

Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate. Edited by *Robert A. Shandley*. With essays translated by *Jeremiah Riemer*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Pp. x + 295. \$44.95 (cloth); \$17.95 (paper).

The “Goldhagen Effect”: History, Memory, Nazism—Facing the German Past. Edited by *Geoff Eley*. *Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany*. Edited by *Geoff Eley*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. Pp. viii + 172. \$49.50 (cloth); \$22.95 (paper).

The Holocaust on Trial. By *D. D. Guttenplan*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001. Pp xviii + 328. \$23.95.

Daniel J. Goldhagen and David Irving have little in common, but these books about them raise two issues of signal importance to the discipline of history. The first is the role of historians as commentators on questions that transcend the relatively small community of professional researchers and teachers. As Jürgen Habermas asked in the *Historikerstreit* in the mid-1980s, “What is the public role of history?” Robert R. Shandley’s *Unwilling Germans?* is a collection of reviews of Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (New York, 1996; hereafter *HWE*) written by German columnists and historians and published originally in 1996 and 1997, mostly in newspapers and nonacademic journals; it contains Habermas’s rearticulation of his thesis on historical consciousness and German democracy. Geoff Eley presents the proceedings of a conference on the book’s reception in Germany, the United States, France, Austria, and Israel, drawing particular attention to the bifurcated reaction among historians and the general public in each country. And the journalist Don Guttenplan has written about the Irving trial, in which prominent historians appeared as expert witnesses, a public exhibition of historical reasoning on the world stage.

The second issue concerns the comportment of national communities of historians to one another. No one is surprised that the national past of historians is not a matter of indifference to them, even when they hate it, and that, say, Russian and Ukrainian historians differ on what constitutes Ukrainian nationality. What guarantees development in scholarly understanding is that historians presume to be able to communicate across culture because their explanatory practices are considered rational, based as they are on universally accessible protocols of evidence. Writers who systematically violate such protocols, like David Irving, are banished from the community of scholars. In the case covered by these books, the nationality/ethnic issue is compounded by the fact that German historians are members of the nation from which the Holocaust emanated, some of them having even grown up under Nazism, while Israeli and many American historians are Jews who often have tangible family connections with its victims. What is more, America helped the Federal Republic of Germany rise from the ashes of the war by closely watching its political culture. Here, morality and politics touch epistemology. The truth that dares not speak its name is that it is considered abnormal, even transgressive, when German historians reflect their nation’s perspectives and preoccupations in the same way as other historians do.

But is this to reify national categories? They seem escapable because they are used by commentators and reviewers to organize the field, and many of the writers are happy to identify with them. Nonetheless, close inspection reveals the difficulties of making firm generalizations about “the Germans” and a “German perspective” on Goldhagen.

As might have been expected, *HWE* became a football to kick around in the “culture wars” about the meaning of the German past. Going by the Shandley collection, it is possible to identify many reactions. To begin with, the journalists Frank Schirmacher (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), Rudolf Augstein (*Der Spiegel*), Marion Dönhoff (*Die Zeit*), and Jost Nolte (*Die Welt*), very touchy about U.S. opinion on Germany, rejected *HWE*, after a hasty read of the English edition, as a rehash of the hobgoblin of the collective guilt and national character theses. In this posture they were paralleled by prominent historians of the forty-fiver generation (born in the 1920s and early 1930s), Eberhard Jäckel, Hans Mommsen, and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, who objected to the book’s method and simplifications. Jäckel’s much cited assessment that it was “simply bad” set the tone. Then there was the predictable reaction. Leftist writers like Kurt Pätzold, Wolfgang Wippermann, Götz Aly, and Klaus Theweleit condemned the defensiveness of the journalists and historians while also criticizing aspects of Goldhagen’s book. Theweleit’s interview is particularly lively. There he was in Freiburg’s *Grünhof*, claret in hand, resplendent in the customary Hawaiian shirt, telling the critics they “lack psychological awareness and knowledge of the poets” (p. 214). Younger historians (in Germany, between 45 and 55 years) Ulrich Herbert and Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey likewise distanced themselves from their elders, signaling a generational changing of the guard in the guild, while, like Norbert Frei, also taking issue with *HWE*. Grinding a different axe were Jan Philipp Reemtsma and Jürgen Habermas, who did not accept Goldhagen’s premises or conclusions but approved of the challenge they made to German national sensitivities.

