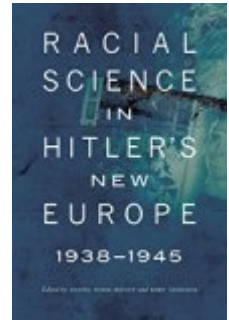


Anton Weiss-Wendt, Rory Yeomans. *Racial Science in Hitler's New Europe, 1938-1945*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. 416 pp. \$50.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8032-4507-5.



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Alongside the theme of modernity, the subject of racial exclusion rests at the center of the now voluminous scholarship dedicated to the Third Reich. In particular, hundreds, if not thousands, of studies have investigated the caustic forms of racial science, which undergirded Nazi ideology and provided the rationale for Adolf Hitler's regime's murderous and utopian efforts to restructure Europe demographically. Yet surprisingly little is known about the ways in which Nazi racial thinking interacted with local state and parastatal institutions in the German occupied territories, not to mention among the Reich's allies.

This collection of thirteen essays edited by Anton Weiss-Wendt and Rory Yeomans seeks to close this important historiographical gap. Originating in papers given at a conference on racial science held at the Center for the Study of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Oslo, Norway, the work is consciously comparative in nature. Jettisoning the traditional narrative of a top-down imposition from Berlin, the anthology in-

stead refreshingly seeks to problematize the relationship between Germany and its vassal and satellite states concerning racial policy. Spanning the breadth of Nazi Europe, from the Netherlands and Norway to Italy, Romania, and the Baltic states of Estonia and Latvia, the essays highlight the ways in which eugenicists and ethnographers not only adhered to the tenets of Nazi racial doctrine but also subverted or challenged them in order to pursue agendas aimed at strengthening the body politic in their own countries.

As several essays in the volume note, the often complicated wartime relationship between European racial scientists and their Nazi counterparts stemmed from the fact that throughout the interwar period Germany played a key role in the development of racial science. Having emerged as an academic discipline in the early 1900s, the field was well established in the country by the 1930s, and research institutions at universities, such as Munich and Giessen, attracted students from as far away as Italy, Romania, and the Baltics eager to learn about the benefits of racial hygiene from

some of the most prestigious scholars in the field. Indeed, eugenicists in east central Europe's fledgling new republics were especially keen to promote practices advocated in Germany, such as birth control and sterilization, as they appeared to offer the best means of navigating the social and economic pitfalls of the unstable interwar period.

Despite their admiration for the central role that eugenics played inside Germany after 1933, the authors highlight the considerable and enduring differences between these racial scientists and their German colleagues. As Isabel Heinemann notes in her incisive essay on the activities of the Reich Settlement Main Office (RuSHA), "seduced by abundant research funding and the prospect of swift national revival," many German academics enthusiastically implemented the regime's increasingly exclusionary racial policies (p. 50). Using the case study of RuSHA's activities in occupied Poland as a backdrop, the essay reveals that these racial specialists not only helped draft legislation, but also proved willing to go abroad as Nazism's racial vanguard after the outbreak of war in 1939, overseeing the deportation and extermination of non-Germans. Drawing on the rich historiography of *Täterforschung*, Heinemann conclusively demonstrates that these "architects of extermination" formed a distinct type of perpetrator, who, much like the counterpart in the Reich Security Main Office, was equally comfortable taking part in operations in the field as managing violent population transfers from offices in Berlin (p. 48). While readers familiar with Heinemann's previous work ("*Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut*": *Das Rasse-und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* [2003]) will not find much new in terms of content, the essay serves an important function by setting up the juxtaposition between these Nazi racial scientists unconditionally committed to the violent pursuit of a racially pure *Volksgemeinschaft* and their often much less radical European contemporaries featured in subsequent essays.

The Nazis' uncompromising dedication to exclusionary racial ideology is further driven home in the keen contribution of Amy Carney. Fully intending the SS to serve not only as the martial arm of the German nation but also as an eternal wellspring of racially pure Nazi acolytes, throughout the war years, Heinrich Himmler took great pains to balance the tension between the burdens of frontline service and the need to ensure a demographic future for Nazism's racial elite. Unable to forego the necessity of providing valuable *Menschenmaterial* for the battlefield, the SS chief sought to encourage procreation by offering material incentives, reducing the bureaucratic red tape related to marriage applications, and even providing brief conjugal vacations for SS men. However, as Carney points out, these programs ironically cut against the grain of Himmler's vision of an ideal SS code, as the *Reichsführer* was dismayed to discover that most SS officers failed to grasp the importance of their reproductive obligations, and often simply reveled in the brief respite from frontline service.

