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Alexandra Przyrembel. *'Rassenschande': Reinheitsmythos und Vernichtungslegitimation im Nationalsozialismus.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003. 568 S. + 13 Abb. EUR 76.00, gebunden, ISBN 978-3-525-35188-8.

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There are by now a great many studies dealing with racist ideology in Nazi Germany in relation to specific professions, academic fields, and institutions.[1] Alexandra Przyrembel's recent book *"Rassenschande"* (Racial Shame), however, is one of only a few works that provides a much-needed examination of the institutionalization of racist policies in Nazi Germany across organizational and professional boundaries.[2] In so doing, it provides a much more holistic picture of the functioning of the "Racial State" than is usually the case.

Przyrembel's ability to provide this wider view is largely a function of her choice of topic. During the Third Reich, "racial shame" meant primarily two things. One was a specific violation of the 1935 Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor (part of the Nuremberg Laws), which outlawed sexual relations between "Jewish and non-Jewish Germans."[3] The other was a more popular understanding of "racial shame" as sexual relations between "'Aryans' and 'colored persons,'" or anyone else of "alien racial type [*artfremd*]" (p. 12). Dividing her book into two conceptual halves, in the first, entitled "'Racial Shame'--Emergence of a Stereotype," Przyrembel discusses the pre-1933 development of the concept, the popularization and institutionalization of the idea in the Third Reich, and the expansion of Nazi race legislation. The second half, called "'Racial Shame'--a Stereotype and its Devastating Consequences," provides a detailed overview of the functioning of the concept of "racial shame" in German society during the Nazi era. This section, which forms the bulk of the work, concentrates on the role of denunciations by private individuals in finding violations of "racial purity" measures; the role of various police entities in identifying, arresting, and interrogating potential violators; the profile of persons accused of the "crime" by "race," gender, and socio-economic status; the incorporation of the concept of "racial shame" into legal practice; the punishments meted out to those who violated the law and how these corresponded to their social profile; and the various responses of the accused.

During the Third Reich, the German legal system convicted about two thousand men--both

Jewish and non-Jewish--of the crime of "racial shame" (p. 15). A primary argument of Przyrembel's work is that despite this relatively small number of convictions, state prosecutions of intimate relations between "Aryans" and Jews had far wider repercussions than the numbers would indicate. A broad range of individuals and institutions were necessary to enforce the prohibitions. A "racial shame" case, for example, involved virtually all components of the German criminal-justice system. Przyrembel stresses that besides public prosecutors and courts, not only the Gestapo but also the regular criminal police were heavily implicated in the process. Such cases also required the assistance of private individuals and a great variety of institutions willing both to denounce and testify against the alleged perpetrators. Thus, in one of many examples Przyrembel provides, a Berlin hospital worker denounced a couple (in which both parties were well over seventy years old) to the Berlin Health Care office, which then passed this information on to the Office of the State's Attorney (p. 210). "Racial shame" cases often also involved scientific experts who "determined" the "race" of alleged violators, and journalists (not all of whom wrote for regime outlets like ***Der Stürmer***) who reported favorably on the efforts to root out the "crime." The participation of wide segments of society in such measures played a key role in destroying social relations between German Jews and non-Jews, isolating the Jewish population, and making it an easy target for the Nazi regime's ever-expanding anti-Jewish measures (pp. 15, 488).

Przyrembel shows that not only were a great variety of social and institutional components involved in the prosecution of racial shame cases, but that these various elements willingly, and often enthusiastically, participated in the process. Thus, the first criminal conviction for "racial shame" actually occurred several months before the passage of the Nuremberg Laws (p. 65), i.e., before the act had actually been criminalized. Later, courts took the initiative by seeking to penalize not just sexual relations, but any sort of friendly relations between "Aryans" and "Jews," as a "racial shame" violation. Przyrembel also describes what she calls an "astonishing consensus" between States' Attorneys' offices and the criminal police to "criminalize every form of erotic contact between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans" (p. 338). Indeed, she argues that there were pressures to attack "racial shame" from both "above" and "below," and that often actions from above were really "reactions" to pressure from below, such as the unofficial public humiliations of persons engaged in "racial shame" that began to take place across Germany shortly after the Nazi assumption of power (p. 150). While Przyrembel also notes courageous efforts to resist the "racial shame" laws, she makes the case that such resistance was far from representative.

Przyrembel's work is less effective in explaining the reasons for widespread receptiveness in Nazi Germany to the prevention or punishment of fraternization between Jews and non-Jews. In her discussion of the conceptual development of "racial shame" in the ***Kaiserreich*** and Weimar, for example, she demonstrates the presence of significant concern about Jews as carriers of "alien blood" (as exemplified by the popularity of Artur Dinter's novel ***Sin Against the Blood***). But her evidence also shows that especially in Weimar, public disquiet, frequently expressed at the highest levels of government, was primarily directed against "colored" persons, notably the African and Asian soldiers in the French army of occupation in the Rhineland, not against Jews. Obviously, after the Nazi assumption of power, Jews became the primary target of those concerned with "racial shame." Przyrembel's work, however, seems to assume that this receptivity to racial rhetoric was a natural continuity in German society. It is not clear, however, that prior to the Nazi assumption of power much of the German public in fact viewed sexual relations between German Jews and non-Jews in the same way as between Germans and "colored" persons. Many German Jews,

for example, were, unlike "colored persons," often physically indistinguishable from German Christians. Przyrembel's own work shows such similarities actually caused no small measure of consternation for those seeking to enforce the "racial laws." Moreover, by 1933, the level of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews had reached its highpoint in Germany. Indeed, Przyrembel quotes Reich Justice Minister Franz Gürtner (1932-1941) arguing that it would be easier to enforce the racial laws if they were first directed against the "colored" rather than the Jews (p. 142). While the question as to why anti-Jewish measures were institutionalized so effectively in Nazi Germany is complicated, given the nature of her subject, it would have been helpful had Przyrembel sought to address it to a greater degree.

Whatever her work lacks in this regard, however, Przyrembel has otherwise provided a compelling portrait of the complex social relations involved in the effort to stop instances of "racial shame" in Nazi Germany. The level of empirical detail in her study is impressive and the organization is well thought out. All in all, this is a very valuable work for those interested in the functioning of Nazi society and the history of racist ideas.

Notes

[1]. See, e.g., Robert Proctor, ***Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis*** (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Peter Weingart, Jürgen Kroll, and Kurt Bayertz, ***Rasse, Blut und Gene: Geschichte der Rassenhygiene in Deutschland*** (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1988); Michael Burleigh, ***Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Ingo Müller, ***Hitler's Justice: The Courts of the Third Reich*** (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Diane Schulle, ***Das Reichssippenamt: Eine Institution nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik*** (Berlin: Logos, 2001); Isabel Heinemann, ***"Rasse," Siedlung, deutsches Blut*** (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003).

[2]. The primary study in this regard remains Michael Burleigh, Wolfgang Wippermann, ***The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[3]. More technically, the law outlawed sexual relations between "Jews" and those of "German or related blood."

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