A feature of the “Goldhagen debate” was that it was subject to critique in Germany from Americans while it was unfolding. Thus Andrei S. Markovits excoriated the Germans for antisemitism in the pages of the *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, the journal that later awarded Goldhagen its “democracy prize.” Many of those Markovits attacks do not appear in the Shandley collection, but the point is clear: by speculating on Goldhagen’s relationship with his father, Erich Goldhagen, and suggesting that he was acting out the senior Goldhagen’s supposed revenge fantasy against Germany, and also by expressing contempt for the American intellectuals who had feted *HWE*, German commentators were articulating antisemitic canards. It was no surprise, he continued, that German Jews were better disposed toward the book (p. 125).

Unfortunately, the reviews of other German Jews such as Micha Brumlik, Dan Diner, and Henryk Broder are not included in the Shandley collection. Still, they would not have confirmed the view that a single German-Jewish reaction can be discerned. In fact, these writers were as divided about *HWE* as were other Germans. Michael Wolffsohn, for example, also raised the fact that Goldhagen was indebted to his father, concluding with the peremptory “reminder” to “father and son that history has less to do with questions of belief, with prejudices or collective judgements, and with legends than with facts” (p. 78). Broder also stressed the father-son relationship in his articles in *Der Spiegel*, while Julius H. Schoeps perceived Goldhagen as mounting a collective guilt case, rejecting it out of hand (p. 79). If we count Diner’s and Brumlik’s contributions with that of Josef Joffe as “pro-Goldhagen,” then the apparently hard and fast category of “German Jew” as a signifier for a fixed perspective vanishes into thin air.

Nonetheless, Markovits has a point. What was the basis of Wehler’s suggestion that the descendants of victims of genocide (such as the Armenian genocide of 1915) are unable to attain the necessary scholarly distance from the subject (p. 100)? Why should the descendants of the perpetrators be any more sober? The background to the conceit of some German historians of holding a privileged perspective has been illuminated

recently by Nicolas Berg, a historian at the Simon-Dubnow Institute in Leipzig. From the archives of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte (IfZ), he has been able to reconstruct the story, as revealing as it is disturbing, of an early encounter between rival victim and perpetrator perspectives (“Die Lebenlüge vom Pathos der Nüchternheit,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 17, 2002). The protagonists were Joseph Wulf (1912–74), a Jewish survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, and Martin Broszat (1926–89), the renowned German historian and erstwhile director of the IfZ. In the late 1950s, both wrote books about Nazi policy in occupied Poland, coming to opposite conclusions about the German head of the health authority in Warsaw, Wilhelm Hagen, who enjoyed a successful medical career in West Germany after the war. Wulf portrayed Hagen as a willing tool of Nazi policy who callously violated medical ethics. Broszat, by contrast, held up the doctor as the embodiment of professionalism: he did what he could to soften the anti-Polish policies of the SS. In the ensuing exchange—Hagen had turned to Broszat for help to protect his public reputation—Wulf took offence at Broszat’s insinuation, and later that of his colleague, Helmut Krausnik, that resentment had blinded him to the difference between the fanatical Nazis and “resisters” like Hagen who had been caught up in bureaucratic structures and had little room to maneuver. But Wulf had not portrayed Hagen as a fanatic (*Hundertprozentiger*): he believed that the system could operate with far less committed functionaries.

What this virtually unknown controversy reveals is that culture or national context—and Jewish or German identity—does matter. Wulf and Broszat were asking different questions that served compelling psychological imperatives, as Broszat and Saul Friedländer were in their well-known correspondence in the 1980s. Wulf wanted to explain how genocide could be expedited, and this necessarily entailed implicating all Germans involved in carrying out the policy. What they shared was more important than what divided them. Like other postwar Germans, Broszat wanted to distinguish the small number of ideological madmen from his essentially decent compatriots who did not subjectively affirm Nazi policy and had made the best of a bad situation.

To claim, then, that the “German perspective” is somehow more objective or scholarly than the “Jewish” one is obviously suspect. Whether it is antisemitic, however, is another matter, and I wonder whether the term is helpful in the circumstances. There was, to be sure, defensiveness, and even indignation, about the initial German reaction to *HWE*, replete with embarrassing references to Goldhagen’s father and ethnic background. But there are genuine problems with the book, acknowledged by all of the reviewers, which virtually guaranteed such truculence. Despite his protestations to the contrary, Goldhagen used the tools of social science to make the functional equivalent of a collective guilt argument: he portrayed the Holocaust as a national project since the nineteenth century. By shuttling back and forth between “eliminationist” antisemitism (excluding Jewishness from Germany, either by assimilation or expulsion) and “exterminationist” antisemitism (physical murder), he confused the reader about his position, so that many, like Augstein, genuinely believed that Goldhagen was arguing the absurd case that most Germans had wanted to murder Jews for centuries (p. 151). Furthermore, as Goldhagen concedes in his latest book on the Holocaust and the Roman Catholic Church (*A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair* [New York, 2002], p. 4), *HWE* was in fact a morally driven exercise rather than a disengaged piece of scholarship. Finally, Daniel Goldhagen is indeed indebted to his father. The book is dedicated to “Erich Goldhagen, my father and teacher,” and its thesis is based foursquare on his influential article, “Weltanschauung und Endlösung: Zum Antisemitismus der nationalsozialistischen Führungsschicht” (*Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 24 [1976]: 379–405). Erich

