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MENORAH

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SYMPOSIUM

This symposium is a response to the *Review* essay of Sarah Gordon's *Hitler, Germany, and the "Jewish Question,"* written by Joseph W. Bendersky, which appeared in the spring 1985 issue of *Menorah Review*. —J.S.

Allice L. Eckardt

Joseph Bendersky is correct in mentioning the uneasiness Sarah Gordon's book elicits.

Gordon provides a full analysis of Hitler's ethnic theory, interpretation of world history, and conviction of having a "holy mission" that only he had the fortitude to accomplish. But she does not consider sufficiently the way in which his "messianism" was accepted by so many who allowed him to become their conscience, nor how his elite SS came to believe in their godlike impunity in determining life and death for millions.

The fact that before *Kristallnacht* "probably a majority of Germans" found Nazi racial policies acceptable demonstrates how radical evil builds on lesser evil, or even on what some see as positive. Here the culpability of Christianity cannot be evaded. The church's centuries-old insistence that Jews must remain outsiders in a Christian society, tolerated only with limited rights and controlled by law, continued into the 1940s. The need to protect the faithful from unfaithful Jewry was added to a theology of divine punishment. Anti-Semites even of an anti-Christian type could use church laws and teachings for their own more radical ends and thus undermine Christian opposition. Although the chapter on the churches is one of the weaker ones, two of Gordon's more telling statements should be underlined: "The failure of German churches to speak out

against racial persecution is a disgrace second only to that of the military. . . . [Why not *greater than* the military?] For the 'nonconverted' Jews in Germany, both churches may as well have been nonexistent as institutions" (pp. 261-62).

The evidence that only a small minority of Germans and even Nazis were rabid anti-Semites points to the need for *early* opposition to any discriminatory acts or ideology. The small number could accomplish their devastation because tens of thousands of Germans facilitated exclusion, deportation, and murder just by doing their jobs as usual, or by being a bit more zealous in order to earn a promotion; because millions aided the killers by remaining "neutral"; and because thousands of rabid anti-Semites of other nations enthusiastically joined the "war against the Jews."

The behavior of so many Germans is frighteningly understandable. People are primarily concerned for themselves and their families, indifferent to those unknown or unseen, desirous of blocking out unpleasant facts, and tempted to adjust their moral standards to those of the majority or the powerful. We know, too, how totalitarian states rely on networks of secret police and informants, opportunists and amoral careerists, arbitrary arrests, torture, and execution to terrorize populations into submission. We realize that Hitler's piecemeal strategy and gradualist escalation were essential for the Final Solution; he could not have initiated it in 1933. We recognize the clever way in which Hitler made so many into criminal accomplices. We wonder what we would have done in

these circumstances, and we become, reluctantly, empathetic.

Yet we are troubled. Is it that simple to accomplish mass murder? We are driven to remember the widespread support of the Nazis' "moderate anti-Semitic" measures.

Our uneasiness goes deeper. For all the unimpeachable scholarship and research, something seems to be missing. Do the data truly reflect the situation? If only fear, helplessness, careerist opportunism, identification with the Führer, or indifference kept most Germans from showing their opposition to persecution and murder, why did they show so little sympathy and, in fact, manifest such hostility to Jewish survivors *after* the war?

Nor can we stop here. We also are forced to take another look at the attitudes and behavior of the English-speaking world both during and for years after the end of the Third Reich. Anti-Semitism and callous indifference were not restricted to Germany or Europe.

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Henry L. Feingold

Gordon's research can be interpreted as letting the German people off the hook as far as guilt for the destruction of European Jewry is concerned by placing that guilt more squarely on Hitler. But, in fact, her findings are far more complex than that.

Gordon's book is, as Bendersky suggests, not really such a great departure from the general direction of current historiography on the nature of anti-Semitism during the war. (See, for example, Michael M. Marrus, "The Theory and Practice of Anti-Semitism," *Commentary*, August 1982, and Milton Himmelfarb, "No

Hitler—No Holocaust.” *Commentary*, March 1984. Both essays go well beyond the normative demonic portrait of German anti-Semitism during the war.) When historians get down to the particulars, the satanic anti-Semitic gestalt becomes fragmented and merges into the background of the historical canvas; it does not vanish, but bureaucracies, fanatic minorities intent on genocide, indifference of other power holders such as the officer corps, and of course the enigmatic figure of Hitler himself become far more important. It is difficult for historians to find the link between pre-war, normative anti-Semitism and the Final Solution. It may sound amazing, but Nazism did give normative anti-Semitism a bad name and also somehow went beyond it.