The twisted nature of Nazi ethics is further astutely elaborated on by Wolfgang Bialas. Echoing the recent work of Alon Confino (*Foundational Pasts: The Holocaust as Historical Understanding* [2011]) and Raphael Gross (*Anständig geblieben: Nationalsozialistische Moral* [2012]), Bialas emphasizes the regime's efforts to supplant the Judeo-Christian humanist tradition with a new set of values that reflected National Socialism's view of history as a merciless life or death struggle between competing races by creating rigid binaries of belonging and exclusion. Citing as evidence the lack of apparent remorse among Nazi perpetrators during the postwar period and the often heard refrain that one was simply "following orders," he finds that the regime was largely successful in its attempt to provide justification for mass murder, reducing heinous crimes to mundane concepts, such as "work" or "duty," clinical terminology that revealed the lack of empathy for Nazism's victims and allowed killers to

consider themselves, as Himmler remarked in his infamous Posen speech of 1943, "decent" guardians of the German racial community.

When placed alongside Nazism's ideological warriors, other European racial thinkers pale in comparison. Indeed, most eschewed violent schemes of racial purification, and others continued to adhere to competing conceptions of race, offsetting the hegemony of Nazi doctrine. For example, in Italy, eugenicists influenced by Latin and Catholic culture were more apt to promote positive eugenic policies, such as good hygiene and better working conditions, rather than resort to birth control or sterilization. The majority also tended to shy away from discussions of racial purity, instead using the term *stirpe*, or stock, to describe a national fusion of peoples that created a distinct, if superior, Mediterranean people. Indeed, throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, racial anti-Semitism and notions of pure races along the lines of those advocated by German academics remained relegated to the shadowy margins of racial discourse. However, things began to change after the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, which proved to be a turning point in Fascist thinking regarding race. This quest for empire demanded that Benito Mussolini's regime take a more concrete approach to such questions, as reflected in the discriminatory laws passed in Italy that barred sexual relationships between Italians and Africans in 1936. Another sign of the growing shift in discourse came two years later in the form of Guido Landra's 1938 "Race Manifesto," which advocated biological forms of anti-Semitism, and demanded expulsion of Italian Jews as irredeemable ballast. However, many of the ideas espoused in this document remained contentious, and heated debates between the national and biological camps of Italian racial science continued to rage until roughly 1943, when the formation of the Salò Republic, and more direct forms of German influence, definitively shifted the discourse in favor of racial biology.

The field of eugenics followed similar trajectories in southeastern Europe, where national belonging continued to be defined in anthropological and cultural terms until the 1940s. It was during this period that states allied to Nazi Germany acquired new territories, forcing reconsiderations of race. As Marius Turda points out in his case study of Hungary, "during the Second World War racial science acquired renewed importance in the public imagination," highlighting the critical role that the conflict played in radicalizing perceptions of the nation (p. 238). Characterized by tension between competing cultural and biological conceptions, few Hungarian racialists argued for a homogenous race until roughly 1938, when these debates were used to pursue territorial claims in southern Slovakia and Transylvania. Much like their German counterparts, flush with state funding, Hungarian eugenicists proved exceptionally willing to turn their research toward political ends, crafting a "Magyar race," which evidenced common hereditary characteristics, with predictable repercussions for the country's ethnic minorities. In neighboring Romania, racial thinkers were deeply troubled by the alleged dilution of the middle strata of society by the influx of foreigners, particularly Jews, who arrived from regions annexed after World War I. Inspired by German racial science, they sought to recast ethnicity, or *neam*, in biological terms, while remaining true to the idea of a synthesis of peoples which dominated Romanian national mythology. While they acknowledged that *neam* was created by centuries of ethnic fusion and argued against the conceptions of racial purity that dominated German racial science, they also warned that the Romania nation was now characterized by its "blood relationship," in which all its members shared in a common ancestry and needed to guard against the corruption of outside forces, namely, Jews. Thus, by 1942, Romanian racial scientists had created a "biologically hardened ethnic nationalism" that encouraged violence against outsiders (p. 279).

