

PERSPECTIVES ON NATIONAL SOCIALISM,  
GLOBAL WAR, AND THE HOLOCAUST:  
A SYMPOSIUM IN HONOR OF GERHARD L. WEINBERG

Symposium at the GHI, May 2, 2008. Conveners: Doris Bergen (University of Toronto), Philipp Gassert (German Historical Institute), Alan E. Steinweis (University of Nebraska, Lincoln). Participants: Richard Breitman (American University), Christopher Browning (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), Astrid M. Eckert (Emory University), Jürgen Förster (University of Freiburg), Norman Goda (Ohio University), Detlef Junker (Heidelberg University), Alfred Mierzejewski (University of North Texas), Michaela Hoenicke Moore (University of Iowa), Dietrich Orlow (Boston University), Daniel Rogers (University of South Alabama).

The historiography of National Socialism and the Holocaust would be unthinkable without the contributions of the generation of American scholars who started their careers just after World War II. Gerhard L. Weinberg, who turned eighty on January 1, 2008, is one of the most distinguished and prolific members of a group of historians who devoted their lives and careers to trying to understand Germany's embrace of totalitarianism under the Nazis. Many, including Weinberg, were born in Germany and had first-hand experience of Nazi rule in practice. It was therefore fitting that, together with students and colleagues of Weinberg, the GHI convened a symposium dedicated to Weinberg's achievements as a scholar and teacher. The symposium explored the depth and impact of Weinberg's numerous contributions to the historical profession, both in the United States, where he was influential in re-establishing German history as a field of study, and in Germany, where he was a frequent participant in high-profile scholarly debates.

The symposium began with a panel chaired by Philipp Gassert that was dedicated to Weinberg's early work with captured German records. Astrid M. Eckert's contribution highlighted Weinberg's role in the cataloging and microfilming of the captured documents, which were temporarily housed in the torpedo factory in Alexandria, Virginia. Weinberg and his colleagues helped guarantee scholarly and international access to valuable historical sources much earlier than would otherwise have been possible. This established an important transnational foundation for post-war scholarship. Detlef Junker highlighted one of Weinberg's most important discoveries in the captured records: Hitler's so-called Second Book. This source became central to historiographical debates over Hitler's foreign policy aims, including the heavily debated question of

whether Nazi Germany aimed at world domination. Dietrich Orlow argued that access to documents was essential for the success of postwar German historiography, guarding against nationalist and apologist perspectives by making evidence against such arguments readily available.

The second panel, chaired by Doris Bergen, was devoted to Weinberg's contribution to scholarship about Nazi foreign policy and World War II. Taking Weinberg's seminal work *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany* as his starting point, Norman Goda argued that Hitler had pursued truly global aims and that Hitler's intentions and ideology mattered. Moreover, Goda noted that even though Weinberg was writing in a highly charged ideological moment, his arguments were not anchored in any specific ideology. Jürgen Förster considered the impact of Gerhard Weinberg's scholarship in Germany, focusing on Weinberg's response to Andreas Hillgruber and Hans-Günther Seraphim in the first volume of the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*. There Weinberg argued against Hillgruber and Seraphim's thesis of a German preventive war with the Soviet Union. Indeed, Förster noted that Hillgruber eventually came around to Weinberg's point of view, incorporating Hitler's racist world view and focus on *Lebensraum* into his own interpretation. The panel was concluded by Alfred Mierzejewski, who discussed Weinberg's *Visions of Victory* in order to highlight the war aims and postwar intentions of eight World War II leaders.

Daniel Rogers continued the focus on Weinberg's role in historical debates in the third panel, devoted to Holocaust studies and chaired by Christopher Browning. Rogers underscored Weinberg's role as an important public intellectual in the United States. In particular, Rogers cited Weinberg's vigilance in rejecting shoddy uses of history in contemporary political debates, most famously, perhaps, Weinberg's 2002 *Washington Post* critique of the use of the "Munich analogy" in the run-up to the Iraq War. Michaela Hoenicke Moore looked at the long history of policy debates on Germany and World War II, ranging from their origins in the 1930s to their present meaning for American foreign policy. Moore reminded her listeners that moral outrage against Nazi Germany was not always front and center in the public's understanding. Finally, Richard Breitman returned to the theme of the first panel by highlighting the importance of sources and Weinberg's role in the declassification process, most recently in securing the release of millions of classified documents from the CIA and other American intelligence agencies.

The symposium was followed by an evening of tributes and reminiscences from former students and representatives of the many institutions with which Weinberg was associated during his long and distinguished career. These included the GHI Washington, represented by its director, Hartmut Berghoff; the German Studies Association (of which

Weinberg is a past president), represented by Henry Friedlander; the Conference Group for Central European History, represented by Isabell Hull; the Friends of the German Historical Institute, represented by Geoffrey Giles; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, represented by Gretchen Skidmore; the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, represented by Michael Brenner; and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, represented by Konrad Jarausch. German ambassador Klaus Scharioth honored Weinberg with a speech that culminated with the statement "Your former country is proud of you." The evening concluded with a speech by Gerhard Weinberg himself, who reflected on his "Sixty Years of Adventures in German History."

*Philipp Gassert (GHI)*