I don’t mean to suggest that the Final Solution was implemented in a fit of absentmindedness, but the road to Auschwitz was a “crooked” one as Schleunes suggested years ago, and it was also one conceived of by a comparatively small minority who were abetted by a great mass of people morally inured from its horrors. They neither cared nor had the courage to resist what was being done in their names. It is not totally true to say that Hitler’s pathology about Jews was amplified by power and was imposed by a totalitarian conduit on a people made powerless and ready by its history and its condition to receive and act upon the message emanating from government. But it comes close.

What Gordon really points out is crucial to the struggle against anti-Semitism here. For years we have nervously been taking the pulse for signs of anti-Semitism. But what we measure is latent attitudinal anti-Semitism. Had we had such polls during Weimar, we probably would have discovered that the Germans’ distaste for Jews was less than that of the French. The operative factor, however, is not anti-Semitic attitudes but who holds power. Power can officialize the “Jewish question”; in Germany it made the latent overt. Huge sections of the undifferentiated middle classes (*mittelstand*), realizing that there was profit, psychic income, and even status in being anti-Semitic, promptly became so. Or at least became so enough to abandon their Jewish friends, spouses, connec-

tions—lest they be hurt. Power is the central ingredient in converting latent attitudes into overt anti-Semitism. That was true in Tsarist Russia, is true in the Soviet Union, and was true in Nazi Germany. It could not have been any vulnerable minority but only one that fitted the need.

The importance of having power in officializing anti-Semitism can be gleaned from what happened in Germany after Hitler perished in his bunker. Not only did all the symbols of power vanish suddenly (as if the Nazis had never played on the historical stage), but the centerpiece of their mock ideology, anti-Semitism, went back into the closet. It became latent, almost impossible to detect among the German people. It had lost its *heksher*, its imprimatur of acceptability. When that happens, the faceless citizenry abandons the old animus and waits to hear what the new “in” thing will be. That is what mass society is all about.

I think Gordon really tells us that and much more.

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Albert H. Friedlander

Dr. Bendersky’s review is a sober, responsible exposition of Sarah Gordon’s work, which in turn is a competent work of research. Much of her thinking is the standard approach in contemporary European scholarship, even if there are individual points where other conclusions may recommend themselves. The response to this work may, therefore, suggest a different agenda: it is not the soundness of the structure, but the use to which it will be put that governs the response.

Can her work be used by revisionist historians or by apologists for the Hitler regime to deny the utter evil of that time? Yet Bendersky reminds us that this work attacks the mythology of a Hitler ignorant of the mass murders, and that it destroys the myth of an all-powerful German Jewry in control of Weimar Germany. Bendersky also attacks the myth that all Germans hated the Jews, that Ger-

man anti-Semitism occupied a central role within that society; and he quotes Peter Gay’s comment that “Germans seemed less susceptible than Russians or even Frenchmen.” Viewing the high level of anti-Semitism in contemporary France (unofficial) and in the USSR (official) compared with Germany today, this is a disquieting insight.

It is vital to the understanding of the *shoah* to recognize that German actions were not based upon a universally accepted stereotype of all Jews as devils, just as contemporary approaches must not see all Germans as evil. It is only then that we begin to perceive the other factors that led to the mass destruction of minority groups within the Third Reich: the attitude of unquestioning obedience to authority; the growing attack upon all religious patterns (Salo Baron: “It is unmistakable how the resistance against everything that Judaism and Christianity stand for has increased since the seventies of the nineteenth century, and it is no exaggeration to say that this development prepared the ground for the Nazi assumption of power”—in *Deutsche und Juden*, Frankfurt, 1967); the role of the church and of Christian teaching, even though Christianity itself was attacked; a political pattern in which Left and Right both destroyed the Weimar Republic even when fighting each other; and various other factors existing in the economic and social areas of the early twentieth century.