went to bat for his son, interceding unsuccessfully with Wehler not to publish his critical review. (The younger Goldhagen now insinuates that Wehler is an antisemite and Nazi sympathizer! [*A Moral Reckoning*, pp. 298, 304 n. 34]).

Why should Germans be condemned for pointing out what is so patently obvious? Because they thereby refused to take seriously the powerful message in the book about the ease with which average Germans could be mobilized for mass murder? True, but such blockages would greet any book that made extreme statements about another people. American commentators bristled when Germans dared question the seriousness of their country's public life, itself hardly beyond reproach in light of the Lewinsky affair and fiasco of the last national election. Is the test of being a good German accepting, or at least tolerating, any statement that others make about them? Is this a sustainable intercourse?

These questions lead us to the title of Shandley's book, *Unwilling Germans*? What are Germans supposed to be unwilling to accept? Goldhagen's theses? If so, the title is misplaced, for in the fall of 1996 Goldhagen embarked on his triumphant tour of Germany, winning over younger audiences and leaving the critics floundering in his wake. In order to divest themselves of their grandparents' moral pollution, young Germans embraced the endearing young American who could pronounce absolution and effect redemption: if you accept my book then you are a good German.

The fervent embrace of this "nice Jewish boy," as Atina Grossmann describes his appearance to Germans, was in fact "creepy" (Eley, p. 119). Her detailed analysis of the German response to HWE appears in Geoff Eley's splendid book *The "Goldhagen Effect": History, Memory, Nazism—Facing the Nazi Past*, a collection of five substantial chapters by experts on European history that examines the reception of HWE in Europe, the United States, and Israel. What they reveal again is that culture matters. Each national public sphere and community of historians has different priorities and preoccupations, and the book was invested with significance to the extent that it proved useful or interesting to players in their respective fields. Thus, Pieter Judson demonstrates why the book made no impact in Austria, but it is the American and German receptions that receive the most attention.

Jane Caplan argues that the book appealed to Americans because their country has made memorializing the Holocaust a national mission. Combined with vigorous marketing, Goldhagen's disarmingly simple but seemingly authoritative tale of good and evil that identifies the seeds of the Holocaust deep in German history ensured success. But it came at a cost: his rigid tracking of "Germans" and "Jews" through the German past acts out the very antisemitic ideology he opposes (p. 158). In a massive fifty-four-page survey of the United States, Germany, France, and Israel, Omer Bartov takes the analysis further. Goldhagen's book "played on the anti-German sentiments of large sectors in the American public and on the growing frustration with academic discourse" (p. 40). Goldhagen speaks increasingly "to public audiences, mostly nonacademic Jewish groups who are glad to hear him confirm what they had always believed" (p. 42). Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (2d ed., London, 2001), the rival explanation of perpetrator behavior that emphasized peer pressure, was not about to change the "American, and especially Jewish-American" belief "that Germans and Nazis were synonymous during the war" (pp. 52–53).

In Israel, however, Goldhagen's lurid depictions of Nazi violence were regarded as "kitsch" and his main thesis as old hat: everyone already knows that antisemitism was at the heart of the Holocaust and that Germans enjoyed killing Jews. Surprising is the Israeli commentary on the book's reception in the United States. Displaying a waft of

anti-Americanism (in this case, not linked to antisemitism) in attributing its success to commercialism and simplification, Israeli reviewers also held forth on other matters. Gulie Ne'eman Arad wrote, "Within the Jewish-American community . . . the conception that the danger of a Holocaust for the Jewish people has not passed serves as a central component of consciousness in the struggle for the continuation of a particular Jewish identity. No wonder that many see the Holocaust as a kind of new 'secular religion' there" (quoted, p. 68). In *Ha'aretz*, Ilana Hammermann damned Goldhagen's "pamphlet" for inciting the reader to "reach out for this sword . . . and take revenge against the monster" (quoted, p. 74). Bold statements indeed, and Germans got into trouble for saying less. Bartov's main point is that, although the Holocaust serves a legitimating function for the Israeli state and national identity, *HWE* also showed the brutalizing effects of frontline military service, a troubling link while Israeli soldiers watch over Palestinian civilians (p. 71).

