the reasons for their marginalization.

The overall goal of my book is to analyze how a transatlantic historiography of National Socialism and the Holocaust emerged. It therefore focuses on different scholarly approaches to their study. For example, many historians dealt with the nineteenth century or even earlier epochs to identify long-term (mis)developments that had led to the rise of National Socialism. The caesuras of 1933 (the transfer of power to Hitler) and 1941 (the beginning of the systematic murder of Jews) were the vanishing points of their research.

Focusing on three protagonists of my study, this article seeks to illuminate the transformation of the basic narrative in West Germany as well as the key steps in the genesis of the research field of Nazi and Holocaust studies. In doing so, the article will address three questions that shaped the discourse around the recent German past and the narrative around the German past: first, the question of who was supposed to write German history; second, the conflict over how German history should be written, and third, the question of how the (symbolic) reevaluation of Nazi and Holocaust research came about.



Figure 2. Adolf Leschnitzer, without date, F 25117, Adolf Leschnitzer Collection, AR 25320, Leo Baeck Institute New York. Reproduced by permission.

6 Hans von Kress and Friedrich Meinecke to Adolf Leschnitzer, Nov. 15, 1951, Adolf Leschnitzer Collection (ALC), AR 25320, Box 8/Folder 33, Leo Baeck Institute New York (LBI). German original: "Wir würden eine Zusage Ihrerseits, im Rahmen der Philosophischen Fakultät und auch für Hörer aller Fakultäten über ‚Die Geschichte und Problematik der deutsch-jüdischen Beziehungen‘ zu lesen, sehr begrüßen. Es ist uns ein Herzensbedürfnis, von unserer Seite alles zu tun, diese schwerwiegenden Probleme objektiv zu behandeln und unseren Beitrag zu leisten, um so einer Versöhnung den Weg zu ebnen, der uns hilft, über das grauenhafte Geschehen der vergangenen Jahre hinwegzukommen."

I. Who May Write German History: Adolf Leschnitzer

Adolf Leschnitzer, born in 1899 in Posen, belonged to the first generation of émigré historians. During the Weimar Republic, he studied German and history and then worked as a high school teacher; it was only after his emigration that he embarked on an academic career in higher education.

After the war, Adolf Leschnitzer taught German language and literature in New York City. In 1951, he received a letter from the rector of the recently founded Freie Universität Berlin (FU), Hans von Kress, and its honorary rector, Friedrich Meinecke. Von Kress and Meinecke invited him to come to Berlin for a visiting professorship:

We would very much appreciate a commitment on your part to lecture on "The History and Problems of German-Jewish Relations" within the framework of the Faculty of Philosophy and also for listeners of other faculties. It is our deepest desire to do everything we can from our side to deal objectively with these grave problems and to contribute to a reconciliation that will help us to get over the horrible events of the past years.⁶

Von Kress and Meinecke's expectations illustrate problems in dealing with National Socialism during the early postwar

years. The idea of being able to deal with the Holocaust in an “objective” way a few years after the end of the war reveals the prevailing desire to overcome what had happened. The period 1933 to 1945 was to be analyzed objectively, without drawing moralizing conclusions from it. In the following decades, the desire for an objective discussion remained a central notion that limited discourses in historical scholarship. Meinecke’s and von Kress’ reference to the “horrific event” remained unspecific. The deed, perpetrators, and victims remained invisible in their statement to Leschnitzer. The term “reconciliation” also implied wrongdoing on both sides, suggesting both Jews and Germans had to make amends for their mistakes. In this way, too, the crimes, and above all the guilt, of the Germans were hidden.

The invitation was the result of an initiative by the émigré historian Hans Rosenberg, who knew Leschnitzer from Brooklyn College in New York City and recommended his colleague to the Free University. Rosenberg argued that Leschnitzer could contribute to a “historical self-reflection and sociological position-fixing of the present” and heartily endorsed his “academic achievements, his richly ramified professional experience and the insights gained in the wake of his international life’s wanderings” set in motion by the Pogrom Night of 1938.⁷ Leschnitzer, however, had reservations about returning to Germany, even if it was for a limited time. Leschnitzer’s first reaction to the request revealed the discomfort it caused him: “The letter was worded carefully, cordially and nobly. [. . .] My first reaction was that I could not accept this invitation. I did not want to go to Germany even for a visit, even for such a purpose, probably a noble purpose.”⁸

Leschnitzer’s reaction, which he repeated in a speech he gave at the conferral of an honorary doctorate by the Free University in 1956, seems diplomatic. He interpreted the tenor of the invitation as “cautious.” That he initially intended to decline the invitation was an expression of a deeper attitude that can be interpreted as distance toward Germany. This also becomes apparent in Leschnitzer’s choice of the English

⁷ Rosenberg to Außenkommission der FU Berlin, Oct. 1, 1951, FU Berlin University Archives (UA), GD, Hans Rosenberg. German original: “historische Selbstbesinnung und soziologische Ortsbestimmung der Gegenwart” and “wissenschaftlichen Leistungen, seiner reich verzweigten Berufserfahrung und der im Gefolge seiner internationalen Lebenswanderung gewonnenen Erkenntnisse”.

⁸ Rede Freie Universität Berlin 1956, ALC, B 11/F 49.

9 Leo Baeck to Adolf Leschnitzer, December 21, 1951, ALC, B 5/F 7.

10 The English version only appeared in 1956, two years after the German publication of *Saul und David*. Adolf Leschnitzer, *The Magic Background of Modern Anti-Semitism: An Analysis of the German-Jewish Relationship* (New York, 1956).

