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Ron Robin. *The Barbed Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States during World War II.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995. 224 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-03700-4.

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Ron Robin, an historian from the University of Haifa, aimed originally in this project to evaluate the success of the American reeducation program for German POWs held in the United States during and after the Second World War. Yet the "manifestly ineffectual" methods employed by the Americans pushed the study in another direction. Rather than devoting an "entire book to damning American reeducation officials for being presumptuous or misleading," (ix) Robin attempts to analyze the rationale behind the American approach to reeducation. *The Barbed-Wire College* is thus a "social history of an intellectual endeavor"(12) which focuses on the American officials and academics who designed and implemented the reeducation program. It explains how their attitudes toward popular culture, the social sciences, and education shaped reeducation efforts. The book is based on the archival records and in-house histories of the Special Projects Division of the US Army Provost Marshall General, the agency responsible for the reeducation program. Supplementing these sources are *Der Ruf*, the German language newspaper issued by the Special Projects Division, as well as the papers of the program's director, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Davison, and those of the curriculum director, Walter Schoenstedt. The only Germans to figure prominently in the work are those who volunteered to work in the reeducation program. Thus those seeking a broader description of the German POW experience in the United States would still do well to consult Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (1979); Judith Gansberg, *Stalag USA: The Remarkable Story of German POWs in America* (1975); or Hermann Jung, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand - USA* (1972).

Robin divides his study into three major parts. Part One, "The Mobilization of Liberal Arts," examines the POW Camp environment, the roots of the reeducation program, and the background of those involved in it. His comments on Germans POWs who collaborated in the reeducation effort will prove most interesting to German historians. In Part Two, "Reeducation and High Culture," Robin presents a detailed view of the reeducation program's various components. He concludes that *Der Ruf* appealed to a restricted, "high brow" readership due to the background and disposition of both the American supervisors and the German staff. These same elitist tendencies were seen in attempts to control the literary diet of POWs. Only the film program of the Special Projects Division sought to woo the mass of German prisoners, partly because the professors and writers who dominated the reeducation program ignored the film branch's activities.

Part Three, "The Prison Academy," examines the ambitious program of crash courses and democracy seminars instituted after the German surrender. Robin notes that the reeducators designed the courses and seminars along college patterns; lectures, discussion groups, and tests were the pillars of the sixty-day courses and six-day seminars. He notes, however, that the intention of recreating the free exchange of an American college seminar was never fully met. Other topics which Robin addresses include the lack of cooperation between school administrators and occupation officials as well as the purge of leftists within the Special Projects Division in the summer of 1945. Robin's question as to whether it was "... at all realistic to expect a significant and profound change in the world view of an adult population during the course of six days, six months, or even six years" is rhetorical. He believes the courses had little if any value. The final chapters of the book deal with how the reeducation program was influenced by the dynamics of American academia in the 1940s. Robin postulates that American reeducation officials – largely professors from the humanities departments – devised a humanistic reeducation program that aimed to validate the liberal arts in an age of technology and science. University politics and academic controversies, rather than an informed appraisal of POW camp dynamics and the German prisoner, determined the character of the reeducation program.

Though Robin's study is indeed a valuable one, his

starting premise – that the reeducation program was fundamentally flawed – is conceptually confused. At one point he suggests that the program's root problem was its exclusion of social scientists and behavioralists (54), but he argues later that reeducation programs are ineffective in any form (176). The author attaches no significance to the popularity of the Special Projects Division's book series and film program and in fact uses exit polls which indicated a changed attitude among German POWs to argue the exact opposite (163- 4). Though the success of the reeducation program is indeed difficult to measure, its value should be weighed against the alternatives of inaction or attempted behavioral modification. Robin's analogy between the behavior of German POWs in Allied hands and Allied POWs in German hands, moreover, may not be as direct he believes; Nazi ideology penetrated deeper into the German military than he admits. On a minor note, the use of the acronym "SPD" throughout the monograph to denote the Special Projects Division is distracting for those who link it with the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*. These criticisms aside, however, Robin's important study provides fascinating insights into the creators of the German prisoner reeducation program and into the concepts behind its implementation.

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