The *shoah* was and remains unique: a whole state turned criminal, a country submissive to a rule of evil. There is still so much to explore here, particularly the role of religion; and Sarah Gordon reminds us that “church-goers had a greater tendency towards anti-Semitism than those who were no longer regular attendants.” Here is an issue to be explored in greater depth, rather than being accepted as a polemical point. One of the foremost young theologians in Germany writes

Christians before the time of Hitler cannot be accused of having desired the devilish acts put into practice by the Nazis. On the other hand, the Church and its theologies, through the centuries . . . encouraged attitudes against the Jews of hate; of contempt . . . which often had

deadly results . . . to the christologically founded denial of Israel's right to exist, that is, denying the Jewish people's being the people of God, walking the path of life with the Torah. . . .

Peter von der Osten-Sacken,
*Grundzüge einer Theologie im
christlich-jüdischen Gespräch*,
Munich, 1982, pp. 29ff

There is a dimension of theology here, which current historiography has not assessed sufficiently. Thus, it is an over-simplification to view Luther's invective, as used by Streicher and the *Sturmer*, as a major aspect of anti-Jewish policies. Rather, it is a doctrine of exclusion from grace and a concordat with the state to whom Luther hands the Jews for punishment that created a relationship between church and state facilitating a criminal state's work of genocide. Apathy and lack of resistance were linked to that fatal relationship. The Confessing Church of Bonhoeffer, and the very real resistance within Germany, which scholarship has now disclosed, were minor aspects of swimming against the stream. Yet they may not be ignored. There is a tendency within contemporary historiography of the *shoah* to do just that. Bendersky's review, linked to Gordon's book, is a sound attempt to show the larger picture, and it should be welcomed for that reason by those who may disagree with some of the analyses given in such a presentation.

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Herbert Hirsch

The debate over whether the Holocaust was the result of a single individual's ability to gain power and implement his program of destruction or was tied to threads running through German culture and history is replayed once again in Bendersky's review essay. In reviewing Sarah Gordon's *Hitler, Germany, and the "Jewish Question"*, Bendersky displays his own peculiar vision of history.

Bendersky sets up a "straw man," which he proceeds to discredit. His repetitive use of phrases such as "uniformly anti-Semitic," "total fail-

ures," "uniform attitude," and "inevitable result" creates the impression that history can be analyzed in such a fashion as to provide analyses that allow one to make universalistic judgments. By resorting to such terminology, Bendersky creates a situation that allows him to easily discredit the analysis. If, for example, the opponent is said to have stated that Germans were "uniformly anti-Semitic," then all one needs to refute that is to find the single exception to that rule. Life does not, of course, operate in such simplistic fashion, and historical events do not proceed in this manner. No creditable scholar would, in fact, argue that Germans were "uniformly anti-Semitic."

As life is ambiguous, there are ambiguities and inconsistencies in all nation states and cultures. Genocide, as other actions initiated by the state, does not result from some single act or individual. Policy is the result of historical processes. States do not, *sui generis*, suddenly decide to engage in policy such as genocide, and genocide does not suddenly appear in a cloud of smoke emerging from the fevered imagination of a single individual. Just as there were historical reasons and precedents leading to the genocide against the native Americans and Khmers, so too were there historical precedents in Germany. When he refused to recognize this, Bendersky established his own brand of historical determinism, which implies that historical evolution is irrelevant since events seem to materialize from the mind of a single individual.

This notion of Hitler as the soul architect of genocide implies that there was no authoritarianism or anti-Semitism in German culture and that no other support was necessary. No Martin Luther with his vicious "On the Jews and Their Lies"; no cultural or historic antecedents; no Himmler with his bizarre theories—just Hitler. How easy it would be if we could follow this example and blame Lyndon Johnson alone for Vietnam or saddle Andrew Jackson with responsibility for the genocide against native Americans. History becomes neater and cleaner than life, and people below the level of Hitler or Johnson or Jackson are conveniently absolved of any responsibility. This absolution, even though one

hesitates to say it, comes perilously close to the justification given by the Nuremberg defendants: they were not responsible, they were simply following orders.

Interestingly, there has in recent years been an increase in this type of analysis, which excuses horrific acts on the grounds that they were the product of the psychopathologic mind of a single individual. Hannah Arendt in her famous concept of the "Banality of Evil" found this type of interpretation to be faulty at the core. She argued, convincingly I think, that acts of ultimate evil are often committed by very ordinary people in the name of some higher goal. Leaders may inspire, but someone has to pull the triggers, release the gasses, and drop the bombs. Hitler did not do it by himself.