11 German original: "Anderssein von Majoritäten und Minderheit."

language in his reply. Leschnitzer's attitude differed from that of other emigré historians of the first generation who accepted visiting professorships in Germany soon after the end of the war. Leschnitzer exchanged his thoughts about the invitation from Berlin with colleagues in the United States. The rabbi and survivor Leo Baeck recognized in it the possibility of bringing Jewish culture closer to German youth, especially to those who had not consciously experienced National Socialism, as he wrote to Leschnitzer from his post at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.⁹

This argument convinced Leschnitzer. In the summer of 1952, he set foot on German soil again for the first time in over 13 years. Four years later, Leschnitzer received a permanent honorary professorship at the Free University, making him the first professor of Jewish history to be anchored at a public university in West Germany. For more than two decades, he taught every summer in Berlin. On the basis of his 1952 lectures, he wrote the monograph *The Magic Background of Antisemitism*, which appeared in German in 1954 under the title *Saul und David*, in which he outlined the relations between German Jews and non-Jewish Germans since the late seventeenth century.¹⁰ He emphasized as problematic that while Jews had adopted Germany's expressed cultural values – humanitarianism and tolerance – German Christians did not act according to them. This interpretation is similar to that of George L. Mosse, who in the 1980s identified Jews as the actual bearers of German educational ideals.

The reception of Leschnitzer's work remained very limited in West German professional circles, even though Jewish history and antisemitism were under-researched areas. German historian Heinrich Schnee, who had been working on the history of court Jews since the early 1940s, uncritically reproducing antisemitic images from Walter Frank's Reichsinstitut für Geschichte des Neuen Deutschland in his work, reviewed Leschnitzer's work for the journal *Das historisch-politische Buch*. According to Schnee, antisemitism was based upon the "otherness of majorities and minorities."¹¹ Since Leschnitzer

did not take this aspect into account, Schnee argued, he could not fully explain antisemitism. He also disagreed with Leschnitzer that “Jewish lecturers and professors at German universities had been set back before 1933; on the contrary [. . .] they had made a downright brilliant career.”¹²

In his review Schnee thus resorted to antisemitic stereotypes and at the same time denied the scope of the exclusion before 1933. Among West German historians in the first post-war decades Schnee was the only non-Jewish scholar working on Jewish history. However, he did so in continuity with antisemitic stereotypes and research from the Nazi period. Similar to his treatment of Leschnitzer’s study, he also devalued historian Selma Stern’s work. Schnee’s multivolume work *Die Hoffinanz und der moderne Staat*, which furthered classic antisemitic stereotypes by portraying court Jews as materialistic and self-serving, nonetheless received positive reviews in Germany as it appeared over the 1950s and 1960s. Historians such as Wilhelm Treue and Walther Hubatsch, as well as leading politicians, proposed Schnee for an honorary professorship at the University of Bonn and the Federal Cross of Merit. However, these proposals failed due to the objection of individual historians. In this context, the German-British historian Francis L. Carsten asked whether German professors had read his work at all.¹³

German daily and weekly newspapers paid more attention to *Saul und David* than his professional colleagues. Berlin’s *Telegraf* judged that “Leschnitzer [. . .] has, in a sociology superbly equipped with bibliography, revealed the history of the German-Jewish cultural and living community essentially from its political and ideological moments.” The reviewer perceived the book as a “tragic account of the decline of the German bourgeoisie.”¹⁴ In the *Merkur* H. G. Adler wrote that

12 Heinrich Schnee, review of *Saul und David*, by Adolf Leschnitzer, in *Das Historisch-Politische Buch*, No. 4/56, 113–114. German original: “jüdische Dozenten und Professoren an deutschen Universitäten vor 1933 zurückgesetzt worden sind, sie haben im Gegenteil [. . .] eine geradezu glänzende Karriere gemacht.” A biography of Schnee was published in 2017: Katharina Abermeth, *Heinrich Schnee: Karrierewege und Erfahrungswelten eines deutschen Kolonialbeamten* (Kiel, 2017).

13 Stephan Laux, “Ich bin der Historiker der Hoffaktoren: Zur Antisemitischen Forschung von Heinrich Schnee (1895–1968),” *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 5 (2006).

14 H.G.S., “Soziologie der deutsch-jüdischen Gemeinschaft,” *Der Telegraf*, July 4, 1956. German original: “Leschnitzer [. . .] hat in einer bibliographisch hervorragend ausgerüsteten Soziologie die Geschichte der deutsch-jüdischen Kultur- und

Lebensgemeinschaft im Wesentlichen aus den politischen und ideologischen Momenten aufgezeigt.”

and “. . . tragischen Bericht über den Niedergang des deutschen Bürgertums.” Copies of this review

and those mentioned in the following footnotes are found in ALC, B 20/F 31.

15 H.G. Adler, "Jüdische Existenz," *Merkur*, April 1956. German original: ". . . die rund 150 Jahre deutsch-jüdischer Lebensgemeinschaft mit unerbitterlicher Kritik und Selbstkritik als eine geschichtlich abgeschlossene Epoche zu untersuchen" and "Und zwar als Jude aus Deutschland."

16 Peter Left, "Tragik der deutsch-jüdischen Symbiose," *Der Tagesspiegel*, February 12, 1955, 5. German original: ". . . die Ideologie der Ausrottung [. . .] vielleicht zum ersten Male in vollendeter Deutung von innen her." See also Wilhelm Teufel, "Saul und David," *Die Stuttgarter Zeitung*, April 2, 1955; Joseph Maier, "Warum die deutschen Juden untergingen," *Der Aufbau*, April 1, 1955; "Allgemeine Wochenzeitung der Juden in Deutschland," January 21, 1955, Book Review, in: Bayerischer Rundfunk, March 11, 1955, ALC, AR 25320, B 20/F 31, LBI.

17 Paul Kluge to Rothfels, June 25, 1957, ID 90-3-57, Hausarchiv Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin (IfZ).

