

Franz Neumann, Herbert Marcuse, Otto Kirchheimer. *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany: The Frankfurt School Contribution to the War Effort.* Edited by Raffaele Laudani. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013. 704 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-691-13413-0.



Reviewed by Anne Berg

Published on H-German (October, 2014)

Commissioned by Chad Ross

When the news broke last November that Cornelius Gurlitt, the eighty-year-old son of a former Nazi art dealer, was sitting on more than 1,200 pieces of artwork confiscated by the Nazi regime, *The New York Times* somewhat indignantly reported that "the 1938 law"—on the basis of which the regime seized "thousands of other Modernist artworks deemed 'degenerate' because Hitler viewed them as un-German or Jewish in nature—remains on the books to this day." [1] The failure of the Federal Republic of Germany to effectively eradicate traces of Nazism from its laws is more easily seen in relation to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—Germany's attempts to come to terms with the Nazi past—rather than in the context of the postwar politics of occupation and reconstruction. But as Raffaele Laudani's collection of secret reports by members of the Frankfurt School working for the Research and Analysis Branch the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) illustrates, concrete suggestions about Germany's political and legal reconfiguration after defeat were already being discussed and planned by the Allies

while the war was still raging in Europe. In response to suggestions that "all legislation enacted by the Nazis should be considered unconstitutional and therefore invalid," Otto Kirchheimer recommended in March 1944 that "there are in practice serious objections to such a drastic policy" since the "wholesale abrogation of this legislation, though not without psychological benefit, would lead to chaotic conditions" (p. 230). As this example illustrates, *Secret Reports On Nazi Germany: The Frankfurt School Contribution to the War Effort* is of immense contemporary relevance in addition to being an excellent resource for scholars.

Laudani argues that Franz Neumann, Herbert Marcuse, and Otto Kirchheimer, who joined the OSS in this order only after the German defeat at Stalingrad, "produced a formidable number of studies and reports on the 'German enemy' that represent the most complex and insightful analysis of Nazi Germany ever put forth by members of the Frankfurt School" (p. 1). Following Raymond Geuss's preface, a brief note on the texts, and an overview of each author's life and intellectual la-

bor, the editor's introduction explicates the difficulties the Frankfurt School faced in exile and highlights a few key ideas the authors collectively belabored in their reports on Nazism. Moreover, Laudani carefully links the activities of the Frankfurt School to the birth of social science in the United States and situates the reports in the context of nascent Cold War politics. Organized into seven parts, the primary texts analyze the Nazi regime; outline the possibilities for its collapse; speculate on potential internal opposition; and advance a number of recommendations for post-war denazification, trials of criminals, and political and judicial reconstruction before offering some observations on Communism as the new enemy.

Rather than contextualizing each part, Laudani chooses to let the documents speak for themselves, essentially providing the reader with a history of a present long gone. The resulting immediacy to the sources and the voices of their authors is one of the book's major strengths. The minimalist presence of the editor allows the reader to appreciate the scholarship of the original authors that clearly connects with, and even anticipates, subsequent historiographical breakthroughs and debates. For example, the phases of Nazi rule from revolution over consolidation to radicalization are already apparent in Marcuse's exposition of the "Nazi Master Plan." The authors collectively recognized the internal power dynamics within the Nazi hierarchy, the competition between various high-standing officials, systematic competition between the army and the police, and the chaotic nature of policy making. Their analyses of Prussian militarism, the social composition of German society, the increase of female labor, linkages between class and political affiliation, the atomization of German society, the complicated marriage between state and industry, and de-emphasis on the role of Adolf Hitler foreshadowed many of the arguments later advanced by the so-called structuralist camp.[2] At the same time, questions of art and culture, popular consent, ev-

eryday life, and perhaps most important, the genesis of the Holocaust are telling only by their very absence from the Frankfurt School's considerations. What is noticeable instead, particularly in their assumption that the Nazi leadership was more actively involved in finding an end to war, is the postulation of a shared "rationality" between Nazism and the "West."

The Frankfurt scholars, nonetheless, understood power in a rather "traditional" sense; in other words, as male, bureaucratic, and technocratic, and as enforced by means of brutal terror that was designed to keep "people in a perpetual state of tension" (p. 97). As a result, their analyses did not leave room for conceptualizing consent. Instead, submission and resistance were elevated to the operative binary. Aspects of Nazism that would subsequently be remembered as part of the "good times" as well as Nazi promises for post-war prosperity were seen by the Frankfurt scholars as mere window dressing without political consequence.[3] This understanding of power wielded ruthlessly from the top determined their recommendations for dealing with Nazi criminals as well. In particular, Kirchheimer's analysis of the leadership principle, written in collaboration with John Herz, exposed the Nazi regime as an extralegal system in which the leader is responsible for the failure of those under his command. By reverse logic, the Nazi leaders "would indeed have to answer for what has actually been done in accordance with their own standards and policies" and answer to allegations of war crimes (p. 471). Analyses such as these inadvertently exculpated the majority of the population and potentially facilitated the rather half-hearted denazification efforts in the western zones.

