Harold Marcuse, Review for American Historical Review, of:


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The milestones of international recollections of the Nazi Holocaust from the 1970s to the present millennium are well known and have been examined in detail. This book, based on the author's 2012 dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania, takes a look inside the international politics of some of the more salient public Holocaust memory prompts from 1978 to 1998. The first of five chapters is titled "Holocaustomania," a term employed by Jewish religious figures critical of the increasing importance of the Holocaust in contemporary Jewish identity. Eder uses it more broadly to refer to the accelerating public interest in the Nazi genocide of Jews prior to 1980, especially among non-Jewish Americans, as evidenced by the high viewership of the 1978 TV miniseries "Holocaust." This chapter details how West German diplomats, while observing this trend and considering responses to limit possible damage to their country's reputation, prudently decided that refraining from attempts to intervene would be the best response.

Chapter two begins in 1982 with the election of conservative Christian party leader Helmut Kohl to the chancellorship. Kohl, a Ph.D. historian who served in (West) Germany's highest executive office until 1998, is the main protagonist of this book. In contrast to all chancellors before him, Kohl immediately and openly pursued an affirmative "politics of history." In addition to launching domestic memorial and museum projects, Kohl fretted about the effects on Germany's reputation of growing U.S. interest in the Nazi genocide, and he took personal interest in deploying his diplomatic corps in an effort to establish a positive image abroad of a democratic West Germany unconnected to its Nazi predecessor. Kohl's visit to the Bitburg military cemetery with U.S. President Reagan in May 1985 takes center stage. Eder's detailed retracing of the planning process based on internal memoranda adds significant depth to the consensus view that this was a public relations disaster for both Kohl and Reagan. In an odd twist however, Eder finds that this debacle increased dialog between West German and American Jewish organizations, creating ties that would bear fruit in the 1990s.

West German efforts to influence the content of the planned US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, the subject of the third chapter, are the centerpiece of the book. In minute detail Eder walks readers through German fears that the planned museum was, as one American put it, Sybil Milton summarized after a 1985 tour exploring German archives, "by definition anti-German," and would forever bind Germany's image abroad to the Nazi genocide (103). The most salacious revelations of the book emerge in this chapter: German parliamentary delegate Peter Petersen's blatant antisemitic prejudices, and his attempted quid pro quo helping Elie Wiesel to win the Nobel Peace Prize in order to influence the content of the museum's permanent exhibition. Eder also lays out the sources supporting claims that Kohl's government offered millions in back-channel funding if the museum included positive images of West Germany, a possibility appearing more likely after the exposure of Kohl's illegal slush-
fund in 1999. In spite of the fruitless German efforts of the 1980s, by the time the museum opened in 1993 German diplomats conceded that their fears had been vastly exaggerated if not baseless.

Of particular interest to US historians of Germany is the chapter on the establishment of the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C. in 1987, as well as German-funded "Centers of Excellence" at Harvard, Georgetown and UC Berkeley in 1990. Although these initiatives dated back to the 1970s, their realization under Kohl was tied to the West Germans' angst about the USHMM's expected impact. The final chapter takes the story from unification in 1990 to the end of Kohl's tenure in 1998. After the post-unification wave of German xenophobia and the anti-climactic opening of the USHMM, Eder examines how the German public's reception of the 1993 film *Schindler's List* and the 1996 publication of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* contributed to the government's shift from trying to "correct an allegedly 'distorted' image" of Germany, as Eder puts it, to taking specific steps to address festering legacies of Nazism, such as compensating survivors of Nazi persecution in eastern Europe (188). With his final example of Kohl's quid pro quo granting a location for a central "murdered Jews" memorial in Berlin in return for support for his national war and tyranny memorial, Eder concludes that Kohl finally realized that putting Jewish victims at the center of Germany's politics of history would render Germany "immune to" the criticism Kohl had feared for so long (195).

Eder points out various contributions made by his exhaustive crawl through German chancellery and Foreign Office files, as well as personal papers, oral histories and interviews with more than three dozen protagonists. However only the second, that he documents the continued operation of antisemitic prejudice in West German politics, is a truly new contribution to our knowledge of how this period of German memory politics unfolded (10-12). Eder euphemistically categorizes this as secondary antisemitism (blaming Jews for reminding the world about genocide), but it appears to me to be very primary, including less rather than more coded language used by Kohl and several diplomatic officials in numerous memoranda and letters. Among the stereotypes they attributed to people like "Mr. Wiesel who came from Auschwitz" (65) and the expectant "American East Coast" (194) were that a Jewish lobby, which could be influenced by money, manipulated U.S. foreign policy and controlled the mass media, with the aim of harming Germany.

A lack of attention to political and cultural context is the main shortcoming of this meticulous archival study: its narrative is driven by the troves of government documents the author ferreted out using the German equivalent of freedom of information requests. While institutional and personal documents are used to assess these documents, Eder does not situate his story in the longer sweep of the generational change framework he alludes to, nor does he mention domestic memory events such as the 1984 German TV miniseries *Heimat*, or the 1994 publication of Victor Klemperer's Diaries. Still, this book shines a bright light on Kohl's generation's paranoia about German victimization at the hands of Jews.

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