18 Jan Eckel, *Hans Rothfels: Eine intellektuelle Biographie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2005).

Leschnitzer was the first to dare "to examine the roughly 150 years of German-Jewish *Lebensgemeinschaft* with unrelenting criticism and self-criticism as a historically closed epoch." "And he did so," he added, "as a Jew from Germany."¹⁵ The *Tagesspiegel* likewise regarded Leschnitzer's work as a pioneering study, for the scholar looked at "the ideology of extermination [. . .] perhaps for the first time in full-blown interpretation from the inside."¹⁶

How should we assess the discrepancy between the reception of Leschnitzer's work in the "Feuilletons" of the German press and in specialist journals? The history of Leschnitzer's reception must be placed in the context of the German historiography on Judaism. Older West German historians who had received their doctorates and habilitations before 1933 were particularly likely to ignore or criticize works published by emigré Jewish historians on the history of German Jewry and antisemitism. Yet Leschnitzer was well-known among West German historians and was considered "one of the best experts on German Jewry immediately before its demise," as the then-secretary general of the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, IfZ), Paul Kluge, wrote to Hans Rothfels in 1957.¹⁷ Rothfels himself had emigrated to the United States during National Socialism but was one of the few historians who remigrated after 1945.¹⁸

That historians in West Germany distanced themselves from particular interpretations of Jewish history becomes clear in the example of the historian Selma Stern, who had written a fundamental study on *The Court Jew: A Contribution to the History of Absolutism in Europe*. The work, published in English in 1950 and based primarily on source research conducted by Stern during the 1920s and 1930s, did not appear in German for over fifty years.¹⁹ In 1951, social and economic

19 Selma Stern, *The Court Jew: A Contribution to the History of Absolutism in Europe* (Philadelphia, 1950); Selma Stern, *Der Hofjude im Zeitalter des Absolutismus (1640–1740)* (Hildesheim, 1999).

historian Wilhelm Treue was one of the few historians in West Germany to comment on the English edition. He accused Stern of not taking into account “historiographical viewpoints.”²⁰ Rather, Treue suggested, the book overstated the role of court Jews as victims.²¹ Treue, who had praised Heinrich Schnee’s account of the “court factors” (German: *Hoffaktoren*), repeatedly pointed to Stern’s biographical background as a Jew persecuted under National Socialism, which in his view explained how she approached the topic. In this way, he relativized the findings of her research. At the same time, he explicitly justified the marginalization of Jewish history in West Germany, which was primarily studied outside the academic establishment.²² One reason for this was that the institutional framework for such study only began to be established with Leschnitzer’s visiting and honorary professorship, and barely developed further until the 1970s. Focusing on the distorted picture of German history created by the absence of studies of the Jewish experience and of the destructive nature of antisemitism meant calling attention to the Holocaust, which German historians and society sought to avoid. Using Herbert A. Strauss as an example, the second chapter of my book shows how the situation began to change in the following decades.

In order to legitimize their interpretations of German history, historians in West Germany often excluded their émigré colleagues from their professional discourse in the 1950s and 1960s. West German historians like Gerhard Ritter tied historiography to a political agenda of the past: “We German historians will have a great deal to do to protect our German history against harmful insults. For it does not change a people for the better, but depraves it, if it loses its joy in its own history and thus loses its self-confidence.”²³ Ritter’s position illustrates the close connection between defensive reaction against guilt, interpretive power, and national identity. In the 1950s and early 1960s, older German historians appeared convinced that only they had a claim to interpret “their own”

20 German original: „geschichtswissenschaftliche Gesichtspunkte“.

21 Wilhelm Treue, review of *The Court Jew: A Contribution to the History of the Period of Absolutism in Central Europe*, by Selma Stern, *Historische Zeitschrift* 172, no. 3 (1951): 573.

22 Michael Brenner, “Nichtjüdische Historiker und Jüdische Geschichte: Der Wandel in der Wahrnehmung von außen,” in *Interesse am Judentum: Die Franz-Delitzsch-Vorlesungen 1989–2008*, ed. J. C. de Vos and Folker Siegert (Berlin, 2008), 341–343.

23 Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BArch), N 1166/225, Vorträge Gerhard Ritter, USA 1953: “The present state of historical studies in Germany.”

24 Gabriele Metzler, *Der Staat der Historiker: Staatsvorstellungen deutscher Historiker seit 1945* (Berlin, 2018), 120 f.

25 German original: "Ritter der Nation." Thomas Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte: Werner Conze und die Neuorientierung der westdeutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (München, 2001), 296.

26 Hans Kohn, "Rethinking Recent German History," in *German History: Some New German Views*, ed. Hans Kohn (London, 1954), 38. On Kohn, see Brian Smollett, "The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Vision in the Life and Thought of Hans Kohn," in *Reappraisals and New Studies of the Modern Jewish Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert M. Seltzer*, ed. Brian Smollett and Christian Wise (Leiden, 2014).

history. The early negotiations about the German past were thus closely linked to the question of who was allowed to write German history.

West German historians answered this question depending on how foreign and émigré historians interpreted German history. Among West German researchers like Ritter, the prevailing idea was that National Socialism was a "workplace accident" (*Betriebsunfall*) caused by a few zealous, diabolical Nazi bigwigs, whose reign of terror had made resistance from the population (almost) impossible. In this way, the historians who remained in Germany defended a positive national historical image. As established protagonists, they excluded historical interpretations and the personal stories of suffering of émigrés historians from the realm of the discussable if they contradicted their interpretations.

Whether someone could participate in the discourse on the German past in West Germany was thus related not only to who wrote, but also to what they wrote. The interplay of these two arguments remained crucial in the 1960s and early 1970s. Contemporary history thus pursued political goals. It was important to stabilize the young democracy via a basic narrative that interpreted National Socialism as a brief slip into a regime of injustice which had no deeper historical roots. Historians in West Germany were involved in shaping and maintaining this narrative in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁴ Thomas Etzemüller has argued that the older German historians such as Ritter, Conze, and Schieder functioned as "knights of their nation" in this sense.²⁵ To protect the nation's honor, they quickly abandoned plans to revise the German historical narrative after the end of World War II.²⁶

Younger historians – many of them associated with what became known as the Bielefeld School – were far less skeptical about those historians who had emigrated. They reevaluated the biographical background and its significance for writing German history so that it no longer meant a lack of ability to

do scholarly work.²⁷ Leschnitzer was therefore able to exert a decisive influence on the education of a younger generation of historians in West Germany who turned to Jewish history. At the Free University in Berlin, a “Leschnitzer Circle” of interested students formed beginning in 1953 and met regularly while their mentor taught in the United States. This circle included scholars who went on to contribute significantly to the establishment of Jewish history in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, including Monika Richarz, Stefan Rohrbacher, Reinhard Rürup, Stefi Jersch-Wenzel, Konrad Kwiet and Julius Schoeps.²⁸ Leschnitzer was thus instrumental in making Berlin an important focal point for scholars who wanted to study the history of Judaism.