Of course, as Bendersky argues, many Germans were apathetic. No doubt most people in most polities are most concerned about their personal interests, and no doubt many were afraid to oppose the Nazis. Yet, "millions of true believers," to use Bendersky's phrase, are rather a large number. As with any issue of this magnitude, if one is not part of the solution, that is if one does not oppose genocide, then one is part of the problem; that is by silence one connives with evil. Unfortunately, Bendersky appears to adopt a perspective that comes very close to arguing that once events are in motion, nothing can be done to resist or to change their course. The fact is that resistance has been successful and revolutions have occurred. Bendersky's view is inherently status quo-oriented and implies an inherently negative view of human potentiality. The contrary view is that people have the ability to make their own history. It is a view receptive to change and implies a positive view of human potentiality.

Whichever perspective one adopts is ultimately an ideological or value choice. Bendersky has chosen to view history rigidly, as the result of the workings of a single individual's mind. In doing so, he oversimplifies complex events and comes close to providing an excuse for those who participated in the Holocaust: it was not, after all, their fault; Hitler started the process of destruction,

and they simply followed orders and had no choice but to obey since resistance was futile.

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Brigitte A. A. Kern

What made it possible for Jews in capitalistic, modernizing Germany to become a projective screen for a damaged identity that no longer came to grips with the complexity of society? Why was it necessary to use the metaphor of "greedy capitalist" to overcome their own deprivations and uncertainties? I suppose the relative readiness of German society before 1933 to assimilate, the readiness of the German Jews to become assimilated, and the obsessive-destructive bureaucratic annihilation of the Jews afterwards, which went hand-in-hand with a massive, loyal-to-the-state toleration of the German population, belong to the same kind of problems. There were a large number of unsolved German problems: uncertainty about the national question, which gained a new ideological stimulus from the projective internationalism of Jews; the basic, far-reaching separation of intellectuals from the people, whose autonomy could be pursued as "Jewish kinship-relations"; the religious schism of Protestantism and Catholicism, which could find a Christian-German unity against the "hereditary foe, Judas"; and the speed of economic development in the German Reich. Since all these factors could become an ideological construct in the middle of an economic and socio-psychological crisis and since Jewish values seemed unworthy of defense, the Holocaust could take its course though unnoticed at the outset.

If the Germans as a group cannot be held responsible because they say that they did not know they were part of the machinery or because they were born after the Holocaust, I would say that this is not a matter of personal guilt. Rather, it is the case that one nation committed one of the most horrible crimes in history. Whether or not someone lived then is completely irrelevant. This crime became a part of history—German his-

tory and Jewish history—and the Germans are heirs to this history. The claim that "they were all Nazis, we are all Jewish" must be forgotten. What remains are the underlying conditions that still continue today.

What is specifically German about the Holocaust? In all parts of Europe (not to mention the United States), there was a deep-rooted Christian anti-Semitism. In different European countries, there were elements that collaborated with the Germans (Polish, Austrian, Czechoslovakian, Soviet Russian) and took an active part in the destruction of the Jewish people. But the whole idea and its organization were exclusively German. Thanks to Goebbels' propaganda, it was possible to give anxious people a pretext, and this pretext was used ideologically to condemn Jews. People lost their inhibitions because of their suffering. In the propaganda, people were not only asked to get rid of their inhibitions but also ordered to do so: You may kill the Jews.

There was the "normal" German who was relatively uninterested in anything, and there was the young SS officer who lived in a different world altogether and did not understand his part in the tragedy. Everyone said: "I was only a small person, an unimportant part of the machinery; I had no influence whatever." All this is typical for people who think *hierarchically*. This type of behavior, deeply rooted in German history, led to the fact that Germans killed millions of people because they were of a different faith or nation. This was the inevitable result of German history after the enlightenment.

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John K. Roth

Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz on January 27, 1945. Exactly 40 years later, the survivor-author, Elie Wiesel, returned there to be interviewed by ABC's Peter Jennings. During the broadcast, Wiesel's response to one of Jennings' questions included the observation that Auschwitz remains a monument to indifference.

The Holocaust pitted many enemies against the Jews. None was

more formidable, Wiesel believes, than the indifference of millions of men and women who stood by as the killers killed and the victims perished. Sarah Gordon's *Hitler, Germans, and the "Jewish Question"* confirms Wiesel's conviction. "The majority of Germans," she maintains, "simply did not think much about Jews during the period of their deportation and extermination."