As Yeomans demonstrates, the country that adopted a racial doctrine most in tandem with that of Nazi Germany was the Independent State of Croatia. However, despite consciously modeling their policies on those practiced in the Third Reich, Ustasha racism cut an erratic course contingent on both changing leadership and a host of other factors that justified both atrocity and softer forms of discrimination. These contradictions were best exposed by the discourse surrounding the initial main target of the Ustasha, the Serbs. In contrast to the Jews and Roma, who were classified as racial outsiders and sanctioned by legislation that prevented them from interacting with "Aryans," Serbs never became the target of racial laws, and although the media constantly trumpeted the need for Croats to protect their racial purity, marriage with Serbs was never banned. Instead they were targeted for a campaign of cultural destruction alongside the murder operations carried out by Ustasha death squads. In the face of widespread Serbian resistance and a changing of the guard to a more moderate Ustasha leadership, by 1942 the regime had largely begun to abandon mass violence in favor of temporary, forced assimilation. During this period, Croatian eugenicists backpedaled from their earlier project of providing justification for the murder of the Serbian population. However, they still played an influential role in shaping doctrine by arguing that the minority needed to be purged of its intelligentsia and clergy, as they constituted the core of the Serb nation. By September 1944, as a new, radical leadership took the helm, Croatian racial scientists again found themselves espousing racist rhetoric against the Serbs, as the regime undertook one last effort to wipe them out. By astutely charting the ebb and flow of mass violence, Yeoman's essay dovetails neatly with the assertions of Christian Gerlach (*Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* [2010]) and Alexander Korb (*Im Schatten des Weltkrieges: Massen Gewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941-1945*

(2013)) by highlighting the often erratic and uncontrollable nature of atrocity. By doing so, Yeoman refreshingly departs from the well-established scholarly interpretations regarding the state's monopoly, or lack thereof, on the course and scope of ethnically motivated violence.

In other parts of Europe, racial scientists tried to align their field with Nazi doctrine in order to work through the occupation, toward the end of strengthening their own national composition. This was the case in Estonia, where Weiss-Wendt finds that the ethnographers who formed the backbone of the nationalist movement were eager to work with Nazi authorities. During the inter-war period, Estonian eugenicists faced what they perceived to be a demographic crisis motivated by a growing Russian minority. They eagerly seized on the opportunity to work with Nazi security forces to remove this allegedly threatening demographic segment, and successfully lobbied for the repatriation of the Estonian minorities inside the occupied Soviet Union, mirroring the Nazis' own efforts to repatriate ethnic Germans. While Hitler's regime came to view Estonia as an advance base for a racially restructured new Europe, in a certain sense, Weiss-Wendt finds that the tail wagged the dog, as local eugenicists sought to consolidate and bolster the nation through collaboration, working through intellectual, material, and security resources offered by the Nazis.

The apparent benefits of siding with the Germans are also found in Geraldien von Frijtag Drabbe Künzel's piece on Dutch settlers in the Nazi East. Traditionally, Dutch eugenicists had looked to Netherlands' colonies in Southeast Asia as a pressure valve to release "surplus" segments of the population and prevent a drain of resources inside the metropole. With Indonesia and parts of New Guinea occupied by Japanese troops, Dutch eugenicists eagerly seized on the opportunities offered by the Germans to promote settlement in Belarus and Ukraine. Between 1941 and

1944, 5,216 Dutch "pioneers" trekked eastward to farm plots of fertile black soil promised to them by the Nazi regime. They soon found that life in the East was double edged--while they were given free rein to command and exploit the "racially inferior" Slavs, they also quickly discovered the startling absence of racial comradeship exhibited by the Germans. Disdained as black marketeers, crooks, and "white Jews" by the Germans, the Dutch discovered they fit uncomfortably low within the racial hierarchy of the East, a fact that cruelly debunked the myth of Germanic kinship touted by the Nazi and Dutch governments inside the metropole.

This comprehensive and diverse volume succeeds in its intention to fill an important historiographical gap and challenge the hegemony of Nazi racial thinking inside Hitler's Europe. The one glaring weakness is the absence of an essay on France. Given the country's contribution to the racial reordering of Western Europe, not to mention the still controversial subject of Vichy collaboration, such a contribution would have rounded out the anthology. Likewise, an effort to compare the eugenic and racial policies of Nazi Europe with those of the neutral states of Switzerland and Sweden might have added further weight to the overarching theme of the work.[1] Lastly, an essay that discussed the effects of these racial policies at ground level or from the perspective of their victims would also have been welcome. While engaging and important, the majority of the chapters, with the notable exception of Yeoman's piece on Croatia, fail to break out of the realm of intellectual history and consider how these ideas played out once they were put into action. Such an investigation would have added a further layer of problematization, demonstrating the contradictions between racial theory and practice that not only allowed for mass violence and discrimination but also showed how targeted groups were in some rare cases, even if only momentarily, spared the full brunt of eliminationist eugenic policies. Here the plight of half-Jewish Germans springs

readily to mind, a case which demonstrates that even at the heart of Nazism, cracks and fissures in racial thinking remained, allowing space for survival.[2] These points aside, the anthology remains a refreshing, cohesive, and compelling contribution to the scholarship on racial policy inside Hitler's Europe.

Notes

[1]. See Thomas Etzemüller, "Total aber nicht totalitär: Die schwedische Volksgemeinschaft," in *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Frank Bahjor and Michael Wildt (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2009).

[2]. James F. Tent, *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: Nazi Persecution of Jewish-Christian Germans* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

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