The fact that, after his initial skepticism, Leschnitzer became so intensively involved in his country of origin was related to his desire to research and understand the roots of German antisemitism. Throughout his life, he saw himself as a German Jew who had found refuge in the United States, as he pointed out in 1962: “Today I feel like an American, which means: I’m grateful to this country for taking me and my family in.”²⁹ Fourteen years later, when asked to which country he felt he belonged, he replied, “Jewish-American of German descent.”³⁰ The temporary return to Germany played an ambivalent but decisive role for the scholar, shaping his work because of the ambivalence he experienced. In 1966, Leschnitzer resigned from his position at City College in New York, but retained his honorary professorship at the Free University until 1972. While he did not fulfill his ambition of writing a history of Judaism, Leschnitzer was recognized as one of the “grand old men” among German-Jewish emigré scholars upon his death in Centerport, New York, on July 24, 1980, at the age of 81.³¹

II. How German History is to be Written: George L. Mosse

In the 1960s, a younger generation of refugee historians obtained key positions in American historical scholarship.

27 Knut Borchardt, review of *Machteliten und Wirtschaftskonjunkturen*, by Hans Rosenberg, *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 67, no. 4 (1980).

28 Monika Richarz, “Zwischen Berlin und New York: Adolf Leschnitzer, Der erste Professor für Jüdische Geschichte in der Bundesrepublik,” in *Deutsche, Juden, Völkermord: Der Holocaust als Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Jürgen Matthäus and Klaus-Michael Mallmann (Darmstadt, 2006), 73.

29 Adolf Leschnitzer, “Im Interview mit Radio Bremen,” in *Bremer Beiträge: Auszug des Geistes*, ed. Radio Bremen (Bremen, 1962), 168.

30 Interview with Joan Lessing, ALC, B 2/F 15.

31 Hans Steinitz, “Zum Tode Von Adolf Leschnitzer,” *Aufbau*, August 1, 1980.

32 Steven Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton, N.J., 2007), 57; Andreas Daum, "Refugees from Nazi Germany as Historians: Origins and Migrations, Interests and Identities," 3 f., and Steven Aschheim, "The Tensions of Historical Wissenschaft: The Émigré Historians and the Making of German Cultural History," both in *The Second Generation: Émigrés from Nazi Germany as Historians: With a Bibliographic Guide*, ed. Andreas W. Daum, Hartmut Lehmann, and James J. Sheehan (New York, 2016).

33 Merel Leeman, "The Transatlantic Reconstruction of 'Western' Culture: George Mosse, Peter Gay, and the Development of the German Tradition of Geistesgeschichte," *GHI Bulletin Supplement* 10 (2014).

34 Aschheim, *Beyond the Border*, 64–67; Emmanuel Sivan, "George Mosse and the Israeli Experience," in *What History Tells: George L. Mosse and the Culture of Modern Europe*, ed. Stanley G. Payne, David J. Sorkin and John S. Tortorice, (Madison, Wis., 2004).

35 Aschheim, *Beyond the Border*, 46.

Historians refer to them as the "second generation," roughly encompassing the birth cohorts 1918 to 1935.³² Members of this generation came to the United States as children and adolescents and were educated there – sometimes by émigré scholars from the first generation. Like the first generation, members of the second generation sought to understand the rise and nature of the National Socialist movement. To do so, they examined ideological and symbolic mechanisms that the Nazis had exploited.³³ They saw illiberalism and irrationalism as the causes of Germany's *Sonderweg* (special path), not social and economic aberrations.³⁴ While the first generation of social historians regarded the transfer of government to Hitler and the downfall of liberal democracy as a major caesura in German history, cultural historians such as George Mosse postponed the crucial caesura to 1941. For them, the antisemitic policy of exclusion and persecution, which led to mass murder, was not automatically inherent in the transfer of government to Hitler, but could be explained by ideological preconditions. These historians therefore initiated a shift in perspective by turning to German cultural and intellectual history.³⁵

George L. Mosse, born in 1918, emigrated in 1933 and studied in England and the United States. After his graduate studies at Harvard University, he worked at the University of Iowa and from 1955 onwards at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Mosse also taught at different universities such as the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Cambridge University, and the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. In a preface included in the 1979 German translation of his first work on Nazi ideology, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (originally published in English in 1964), he reacted to the interpretations of his West German colleagues as follows:

It is easier, of course, to see National Socialism as a break with the German past, a one-time aberration under [the conditions of] war and the great economic crises of the postwar period.



Figure 3. George L. Mosse in Iowa City, around 1950, F 80889, George L. Mosse Collection, AR 25137, Leo Baeck Institute New York. Reproduced by permission.

The power of colossal forces, to which so many historians have referred, often seems to leave out personal responsibility.³⁶

In this observation, Mosse implied that his colleagues were shaping a national and individual self-image that externalized responsibility for National Socialism. Karel Plessini has

sich natürlich leichter, wenn man den Nationalsozialismus als einen Bruch mit der deutschen Vergangenheit betrachtet,

als eine einmalige Verirrung unter dem Krieg und der großen ökonomischen Krisen der Nachkriegszeit. Das Spiel überdimen-

sionaler Kräfte, auf die sich so viele Historiker berufen haben, scheint oft die persönliche Verantwortung auszusparen.“

36 George L. Mosse, *Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer: Die völkischen Ursprünge des Nationalsozialismus*, first German edition (Königstein/Ts., 1979), 1. German original: “Man macht es

37 Karel Plessini, *The Perils of Normalcy: George L. Mosse and the Remaking of Cultural History* (Madison, Wis., 2014), 46–50, esp. 47.