As Joseph Bendersky suggests, Gordon's position is hard to accept because it undermines conventional wisdom about why the Holocaust happened. If Germans as a whole did not welcome the Final Solution, as this typical outlook assumes, their virulent anti-Semitism at the very least legitimated the Nazi push toward Auschwitz. Gordon demythologizes the explanation that could be plausible if the Germans had exhibited a uniformly rabid Jew-hatred. Although reasons for such hatred might elude complete comprehension, depicting Germans as murderously anti-Semitic would provide the convenience of identifying a national obsession as a chief cause of the catastrophe. Granted, it might still be difficult to fathom how hatred could sustain itself while 6 million died, but comprehension becomes even more problematic when the question is, in Bendersky's words, "How could apathy prevail while millions were being gassed?"

Bendersky reviews Gordon's answers. Far from publicizing the exterminations, Nazis censored news about them. Rumors, of course, did circulate. Eyewitnesses testified, too. Germans also understood that the Nazi media were untrustworthy. Nevertheless, it can be credibly asserted that the German populace lacked a widespread conviction that its government was committing mass murder. Even where full knowledge of the slaughter existed, that awareness infrequently energized resistance either among institutions such as the church or the military, which might have mounted effective opposition, or among small groups and individuals, who stood little chance of blocking Nazi power in any case. The human tendency to obey governmental authority, in addition to the Third Reich's terror tactics, effectively checked resistance.

Bendersky concurs with Gordon. "The Holocaust," he contends, "occurred in Germany because it was there that fanatical Nazis like Hitler, obsessed with racial hatred and a murderous historical mission, acquired dictatorial control over the omnipotent modern state and its population." Unfortunately, Bendersky fails to supplement that perceptive summary by underscoring equally two additional points that are needed to keep the record straight.

First, more than once Gordon urges that her study is no apologia for Germany. On the contrary, while Germans "have lived basically within the deficient but lamentably average standards of civilized behavior" both before and after the Nazi era, she insists that their conduct fell far, far below that mark in the Third Reich. Although driven by Hitler, a leader as anti-Semitic as he was charismatic, it was Germany's embracing of Nazification that took the world to Auschwitz. German anti-Semitism figured mightily in that relationship. Save for the relatively small number who openly protested the Nazis' anti-Jewish measures—they usually paid the full price for their courage—people from every sector of German society, certainly including those who stood by, must share the responsibility for Auschwitz. By apportioning that responsibility equitably, Gordon lets no one off too easily.

Second, as she puts German anti-Semitism in perspective, Gordon reveals the Holocaust's full horror. Although Bendersky alludes to it by quoting her conclusion at the end of his review, the following point needs to be made more forcefully: Even in the Nazi era, most Germans were normal men and women who were not so different from most of us. But if normal persons are, by definition, less than heroes, they are also too willing to permit state power to define social reality. Worse, without much caring, normal persons will allow defenseless people to be targeted and dispatched by the millions. Indifference, the Holocaust bears witness, is indeed the saddest human fact of all. For despite Bendersky's urging to the contrary, indifference may even

leave us bereft of "a definite sense of uneasiness."

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Richard L. Rubenstein

Dr. Bendersky's review essay raises more questions than it answers and, in my opinion, misses the fundamental issue concerning the responsibility of the German nation for the Holocaust and for the other programs of extermination that it perpetrated.

Following Sarah Gordon, Bendersky stresses the apathy of the majority of the Germans with regard to the fate of the Jews. Like Gordon, he ascribes much of that apathy to the fact that the violently anti-Semitic National Socialist leadership had coopted the state's instruments of force, such as the army, the police, and the government, rendering resistance futile at best.

There is another explanation of German apathy, which neither Bendersky nor Gordon considers: By virtue of the difference of religion and ethnic origin, the Jews were simply considered outside any possible German universe of moral obligation. Hence, even among those who did not actively hate them, the fate of the Jews was of little or no concern. There is overwhelming evidence that the Germans had one set of moral values for those they considered their racial kin, including the British and the Scandinavians, and an altogether different set for those they considered their racial inferiors. These included the Poles, Russians, Gypsies, and, at the very bottom of the heap, the Jews.

