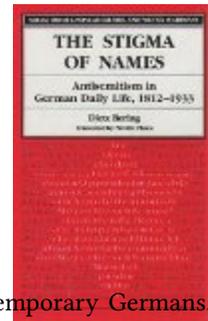


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Dietz Bering. *The Stigma of Names: Antisemitism in German Daily Life, 1812-1933*. . Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992. 345 pp. 50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-472-10407-9.

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Roughly two-thirds of his originally German work entitled *Der Name als Stigma* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1987), Dietz Bering's *The Stigma of Names* adds additional insight into the pervasive nature of antisemitism in German society and culture prior to Hitler's Third Reich. Divided evenly between historical and systematic analyses, Bering explores the various socio-political implications of attempts at isolation and identification of Jews in Germany through the institutionalization of both names and naming. Bering's intentions are clear from the opening pages of this work: this "book does not seek to report on excesses or complicated theories, but precisely to recall everyday occurrences ...[and]... how the normal citizen was involved in antisemitism, and in making the Jews into a 'model of impeachability' " (p. ix).

Bering's historical approach offers a clear insight into latent and open displays of antisemitism linked with the question of Jewish names. Although Enlightened eighteenth-century European minds were moved by a belief in the "original equal value of [all] human beings," enlightened visions of emancipation found only a limited practice in the principle of equality in the eyes of the law (p. 28). As for the Jews, emancipation represented an opportunity for a relaxation of social tensions historically linked with their separation and isolation from the surrounding society as well as the implied right to practice Judaism openly without fear of reprisal. These expectations, however, enjoyed only limited realization. Accounting for these trends, Bering's work suggests a strong link between social and historical forces culminating in the rise of Adolf Hitler's National Socialism and its genocidal policies leading to the Holocaust.

Bering's historical analysis demonstrates two strong points: First, Jewish names often evoked negative stereo-

types of Jews in the minds of contemporary Germans. Some Jewish names, e.g., Schmuhl, stood as stark reminders of the long history of European antisemitism (p. 106). Weimar culture, similarly, became a hotbed of public outcries against Jews through the use of presumed Jewish names in antisemitic publications, e.g., Cohn and Isidor. National Socialists made extensive use of antisemitic stereotypes in their publications and public pronouncements to inflame public opinion against German Jews. The case of Dr. Bernhard Weiss, Berlin's deputy commissioner of police, illustrates the practice. Weiss used the courts of Weimar Germany to defend himself against the tirades of Joseph Goebbels and the Berlin Nazis but with dubious success. He often lost on technicalities, and, even when he won, the voluminous press coverage of the cases in the increasingly antisemitic culture of Weimar's last years focused yet more hatred and calumny on him (pp. 4-5).

Second, Enlightenment thought placed a premium on a legal and social equality which presumed a virtual societal unanimity on the nature of the newly emerging society. A streamlined vision of modernity, Enlightenment thought had little room for Jewish religiosity or traditions. As articulated by individuals such as Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, it presupposed, furthermore, a certain backwardness when characterizing Jewish life and thought, which in turn inhibited a *proper* integration of German Jews into German society (p. 29). Bering's work suggests a rather significant acceptance of this position among German Jews, citing as examples, the pursuit of social integration through Christian baptism and the demonstrative support by Jews of the German cause in the First World War. (See Chapters 5 and 11)

Bering's historical analysis suggests an almost linear

increase in public acceptance of these and other essentially negative attitudes, leading to the framing of policies based on them under National Socialism. (pp. 144-145). But Bering also supplies evidence that leads one to question such a conclusion. Specifically, despite a small increase in the early 1920s, the number of German Jews seeking to change their names remains proportional to the practice within the general population. In other words, German Jews were no more concerned about the negative image or consequences of their names than any other citizens of the German state (pp. 124-126, 141). Were they insensitive to insult? Or does Bering exaggerate?

On the whole, it appears that only *some* German Jews responded to societal pressures to change their names. Instead of quieting criticism, however, the practice provided new fodder for the antisemitic press which fully exploited the conspiratorial implications of invisible Jews trying to live undetected amidst *good Germans*. Nazi policy, consequently, used the issue of Jewish names and naming to enhance the conspiratorial image of German Jews. Although the question of Jewish names and naming could not in and of itself explain the eventual Nazi policy of genocide, Bering argues that it helped galvanize support for the Nazis prior to their rise to power and served as *another* justification for Nazi policy towards the Jews after 1933 (p. 137).

Bering's fairly traditional historical analysis details events leading to specific Nazi policies in the 1930s. His

"systematic analysis" attempts to integrate the *normal citizen* into this matrix of events and to show how *naming* became an important component of German self-identification with both racial and religious ingredients. The two elements of Bering's approach do not coexist comfortably. The "phylogenetic" and "ontogenetic" aspects may prove particularly problematic for more traditional historians. Heavily reliant on various socio-anthropological studies (e.g., Claude Levi-Strauss's *Das wilde Denken* (1968) and Anthony Calvillo's study of the Dakota Indians), his outline of socio-psychological studies of *identity*, names, and prejudice assumes a stronger linkage of "attitudes toward racial and national groups" than is generally acknowledged in historical circles, suspicious of psycho-historical analyses (p. 194). Nonetheless, applying aspects of these studies to Jewish names in German history, Bering will persuade many readers of the all-pervasive character of German antisemitism in "everyday occurrences" and in the life of the "normal citizen."

In conclusion, the similarities between Bering's work and Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996) will be apparent to many. Do they represent a new genre of historical writing? Both seek a clearer understanding of initial societal acquiescence and subsequent support for Hitler's *Final Solution of the Jewish Question*. Both investigate non-traditional approaches to these matters at the risk of offending traditionalists. Bering's contribution to this experiment is, I think, warmly to be welcomed.

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