38 George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, 1964), 1–4 (quote p. 1).

39 Gerhard L. Weinberg, review of *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, by George L. Mosse, *Political Science Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (1966).

40 Fritz T. Epstein to Mosse, May 14, 1965, George L. Mosse Collection (GLMC), AR 25137, B 14/F 8, LBI.

41 Klemens v. Klemperer, review of *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, by George L. Mosse, *American Historical Review* 71, no. 2 (1966): 609. See also Hans Kohn, “Belief in Blood,” *The Nation*, April 26, 1966; Carl G. Anthon, review of *The Crisis of German Ideology*, by George L. Mosse, *Social Studies* 56, no. 4 (1965); Guenter Lewy, “Roots of Nazism,” *The Progressive*, June 1965.

argued that the book arose from a dual concern of Mosse’s: for the lingering past, which he recognized in the desecration of the Cologne synagogue in 1959, and for the present of 1979, in which liberalism and democracy were endangered. For Mosse, *völkisch* ideas still existed both in Germany and the United States. He particularly observed them in extremist groups who held antisemitic and racist beliefs.³⁷ Mosse’s work addressed both a concern for the survival of democracy and the threat that antisemitism posed to a liberal society. Mosse highlighted *völkisch* ideology as central to the rise of National Socialism. He justified his approach as follows: “Historians have not given them [ideas] much serious attention, for they have regarded this ideology [*völkisch* thought] as a species of subintellectual rather than intellectual history.” For Mosse, *völkisch* thought represented a continuity across 1933 and at the same time distinguished German fascism from Italian fascism. In his perspective, the National Socialist seizure of power was the logical culmination of particular developments in German history.³⁸

In the United States, Mosse’s book was controversial. His perspective was considered fruitful, but not far-reaching enough. Gerhard Weinberg, a specialist in the history of World War II, argued that Mosse overstated the role of ideology while underestimating other geographical and power-political issues.³⁹ Fritz T. Epstein, a first-generation émigré historian who had fled from Germany to the United States, wrote a letter to Mosse criticizing him for not doing justice to German intellectual life by reducing it to *völkisch* thought.⁴⁰ In a review in the *American Historical Review* Klemens von Klemperer attacked Mosse’s work on similar grounds: “Mosse’s picture of Wilhelminian Germany is distorted and forced into a ‘volkish’ strait jacket.” Klemperer considered Mosse’s book a step backward from other contemporary historical studies. In his view, Mosse overestimated the ideological significance of National Socialism, while underestimating the “role of the immediate crisis, political, economic, and social.”⁴¹ Only

a few scholars expressed consistently positive views. Carl J. Friedrich, for example, praised Mosse's approach for making it clear that National Socialism had not been an accidental product of German history.⁴² In sum, Mosse's emphasis on German intellectual life was viewed critically. Mosse offered a new interpretation by not portraying National Socialism as a product of Nazi propaganda and the manipulation of the masses. Mosse's account did not feature a powerless population dominated by a ruthless Nazi elite. Nor did Mosse consider economic and social structures or acute crises to have been decisive. Rather, the Nazi seizure of power was the final step in a cumulative process of cultural development dating back to the nineteenth century.⁴³

In West Germany, the historian and specialist in modern German and English history, Bernd-Jürgen Wendt, reviewed Mosse's book in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* in 1967. He concluded that Mosse's findings were likely to meet with rejection in the discipline and among the general public because of his continuity thesis and its ideology-based approach.⁴⁴ He was to be proven right. The fifteen-year delay before Mosse's book was translated into German suggests the accuracy of Wendt's assessment. His book was by no means outdated at this point; rather, it presented a new interpretation of National Socialism in West Germany as cultural history began to emerge. In his 1979 preface, Mosse pointed out that his continuity thesis and his emphasis on the specificity of German fascism in particular had met criticism. He singled out Ritter (who had passed away in 1967): "[Even] if the German historian Gerhard Ritter claimed that the ideological development that led to National Socialism was not a typically German development, because other countries had experienced similar movements, this assumption is false."⁴⁵ Overall, the West German reaction remained limited.

Beginning in the 1980s, the lines of discourse in West German historical scholarship began to shift. This can be seen in the reception of Mosse's 1984 book *Nationalism and*

⁴² Carl J. Friedrichs, "The Changing Theory and Practice of Totalitarianism," *Il Politico* 33 (1968): 63–65.

⁴³ Renato Moro, "George L. Mosse, Historian of Modern Irrationalism," accessed February 22, 2019, <https://histmosse.wiscweb.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/188/2017/05/1996-Moro-George-L-Mosse-1.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Bernd-Jürgen Wendt, "Eine Absage an den Westen: Wie war die Herrschaft des Nationalsozialismus möglich?" *Die Zeit*, January 6, 1967.

⁴⁵ Mosse, *Volk*, 14. German original: "Wenn der deutsche Historiker Gerhard Ritter behauptete, die ideologische Evolution, die zum Nationalsozialismus führte, sei keine typisch deutsche Entwicklung gewesen, denn andere Länder hätten ebensolche Bewegungen erlebt, so ist diese Annahme falsch."

46 Anson Rabinbach, "George L. Mosse 1919–1999: An Appreciation," *Central European History* 32, no. 3 (1999); Robert E. Neil, review of *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*, by George L. Mosse, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16 (1986): 736–38; Lorenzo Benadusi, "A Fully Furnished House: The History of Masculinity," in *George L. Mosse's Italy: Interpretation, Reception, and Intellectual Heritage*, ed. Lorenzo Benadusi and Giorgio Caravale (New York, 2014), 30–32.

47 Christian Jansen, "Nationalismus, Nationalsozialismus, Sexualität," review of *Nationalismus und Sexualität: Bürgerliche Moral und Sexuelle Normen*, by George L. Mosse, *Neue Politische Literatur* 2 (1987): 345–346. German original: "Instruktive Bücher aus dem Bereich der Ideologie- bzw. Mentalitätsgeschichte [kommen] nach wie vor zu einem großen Teil aus den USA."