The difference in attitude toward Germany's eastern neighbors was so great that one German writer, Joachim Fest, refers to the war in the West as the Second World War and the war in the East as the Third. Hitler made no secret of the fact that he intended the war in the East to be a war of enslavement and extermination. He had been explicit about his plans in *Mein Kampf* and in his public addresses both before and after becoming Führer. When Hitler announced to 250 of his leading generals in March 1941 that he would

shortly order the invasion of Russia and that none of the customary laws of warfare with regard to the taking of prisoners or behavior to the conquered population were to be observed, not one general uttered a word of protest. Similarly, the first systematic extermination of the Jews was that conducted by the Einsatzgruppen who entered Soviet territory with the invading German army in June 1941 and rounded up and executed over 1,500,000 Jews in mass graves during the summer campaign.

Although totally in violation of historical traditions concerning the conduct of war, this operation received the full, voluntary cooperation of the German army. In many instances, German soldiers joined in the killing operation with the approval of their commanders. Bendersky's assertion that most Germans dismissed rumors of extermination as inconceivable is contradicted by the evidence brought to light by Walter Laqueur in his book, *The Terrible Secret*, that the exterminations were widely known throughout Germany even when not officially acknowledged.

Of course, there were a small number of Germans who not only opposed the racial policies but tried to help the Jews. Nevertheless, the number of Jews successfully exterminated is the best evidence of the practical insignificance of these attitudes.

Neither Bendersky nor Gordon raises what I believe to be the fundamental issue: Did the majority of the Germans regard the elimination of the Jews to be a benefit? There is overwhelming evidence that from the leaders of Germany's churches to the person in the street, there was a consensus that elimination was considered a benefit. Disagreement was only on the question of implementation. The Nazi elite understood that the majority of the Germans would not, before the fact, have chosen death camps and mass shootings as the methods of implementation. That is why the leadership went through the charade of pretending that they were keeping the operation a secret. In reality, the Nazi elite understood that if the Germans wanted to be rid of the Jews, extermination was the only viable method at the time. In

this respect, the Nazis were far more realistic than Germany's church leaders.

There was widespread consensus among the church leaders that the elimination of the Jews was a necessary precondition for the creation of a homogenous Christian and Germanic nation. As was so often the case among religious leaders, more thought was given by the church to the objective than to the question of implementation. The Nazi elite understood the primacy of the latter question and gave the Germans what they wanted, albeit using methods that most Germans would not have freely chosen. Nevertheless, once chosen, the methods elicited no protest from the churches despite the Nazis' sensitivity to church opinion during the war. When church leaders protested against Nazi programs, as they did in the case of the so-called "euthanasia" project, Hitler changed course. No such protest was ever uttered concerning the extermination of the Jews. Indeed, the Nazis gave the leaders what they wanted while freeing them of the unpleasant task of doing the dirty work themselves.

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REJOINER Joseph W. Bendersky

Most of these responses serve a useful educational purpose in exposing readers to various viewpoints. They make important contributions by elaboration of specific questions, especially regarding moral issues and religion, and require no reply. Indeed, most, including those by such knowledgeable scholars as Feingold, Friedlander, and Roth, recognize the significance of Gordon's book. The pieces by Hirsch and Rubenstein, however, constitute gross distortions of my essay and an inexplicable misunderstanding of Gordon's study. They also reflect limited knowledge of the historiography on Germany, as well as a dated, narrow view of German history and society.

Although Hirsch makes highly charged generalizations about my "peculiar vision of history" and "historical determinism," neither my interpretations nor Gordon's are "peculiar" or suggest historical determinism. The strength of her book is that it fits in so well with other significant scholarship, and I distinctly argue against inevitable events. This does not, however, in any way "imply," as Hirsch surmises, that historical processes are "irrelevant" or "there was no authoritarianism or anti-Semitism in German culture." On the contrary, Gordon and I clearly recognize cultural traditions, especially anti-Semitism, as exceptionally important.

The problem starts with Hirsch's inaccurate identification of a dichotomous debate over whether the Holocaust was the result of Hitler's ability to seize power or tied to German historical developments. Neither Gordon nor I engage in such a debate, since both points have a significant interrelationship. "If we are ever to understand the extermination of European Jewry," she writes, "we must study it within the complex milieu of German, as well as Jewish, history."