As Laudani illustrates in the introduction, the authors collectively rejected the notion of a German *Sonderweg* and described Nazism as fundamentally modern. The Frankfurt scholars did not locate modernity in a universalist notion of progress but recognized it in the regime's techno-

cratic, bureaucratic, mass-political, and industrial operations, and were mainly concerned with eradicating the basis of German aggression rather than of German backwardness. Most interestingly, this analysis does not seem to have been controversial at the time.[4] As the reports collected in parts 5 and 6 reveal, Allied plans for European liberation and economic reconstruction looked at the Nazi occupation of Europe as a model for their own administration of a defeated Germany and its occupied territories, in particular with respect to raw material allocation and food provision.

Laudani draws attention to the problematic position of antisemitism in the writing of Neumann who viewed Nazi antisemitism as the training ground for, and the spearhead of, anticipated universal terror. What is remarkable, however, is the realization by Neumann and his collaborators at the OSS that racism and antisemitism were fundamental to the regime's structure and its power to bind the population to the regime. Identifying antisemitism as "the most constant single ideology of the Nazi Party," Neumann's arguments prefigured the conceptualization of the Nazi regime as a racial state (p. 28). Certainly, the role attributed to antisemitism differs dramatically from that advanced in the work of Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (1991). Even though the Frankfurt scholars already translated the term *Volksgemeinschaft* as racial community, they did not yet see antisemitism as related to the medicalization and racialization of the body politic as a whole. Rather, in the eyes of Marcuse, "anti-Semitism has served the purpose of forcing all Germans either to identify themselves with Nazism or pay the price of dissent" (p. 97).

In their exposition of the Nazi enemy as well as in their recommendations for postwar occupation, the Frankfurt scholars occupy an in-between space. Their intimate knowledge of Germany, their Marxism, and their visions for Germany's post-Nazi future were, at times, in obvious tension

with the tenor of U.S. politics. Such tensions can be inferred most clearly from their recommendations for the treatment of war criminals and the utilization of an existing German (leftist) opposition, which were blatantly ignored by the Western Allies as Cold War considerations trumped universalist ideals. Here, the editor's minimalism is a hindrance rather than a virtue. Much could have been gained from a more detailed context of the particular interests, power dynamics, and policy arguments within the Research and Analysis Branch and the OSS more generally. Since parts of the book are much more substantial than others, a more critical framing of each part by the editor could have linked the selected examples with those omitted. Such framing could have moreover provided the rationale for grouping and thereby strengthened the overall coherence of the book. A stronger editorial presence, explicating abbreviations and identifying misspellings and misnomers, would have been beneficial as well. Without such explanation, the relatively large number of orthographic infelicities, particularly in the spelling of German words, are somewhat distracting.

Such minor criticism aside, *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany* is a work of immense scholarly value that can serve as an important resource for scholars and students interested in the Second World War, U.S. postwar policy, the origins of the Cold War, critical theory, and the politics of exile. Most important, the reports in this collection provide a critical starting point for tracing the historiography on Nazism in the United States.

Notes

[1]. Melissa Eddy and Alison Smale, "Enduring Nazi Law Impedes Recovery of Art," *New York Times*, November 19, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/20/arts/design/enduring-nazi-law-impedes-recovery-of-art.html?_r=0.

[2]. For an excellent summary of these debates, see Ian Kershaw, "Hitler: 'Master in the Third Reich' or 'Weak Dictator'?" in *The Nazi Dic-*

tatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation (London: Arnold, 2000), 69-92. See moreover Martin Broszat, *Der Staat Hitlers* (München: DTV, 1969); Hans Mommsen, "Hitler's Stellung im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem," in *Der 'Führerstaat': Mythos und Realität*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981): 43-72; and Timothy Mason, "Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism," in *Nazism, Fascism, and the Working Class*, ed. Jane Caplan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 212-230.

[3]. See Ulrich Herbert, "Die guten und die schlechten Zeiten: Überlegungen zur diachronen Analyse lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews," in *"Die Jahre die weiss man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll": Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet*, ed. Lutz Niethammer (Berlin: Dietz, 1983): 67-96.

[4]. For a comprehensive overview of the debate over Nazism's modernity, see Mark Roseman, "National Socialism and the End of Modernity," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 688-701. See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Anne Berg. Review of Neumann, Franz; Marcuse, Herbert; Kirchheimer, Otto. *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany: The Frankfurt School Contribution to the War Effort*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. October, 2014.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=39829>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.