These are the kind of links the French would like to make, Bartov continues. They have resisted "Holocaust consciousness" (a term he dislikes)—and therefore *HWE*—because they prefer talking about crimes against humanity (rather than just against Jews), confident as they are that *la grande nation* remains the center of world enlightenment. Yet this universalism blocks critical probing of the country's own disgorging of Jews to the Germans in the 1940s. Similarly suspect is the tool to which many scholars of genocide have turned: Stanley Milgram's "obedience to authority" experiment. In an ingenious exposure, Bartov shows how Milgram's supposedly neutral behaviorist assumptions were actually heavily freighted with gender and class stereotypes—although he does not wish thereby to endorse Goldhagen's "ordinary Germans" thesis, nor does he think the "ordinary men" explanation is sufficient. Authority alone cannot account for human behavior. Ideological commonality (which Christopher Browning did not in fact ignore) underpins the readiness of subordinates to follow orders.

Bringing back ideology is also the burden of Geoff Eley's framing chapter. Not that he credits Goldhagen with a conscious innovation. Indeed, he shows Goldhagen to have fallen behind the scholarly consensus, ignoring as he did the cutting-edge German research in eastern European archives. Yet although Goldhagen was "running through a wide-open door," his book had indeed re-posed the ideological question. For the structuralists conceived narrowly of Nazism as programmatic propaganda, rendering itself unable to account satisfactorily for the readiness of Germans to participate in mass murder. What is necessary, Eley concludes convincingly, is an "*extended* understanding of ideology, as being embedded in cultural practices, institutional sites, and social relations" (p. 23). Ultimately, though, the "Goldhagen effect" was the provocation that Goldhagen's book created in Atlantic memory politics. It was "the latest installment in a long-running public struggle to ground the ethics of democratic citizenship in a country where fascism seemed to have successfully claimed—and disqualified—the national past as source of inspiration" (p. 30)—surely an astute judgment.

These are propositions with which Don Guttenplan would readily agree. A journalist not restricted by academic conventions, he uses his book on the Irving trial as a vehicle with which to hold forth on God and the world. Rather than confine himself to reporting the events in the courtroom, Guttenplan wants to lay bare the cultural politics, in particular the Jewish ones, surrounding the trial. As a self-confessed Jewish leftist, his intention is not to vindicate Deborah Lipstadt and her supporters in all their beliefs: although he has no time for John Keegan's manly admiration for Irving ("Mr Irving's performance was very impressive. He is a large, strong, handsome man, excellently

dressed, with the appearance of a leading QC" ["The Trial of David Irving—and My Part in His Downfall," *Daily Telegraph*, April 12, 2000]), Guttenplan also displays lofty disdain for Lipstadt, a religious studies professor at Emory University.

Although Guttenplan exaggerates in his description of the trial as a close-run affair and devotes much space to its proceedings, his real prey is the opposition within the Jewish community. Dismissing the myths and morality tales of Goldhagen, he agrees with Pierre Vidal-Naquet that they actually make the deniers' task easier (p. 76). In fact, "to continually insist that Jewish suffering is a special case is to collaborate in the very isolation that anti-Semites like Irving seek to accomplish. And when frustration turns that lever into a club, whether directed at Jews or Gentiles, whether wielded by Jews who feel the Holocaust belongs to them alone or by Zionists seeking to preserve Israel's 'moral capital,' the result is a blurring of distinctions between memory and propaganda that serves only the interests of the Nazi perpetrators and their political legatees" (pp. 295–96). Having thus nailed his colors to the mast, Guttenplan goes on to defend those scholars he perceives as having been wronged by Jewish organizations: Hannah Arendt, Raul Hilberg (to whom his book is dedicated), and Arno Mayer (pp. 69–76). And in the vein of Peter Novick's *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, 1999)—a book he admires—he concludes with a plea for Jews to make the existential choice of relinquishing the politics of victimhood to throw in their lot with the excluded: "But they can't have it both ways—wearing the Holocaust as a badge of martyrdom on the robes of power, a kind of amulet to ward off criticism and secure a share in whatever consolations society affords its disadvantaged" (p. 297).