It is the complexity of these developments that Hirsch ignores. Certainly, the Jewish Question, Nazism, and Hitler's *Weltanschauung* grew out of German history, but these are only one aspect of Germany's past. What Gordon argues against is the inaccurate, one-dimensional picture of Ger-

man culture and history prevalent in much earlier literature of the "from Luther to Hitler" variety. By delving into German history to discover the "roots" of Nazism, such studies made important contributions in tracing racist and anti-Semitic trends. By concentrating on these currents to the exclusion of others, however, they created the false impression that these were the dominant characteristics in Germany's heritage. The substantial, more recent literature Gordon cites establishes that Germany's cultural heritage was much more diverse. Significant competing intellectual influences to anti-Semitism existed, represented by such prominent figures as Hegel, Humboldt, Mann, Weber, and others, and "the German liberal tradition, conservative opposition to rowdy anti-Semitism, Catholic humanitarianism, and socialist indifference to purely racial issues."

The historical questions regarding causation and responsibility for the "policy" of genocide are also misconstrued by Hirsch. Of course, genocide was the "result of historical processes," but among these the Nazis, Hitler particularly, were the decisive factors. Without the Nazi seizure of power, which was not an inevitable result of German history or even likely before 1932-33, the Holocaust would never have occurred. The course of German history could have gone off in many different directions. Before the Nazi takeover, modern historical trends in Germany were not leading toward greater persecution, certainly not genocide, but indicated greater acceptance, toleration, and assimilation.

Moreover, in the Third Reich, Hitler personally did decide "policy" on matters of great magnitude. Many Nazi leaders and segments of the party agreed completely with his murderous plans; yet within this *Führerstaat* Hitler remained the omnipotent decision-maker and pacesetter for major events, without whose determination to destroy European Jewry genocide would not have become "policy." In demonstrating Hitler's central role in this policy, Gordon is not seeking to "absolve" others of responsibility. It is obvious to any scholar familiar with the historical literature that what she challenges is the unfounded assertions of writers, such as David Irving, that either Hitler had nothing to do with

the exterminations or this policy was originally initiated by subordinates. The evidence shows Hitler decided on the Final Solution and was the prime instigator of its fulfillment, though he had the enthusiastic support of many Nazis. Others, inside and outside the party, are not thereby absolved. I stated categorically, "this by no means limits the guilt or responsibility to Hitler and the Nazis. Their policies could only have been instituted with the assistance or acquiescence of others." As Roth noted, Gordon is quite critical of those who participated or "stood by."

Hirsch not only ignores what I actually wrote, but his last paragraph in particular "oversimplifies complex events." The various reasons why different individuals, social sectors, and institutions participated or acquiesced in the Holocaust, or engaged in resistance, are analyzed extensively by Gordon. Her essential argument here is that individual resistance could only save some while the mass murders could only have been stopped by destroying the Nazi state, a goal requiring organized institutional resistance. In a dictatorship with a system of terror that had either destroyed or Nazified most institutions, only those that retained organizational autonomy—churches and army—could have succeeded. Gordon and I hold them accountable for their complicity and inaction; we never even "imply" that "resistance was futile" or that they are to be excused because they were merely following orders.

Rubenstein offers an equally simplistic, inaccurate view, incorrectly assuming a homogeneity, as well as unity of outlook and purpose, that never existed among the Germans. He neglects the great diversity in values, beliefs, and politics deeply embedded by religious, class, ideological, and regional differences that kept this nation fragmented into antagonistic segments. His entire approach rests on the erroneous assumption of a "racist" identity among the Germans that the Nazis fostered, yet themselves knew they had not really achieved in the Third Reich. He actually uses *the Nazi* racial ideology to explain the values, outlooks, and reactions of all Germans, whereas in reality the diverse responses of Germans were determined by class, various ideological perspectives, as well

as economic and personal welfare. Apathy was displayed not only toward the fate of the Jews, but also to that of many others in German society. The middle classes, conservatives, and churches lamented their own losses of rights but had no difficulty accepting the suppression of the communists, Social Democrats, or trade unions. Likewise, were the communists and Social Democrats really so concerned about the plight of religious institutions? Even the anti-Nazi resistance was significantly hampered by class, ideological, and religious conflicts.

There is no "overwhelming evidence" for what Rubenstein contends. He merely cites examples of how the "Nazi" racial ideology determined "Nazi" policies toward different kinds of Europeans, while failing to distinguish Nazi racism from the varied outlooks of other Germans. For example, the Catholic and Protestant churches, with grass roots support, strongly opposed Nazi racial ideology.

