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Review of Jacob S. Eder, *Holocaust Angst: The Federal Republic of Germany & American Holocaust Memory since the 1970s*

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Holocaust Angst: The Federal Republic of Germany & American Holocaust Memory since the 1970s.

By Jacob S. Eder. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xvii + 296 pp. \$35.00.

Jacob Eder, a research fellow and lecturer at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, based this important work on his award-winning dissertation of 2012 (University of Pennsylvania). It traces how the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), confronted with America's commemoration of the Holocaust, altered its engagement with its Nazi past from a preoccupation with affirmative history to acknowledgement of the centrality of Holocaust memory and transformed its image from "Holocaustland" to "model state for dealing with the aftermath of genocide" (176, 208). Crucial to these developments were relationships forged between West German and American Jewish individuals and organizations.

Eder's first chapter, "Holocaustomania: West German Diplomats and American Holocaust Memorial Culture in the Late 1970s" contextualizes the analysis. Conservatives around Bundeskanzler Helmut Kohl (1982-1998) perceived American Holocaust memorial culture as a threat to German-American relations. Eder labels this anxiety about the repercussions of Germany's Nazi past "Holocaust angst" (3). Feeding this "angst" were (stereotypical, even anti-Semitic) assumptions about American Jews and their political and cultural power, anti-German animus, and ability to mobilize the Holocaust to Germany's detriment.

Chapter Two, "A Holocaust Syndrome? Relations between the Federal Republic and American Jewish Organizations in the 1980s," focuses on Kohl's attempts to resolve this crisis. Kohl and those around him engaged in an "affirmative" politics of history to provide the FRG with a positive modern identity, offering a "usable past" that acknowledged Nazi crimes while otherwise celebrating German history (62, 133-34). A "watershed" for Kohl's affirmative history was Ronald Reagan's disastrous visit to Bitburg Cemetery, heavily criticized as Holocaust denial (66). Bitburg set in motion an "unprecedented expansion of interaction" between West Germany and American Jewish organizations that helped the FRG to "implement certain [public-relations] policy goals in the United States" and afforded American Jewish organizations "contacts with the highest German authorities [and] significant...influence and power" (75-76, 83).

In Chapters Three and Four, Eder examines the Kohl government's most significant public-relations projects. "Confronting the Anti-German Museum: (West) Germany and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1979-1993," recounts German attempts to assert a "fundamental...right of codetermination in how Holocaust history should be told abroad" through negotiations involving the permanent exhibit of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. (205). The dominant role of Holocaust survivors on the Museum's board determined that its focus would remain on Jewish victims of Nazism. German offers of money and artifacts were viewed skeptically, and the post-Nazi democratic successes of the FRG were excluded. "Politicians and Professors: The Politics of German History in the American Academy from the 1970s to 1990," recounts the founding of the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C., and centers of excellence in German studies at three prestigious American universities to mobilize academics to alter the scholarly discourse about Germany. The tension between scholarship and image management was eventually resolved as scholars asserted academic freedom; while this stymied Kohl's public-relations agenda, it reflected well on the FRG as a democratic and progressive country.

Chapter Five, "After Unification: The Transformation of Holocaust Memory, 1990-1998," addresses Holocaust engagement during the transition to unified Germany that raised new

questions—and fears—about how it would deal with its Nazi past. Complicating the FRG's image were the rise of right-wing, neo-Nazi violence and the “instrumentalization” of the Holocaust by American media (173-174). Realizing that Germany's image would “depend upon [its] domestic engagement with the Nazi past,” Kohl worked more intensively with a broader range of American Jewish organizations in an “open, unapologetic engagement with the past” that “plac[ed] Jewish victims at the center of Holocaust memorialization” (166, 195-196).

This interdisciplinary, transnational study engages German and American history through the lenses of image and memory management, providing a complex, nuanced analysis of the interplay of perception and diplomacy in international relationship building and maintenance. Ironically, it reveals the significant role of Jewish actors and organizations in the rehabilitation of Germany's image. Despite historical and contemporary reasons to distrust the FRG, American Jews nevertheless collaborated in discussions and projects that redefined Germany's engagement with its past and with Holocaust memorial culture. Notwithstanding attempts to manage American Holocaust memorial culture, Germany was only able to project a positive image abroad once it dealt with Holocaust memorialization domestically and acknowledged its debt to its Jewish victims.

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