These are controversial statements, and it is not the reviewer's task to adjudicate them. Suffice it to say that Irving was not displeased with his depiction in *The Holocaust on Trial*, as Guttenplan lent some credence to his claim that he was the victim of a Jewish conspiracy to ruin him. Indeed, although Guttenplan is most critical of the man, he underestimates the paranoid and fantastical world in which Irving lives. If he is not a monster, then he is surely more than an opportunist. There are other problems with the book. Although Guttenplan has to concede that the testimony of the principal expert witness, Richard J. Evans, was decisive in the case, his obvious dislike for the historian—his poisonous review of Evans's own book on the trial paralleled a hostile campaign in *Private Eye*—leads him to suggest erroneously that Evans equated postmodernism and Holocaust denial. Guttenplan's speculations on historical epistemology are similarly unsuccessful. For an analysis of the historical and legal issues at stake, Evans's *Lying about Hitler* (New York, 2001) is superior.

If Guttenplan is really addressing his message to Jews alone, Atina Grossmann, the daughter of German-Jewish refugees to the United States, appears to be doing the same in her revealing contribution to the Eley volume, where she notes her tendency "to pronounce about the guilt complexes and strange fixations about Jews of their German friends and colleagues" (p. 123). At the same time, she observes with admirable candor that Germans are fated to "get it wrong no matter what they do. If they remember too effusively, we accuse them of a self-hating, philosemitic obsession with Jews; if they try to forget, we accuse them of irresponsible and immoral denial, of refusing to face the past" (p. 119). The identity of the "we" is left undefined, but clearly she is not addressing her remarks to colleagues in Germany.

We are back to where we started. Historians recognize that national culture informs their scholarship, but the German-Jewish case challenges the communicative rationality of the discipline because it raises the question of whether the "victims' viewpoint" should trump that of the "perpetrators." The challenge can be met because collectives cannot be ontologized in this way, despite the fact that some historians like to pose the

question in these terms. The books under review show that each of these communities contains a variety of voices. Goldhagen's book was as heavily criticized in America as it was praised. There is no single "Jewish" perspective on the Holocaust. Ultimately, despite the fact that the questions historians pose may be informed by culturally specific preoccupations, the answers they produce, as Max Weber taught, are not mere expressions of particularist viewpoints. Universally scrutinizable, historical claims can be tested against the evidence, which is, after all, how Irving and Goldhagen were refuted.

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Genocide on Trial: War Crimes Trials and the Formation of Holocaust History and Memory. By *Donald Bloxham*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. xix + 273. \$52.00.

After the Second World War the trials of Germans for war crimes and crimes against humanity sought to punish the guilty and educate the world about what they had done. Where the Holocaust was concerned, argues Donald Bloxham, they failed in their didactic mission. Narrowly focused on Nazism as a criminal conspiracy to wage aggressive war, the trials and accompanying press reports either downplayed or ignored the specificity of the Jewish tragedy. Bloxham concludes that lost opportunities to document race-specific crimes delayed and distorted the development of Holocaust historiography.

Previous scholarship by Michael Marrus, Jürgen Wilke, and others identified the postwar judicial proceedings as a turning point in public awareness of the massacre of European Jewry. Bloxham's reading of the trials in which the Americans and British played central roles—including the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, the twelve subsequent Nuremberg proceedings, the British Royal Warrant trials, and the American "Dachau Series" trials—is that they actually obscured the fate of Holocaust victims. The decision to use documentary evidence rather than eyewitness testimony left the courts vulnerable to defense obfuscation, as when Operation Reinhard was accepted as an expropriation enterprise rather than a genocidal program. Worse, the German documents made the trials boring and alienated their intended audience early on. Failure to distinguish between types of German concentration camps left the impression that Auschwitz differed little from Buchenwald, and the necessary spotlighting of individual acts of cruelty in the Dachau and Belsen trials marginalized the Final Solution. Relegating crimes against humanity to a subcategory of war crimes had the same effect. Hence Allied legal conservatism and preconceptions about Nazi criminality contributed to obscuring the Holocaust. So did traditional liberal values, claims Bloxham. Whereas the Americans were reluctant to favor any group of victims over others, the British refused to acknowledge collective Jewish suffering at all. This had little to do with antisemitism, Bloxham assures us. The prosecutors were eager to avoid any semblance of "Jewish vengeance" or of granting special rights to particular racial or national groups. Hence the Holocaust remained an abstraction everywhere, and nowhere more so than in Germany. As cold war pragmatism led to the premature release of figures such as Field Marshals Albert Kesselring and Erich von Manstein, Germans succumbed to self-pity and self-justification.