Rubenstein's loose interjection of the phrase "overwhelming evidence" is even more questionable in his contention about a "consensus" (from church leaders to the average German) that the "elimination" of the Jews was considered a benefit, but they only shied away from the logical necessity of implementing genocide. This false conjecture runs contrary to the evidence. A popular consensus about the necessity of elimination for some benefit did not exist; neither did the compatibility of goals between the churches and Nazis implied by Rubenstein. Although the churches bear responsibility for their moral failure and silence, there is evidence of their disapproval not only of genocide but also of Jewish persecution in the Third Reich in general. They failed to speak out primarily because of lack of courage and institutional self-interest, not because the Nazis gave them "what they wanted."

Similarly, Walter Laqueur's *The Terrible Secret* does not contradict the position that most Germans dismissed rumors as inconceivable. While millions of Germans knew, according to Laqueur, they learned mostly from rumors, and "the number of people

in Germany who had a full picture was probably quite small," because the Nazis tried to keep genocide secret rather than engage in a "charade" as Rubenstein alleges. Laqueur also draws an important distinction between "the meaning of 'to know' and 'to believe,'" noting that many outside Germany, including Jews, had difficulty believing even after confronted with evidence. The event itself was difficult to grasp, especially when based on rumor and in light of the fallacious "atrocious stories" of World War I. Even when faced with facts, Laqueur writes, a tendency existed to avoid knowing or believing. Gordon's point is that the crucial question was not knowledge but what one was prepared to do about it. Here, Laqueur concurs with her thesis on apathy. He writes: "Very few people had an interest in the fate of the Jews. Most individuals faced a great many more important problems. It was an unpleasant topic, speculations were unprofitable, discussions of the fate of the Jews were discouraged. Consideration of this question was pushed aside, blotted out for the duration."

Joseph W. Bendersky is professor of history at VCU.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Musical Variations on Jewish Thought by Olivier Revault d'Allonnes. George Braziller, Inc.

Pictorial History of the Jewish People by Nathan Ausubel. Crown Publishers, Inc.

Scripture in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, edited by Frederick E. Greenspahn. Abingdon Press.

Has God Rejected His People? by Clark M. Williamson. Abingdon Press.

Begin: A Biography by Eric Silver. Random House.

Jewish Experience in the Art of the Twentieth Century by Avram Kampf. Bergin & Garvey Publishers.

The Abandonment of the Jews by David S. Wyman. Pantheon Books.

Evil and the Morality of God by Harold M. Schulweis. Hebrew Union College Press.

Evangelicals and Jews in an Age of Pluralism by James Rudin. Baker Book House, Inc.

Jewish Communities in Frontier Societies by Daniel J. Elazar and Peter Medding. Holmes and Meier.

At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Hamam, edited by Jacques Kornberg. State University of New York Press.

The Left, the Right, and the Jews by W. D. Rubinstein. Universe Books.

Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic by Stephen Sharot. University of North Carolina Press.

The Human Way by Maurice Friedman. Anima Publications.

Post-Holocaust Dialogues by Steven Katz. New York University Press.

Choices in Modern Jewish Thought by Eugene Borowitz. Behrman House.

Five Biblical Portraits by Elie Wiesel. Notre Dame Press.

The Passover Seder by Ruth Gruber Friedman. University of Pennsylvania Press.

The Idea of Biblical Poetry by James Kugel. Yale University Press.

The Body of Faith: Judaism as Corporeal Election by Michael Wyschograd. University of California Press.

Women and Jewish Law by Rachel Biale. Schocken Books, Inc.

The Secret Army by David J. Bercuson. Stein and Day.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

The first annual Selma and Jacob Brown Lecture will be held on Thursday, October 24 at 8 pm in the VCU Business Auditorium, 1015 Floyd Avenue. It will be given by Dr. Richard Rubenstein, outstanding author and speaker.

MINOR IN JUDAIC STUDIES

Judaic Studies has been approved as an academic minor at VCU. The minor consists of 18 credits that include the following courses: Development of Jewish Thought, Modern Jewish Thought, History of the Jewish People (two-semester course), Introduction to the Old Testament, and Hebrew Prophets. Further information is available from the director of Judaic Studies at (804) 257-1224.

CORRIGENDUM

Credit to the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot for the reproduction of the tree-shaped Menorah was inadvertently omitted in the fall 1984 issue of *Menorah Review*.

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