48 "Historikerstreit" notes, April 17, 1988, GLMC, B 17/F 32; George L. Mosse, review of *Three Faces of Fascism*, by Ernst Nolte, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 4 (1966): 621–625.

Sexuality. With this book, Mosse became a pioneer in the field of the history of the body and in research on nationalism in the United States. His interest in constructions of masculinity sprang from the question of how nationalism instrumentalized myths and symbols to achieve consensus in a society.⁴⁶ It was primarily younger historians in West Germany, born in the 1950s, who engaged with his work. Hans Mommsen's student Christian Jansen, for example, observed that "instructive books in the field of the history of ideology or mentality continue to come to a large extent from the United States" and that "German emigrants" played a "prominent role" in this.⁴⁷ Jansen found Mosse's argument of the uniqueness of National Socialism convincing. The majority of West German historians, however, treated Mosse's work with silence. The reason for this was that Mosse, unlike many established West German historians, emphasized cultural causes for the popular support of National Socialism. To mobilize the population, Mosse argued, the Nazi movement drew on patterns of thought that had prevailed for decades. Mosse had repeatedly emphasized the singularity of National Socialism. In the course of the *Historikerstreit* (Historians' Controversy) of 1986, when Ernst Nolte insisted on the comparability of the Holocaust with other grave crimes against humanity, it is notable that Nolte's opponents did not take up Mosse's argument to refute him. Mosse did not intervene in the dispute because he saw it less as a scholarly debate than "as a quest for German national identity."⁴⁸

What were the reasons for the marginalization of Mosse's work in the 1970s and 1980s? Defensive efforts to deny responsibility for National Socialism, as in the 1950s and 1960s, played a lesser role. Nevertheless, Mosse's approach differed from a common narrative, the basic narrative, of West German social historians, who blamed anonymous structures for Nazism. From the perspective of many West German historians Mosse's work was bound to remain speculative because he placed human thought at the center of his work. But what Mosse was concerned with

was analyzing the relationship of popular beliefs to National Socialism. There was also another meta-discourse that shaped the interpretation of National Socialism, as a public exchange between the German historian Martin Broszat and the Israeli historian Saul Friedländer illustrates. Once again, this involved the question of what status National Socialism should be given in German history. Broszat called for a “historicization” that would ensure that “this utterly depraved chapter in German history [. . .] become[s] capable of being integrated once again as a portion of one’s own national history.”⁴⁹ Moshe Zimmermann explains Mosse’s marginalization in this context as an attempt by West German historians “to rescue German history from Nazism in retrospect.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, “A Controversy About the Historicization of National Socialism,” *New German Critique* 44 (1988): 100.

⁵⁰ Moshe Zimmermann, “Mosse and German Historiography,” in *George Mosse, on the Occasion of His Retirement, 17. 6. 85, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986*, xx f.

⁵¹ Henry Friedlander, *The German Revolution of 1918* (New York, 1992), preface.

III. The Revaluation of Biography and Interpretation: Henry Friedlander

Unlike Mosse, Henry Friedlander, born in 1930, viewed the Holocaust as primarily a bureaucratic process. Friedlander studied history but did not turn to Holocaust research until the 1970s. In 1941, at the age of eleven, Friedlander had been deported from Berlin and survived a series of concentration camps, including Auschwitz-Birkenau. Friedlander was only able to emigrate to the United States after the end of the war and then became a historian.

Reflecting on his initial direction of research, he wrote:

As we know, historians do not evaluate the past in a vacuum. Their work is influenced, perhaps even determined, by the intellectual and political climate of their times. I started research on my dissertation in the middle 1950s and at that time World War II and Nazi genocide was still immediate as both chronological event and personal experience. But I believed that those events were still too recent and too colored by personal involvement for balanced historical treatment. Instead, I turned, as did many others, to the years 1914–1920 to explain the terror unleashed between 1933 and 1945.⁵¹



Figure 4. Henry Friedlander visiting the Rosenstraße memorial in Berlin, 2009. Photograph taken by Benjamin Friedlander, private collection. Reproduced by permission.

Friedlander considered the Holocaust as too close in time and too personal to be treated with the necessary scholarly detachment. This was a typical attitude in both American and West German historiography, suggesting that survivors could not write “objectively” about the time period that affected them personally. Despite these reservations, Friedlander turned to the study of the Holocaust in the 1970s. He wrote about his reasons in an undated note:

The boy who has not aged without a name or face has always followed me. He looks over my shoulder, sits behind me on airplanes. For the first ten years I did not want him there. I did not think or talk about the past. Then we agreed to tolerate each other and I could think about it, and did so a lot for the next 15 years. I read the memoirs of others, the heavy tomes of the scholars,

finally even the documents. [. . .] Then after 25 years, in 1970, I had to write it down. I hesitated, I did not wish to do it. But somehow I believe the boy without a face or name understood, approved, and even encouraged me.⁵²

This handwritten four-page manuscript, entitled “The Observer in Birkenau - A personal historiography of the Holocaust,” is found in Friedlander’s papers in a folder containing various lecture manuscripts. In November and December 1966, during his tenure at McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada, Friedlander gave six lectures to the Jewish community under the title “The Jew in the Modern World.” In these lectures, he covered the spread of what he called “modern anti-Semitism” at the turn of the century, the “racial” antisemitism of the Nazis, and the expulsion, ghettoization, and murder of Jews during World War II. This lecture series shows that Friedlander had certainly dealt with the Holocaust outside of an academic context. In the quoted excerpt, Friedlander portrayed his time in Birkenau as both an obstacle and an impetus to his research. By trying to leave the shadows of the past behind for over 25 years, he avoided the subject of genocide in World War II on a scholarly level. Only when he confronted his memories did he turn to the subject of the Holocaust. His personal experience, which had initially kept him from dealing with the Holocaust, now spurred him on to confront it.⁵³ Thus, Friedlander emphasized his responsibility as a survivor to research the Holocaust. At the same time, he felt it was necessary to clearly separate his memory as a survivor and his work as a scholar. In this context, he described the reservations of some colleagues who advised him against studying the Holocaust precisely because he was a survivor.⁵⁴ In response, Friedlander portrayed himself as an exceedingly sober and unemotional researcher, much as other Holocaust scholars who were also survivors such as Raul Hilberg and Gerhard Weinberg did.

When Friedlander reviewed the state of Holocaust research on the occasion of Yom Hashoah in 1975, he hinted at the dif-

52 Friedlander, Henry, “The Observer in Birkenau - A personal historiography of the Holocaust,” folder “Jewish History Lectures”, Friedlander/Milton Papers (hereafter FMP), Box 106, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives (USHMM), Washington, D.C.

53 See folder “Friedlander, Henry, Gedenkstunde, 01/27/1997, Saarbrücken,” FMP, Box 89.

54 Henry Friedlander, interview with sr-online, folder “Friedlander, Henry, Gedenkstunde, 27.01.1997, Saarbrücken,” FMP, Box 89.

55 Manuscript "Yom Hashoah", folder "Jewish History Lectures", FMP, Box 106.

56 "Seminarconcept," folder "Touro 1973", FMP, Box 105.

57 Herbert Strauss to Henry Friedlander, February 5, 1973, Hannah Arendt to Henry Friedlander, March 19, 1973, Peter Gay to Henry Friedlander, March 27, 1973, and Fritz Stern to Henry Friedlander, Oct. 25, 1973, all in folder "Touro 1973," FMP, Box 105.

58 Doris L. Bergen, "Out of the Limelight or in: Raul Hilberg, Gerhard Weinberg, Henry Friedlander, and the Historical Study of the Holocaust," in Daum, Lehmann, and Sheehan, *The Second Generation*.

ficuity of making oneself heard as a survivor. "When talking about the unthinkable, reports use clichés. [. . .] Those who are sincere, must often become sensationalist when describing unbelievable accounts like the deportation of the children from Drancy."⁵⁵ Friedlander emphasized the lack of interest in the Holocaust among the public. According to Friedlander, the mass murder of the Jews only received attention when simplifications satisfied the public's desire for sensationalism.

Friedlander approached the subject of the Holocaust through the question of its institutionalization. In the early 1970s, he was among the first scholars to offer courses on the genocide of European Jews at the university level. However, his efforts to establish a permanent seminar, the New York Faculty Seminar on the Holocaust, met with only limited interest from his colleagues. Friedlander intended to discuss with teachers and lecturers how the history of the Holocaust could be taught.⁵⁶ His attempt to recruit emigré scholars from his own generation as well as the first generation met with refusals from more than half of the researchers whom he contacted. Peter Gay, for example, wrote him that it was a very important undertaking but that he could not attend because of his workload.⁵⁷ The topic of the Holocaust met with limited interest in a New York circle of humanities scholars, partly because their personal histories made it difficult to approach the subject as scholars. Moreover, since the topic of the Holocaust was not institutionalized in academia, studying it might hinder one's career.⁵⁸ This situation changed from the 1970s onwards, when the first seminars on the Holocaust and corresponding further education opportunities were offered in the US and eventually also in Europe.

In the 1980s, awareness of the crimes and horrors of the Nazi regime grew among many Germans due to cinematic and media discussions of the Holocaust that presented Jewish victims, on the one hand, and a homogeneous mass of perpetrators, on the other. This attention encouraged scholarly research as well as the institutionalization of monuments

and memorials, even if it initially remained unclear how they should be shaped. During these years, Friedlander turned to the subject of the so-called “euthanasia” program, the systematic murder of persons with disabilities, resulting in his opus magnum, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide*, published in 1995. He interpreted the “euthanasia” murders as an experimental arrangement for the Holocaust. The murder program had enabled the Nazis to find out how they could systematically murder people without much effort and without attracting too much attention. His thesis that Jews, Sinti, Roma and people with disabilities were killed for the same reason, which Friedlander called “heredity,” was controversial in both Germany and the United States. By listing Sinti and Roma as a victim group alongside Jews, Friedlander entered into a conflict between Jewish scholars and Sinti and Roma activists that vividly reflects the workings of competitive memory. In the course of the Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer’s speech on the occasion of the Memorial Day of the Victims of National Socialism on January 27, 1998, in the German Bundestag, the debate on the comparability of victim groups reached its climax. Bauer emphasized the uniqueness of the National Socialist genocide of the Jews, the basis of which was antisemitic ideology. Although he referred to the Nazi murder of Sinti and Roma as a genocide, in the ensuing debate he distinguished it systematically from that of the Jews.⁵⁹ By contrast, Friedlander was one of the first Jewish scholars to argue that Jews, Sinti, and Roma were all persecuted for the same reason, a thesis for which he was harshly criticized.⁶⁰

Overall, however, Friedlander’s book received positive reviews, especially in the United States, and won several awards. It also received praise in Germany. The political scientist Joachim Perels, for example, wrote: “His analysis is given special weight by the fact that it combines his own experiences with rights-destroying institutions of the Nazi regime with the claim of factually accurate presentation.” Friedlander’s work not only possessed the same objectivity as

59 Yehuda Bauer, “Es galt nicht der gleiche Befehl für beide: Eine Entgegnung auf Romani Roses Thesen,” accessed May 9, 2018, http://www.minderheiten.org/roma/index2.html?http://www.minderheiten.org/roma/textarchiv/texte/rose_bauer.htm; Yehuda Bauer, “Gedenkrede Am Deutschen Bundestag: 27.01.1998,” accessed May 9, 2018, <https://www.bundestag.de/parlament/geschichte/gastredner/bauer/rede/247412>.

60 Yehuda Bauer and Sybil Milton, “Correspondence: ‘Gypsies and the Holocaust,’” *The History Teacher* 25, no. 4 (1992); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif., 2009).

61 Joachim Perels, review of *Der Weg zum NS-Genozid: Von der Euthanasie zur Endlösung*, by Henry Friedlander, *Kritische Justiz* 41, no. 2 (2008). German original: "Seine Analyse bekommt dadurch ein besonderes Gewicht, dass sich in ihr die eigenen Erfahrungen mit rechtszerstörenden Institutionen des NS-Regimes mit dem Anspruch sachlich genauer Darstellung verbinden"; "durch eigene Anschauung verstärkte Objektivität."

62 Raul Hilberg, "'Man weiß nur, was man wissen will.': Ein Gespräch mit der Frankfurter Rundschau," *Die Frankfurter Rundschau*, July 16, 1993.

the studies of other historians, but an "objectivity enhanced by his own observation."⁶¹

In this quote, it is clear that the role of biography was valorized, especially in the 1980s and 1990s in Germany. Friedlander's biography was no longer considered a reason for his possible bias but became a source of special authority. The same argument increased the recognition of other historians such as Raul Hilberg and Mosse during this period. Overall, it can be stated that the works of the second generation experienced a revaluation from the end of the 1970s onward, that is, they were translated more quickly and brought out by more prominent publishing houses; they were also discussed more frequently in the general press and in central publication organs of historical scholarship. If origin and biography had long been an obstacle to reception and a barrier to recognition, the opposite was now the case for the 1980s. The question arises: Why did this happen so late?

Conclusion: Belated Recognition as Intellectual Reparation

When asked about the long silence on the Holocaust in an interview with the *Frankfurter Rundschau* in 1993, Raul Hilberg stated: "You only know what you want to know."⁶² He was referring to the cultural function of historians, who not only produce knowledge about the past, but also reproduce and reinforce it in the form of narratives that can be approved by society. The interpretations of emigré historians presented here were often rejected by German colleagues because they damaged the self-image of a democratic population which had thrown off the burden of the Nazi interlude. While historians working in West Germany wanted to strengthen the national self-image in the first three postwar decades by referring back to their own past as positively as possible, the émigrés were concerned with a complete elucidation of this self-image in order to strengthen the awareness of democracy in the present and the future. When research gaps became apparent at the end of the 1970s due to the increase in knowledge about

the Holocaust, there was an increased turn to the work of émigré historians. They had already addressed many of the questions that were now being asked.

Overall, the aim of German historical scholarship on National Socialism and the Holocaust, as well as its use by politicians, became not only to fill research gaps but also to create the image, both at home and abroad, of a nation that dealt forthrightly with its past. The stylization of many émigré historians' works as "classics of contemporary history" reshaped a story about the avoidance of the Holocaust into a success story that fit into the narrative of the success story of the Federal Republic. Sybille Steinbacher, referring to Hilberg in this context, even speaks of the "tendency towards exaggeration in the reception of the present."⁶³ The internationalization of historical scholarship accelerated in this context.

The debates triggered by these émigré historians show that historiography consists not only of the interpretation of historical events, but also intervenes in a society's cultural self-understanding of its own past. The difficulties émigré historians had in participating in West German discourse resulted from the fact that many West German historians saw themselves as the guardians of the interpretation of their own history for a long time. The valorization of their work was thus not necessarily a sign of the shift in perspective and the opening up of contemporary history. For there was often no intensive discussion of controversial theses. Raul Hilberg thus recorded: "First they [the Germans] don't pay attention to me, then they make me a saint. Both times they don't read my books."⁶⁴ Doris Bergen judges that Hilberg's standard work "might be called the greatest book about the Holocaust that is the least read."⁶⁵ Thus, the process of reevaluation was also, as Hans Rosenberg and Fritz Stern put it, a "symbolic act of intellectual reparation."⁶⁶

What can we learn from these émigré historians today? The analyses of the first generation remind us which social and economic factors contribute to a weakening of democracy

⁶³ Sybille Steinbacher, "Akribie, Ernst und Strenge: Raul Hilbergs Bedeutung für die Holocaustforschung," in *Raul Hilberg und die Holocaust-Historiographie*, ed. René Schlott (Göttingen, 2019), 25. German original: "Tendenz zu[r] Überhöhung in der Rezeption der Gegenwart."

⁶⁴ Hilberg, quoted in Ulrich Herbert, "Nach Kenntnis Der Akten: Nachruf," *taz*, August 8, 2007, 15. German original: "Erst beachten sie [die Deutschen] mich nicht, dann machen sie mich zu einem Heiligen. Beide Male lesen sie meine Bücher nicht."

⁶⁵ Bergen, "Out of the Limelight or In," 239.

⁶⁶ BArch, N 1376/53, Korrespondenz, allgemein, undatiert. German original: "symbolhaften Akt der geistigen Wiedergutmachung." See also Hans Rosenberg, "Rückblick Auf Ein Historikerleben Zwischen Zwei Kulturen," in *Machteliten und Wirtschaftskonjunkturen: Studien zur neueren deutschen Sozial- und wirtschaftsgeschichte*, ed. Hans Rosenberg (Göttingen, 1978), 23.

and which social groups can be involved in it. In particular, Adolf Leschnitzer's research makes clear that the exclusion and discrimination of social groups does not result from the behavior of those affected but from the prejudices of those who discriminate. Antisemitism and racism do not disappear when victims conform to a vaguely formulated notion of a *Leitkultur* (hegemonic culture). The second generation of cultural historians elucidated how authoritarian thinking feeds on fear-mongering and catastrophic scenarios. That freedom and democracy are exposed to constant threats was emphasized above all by Fritz Stern. Following George Mosse, scholars today examine the development of liberalism as well as the relationship between nationalism, racist stereotypes, and gender roles in post-1945 political culture. Finally, Holocaust scholars have clarified the conditions under which mass murder becomes possible: with the help of thoroughly organized bureaucracies, in the context of wars. Henry Friedlander argued that research should not be limited by the notion of the uniqueness of the Holocaust or focused only on certain victim groups. As Hilberg also pointed out, knowledge of the course of the Holocaust could help prevent further genocides or at least identify them quickly. What we can learn today, however, especially from these émigré historians, is that ethical principles accompany the crafting of contemporary history. As a result, historians can and must constantly question the historical narratives underlying a nation.

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