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Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006. Pp. ix, 390. ISBN 978-0-674-02175-4.

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In his latest book, Jeffrey Herf, professor of history at the University of Maryland and a recognized scholar of modern German and Jewish history, adds to the extensive historiography of the Holocaust. His three previous books, *Reactionary Modernism*, *War by Other Means*, and *Divided Memory*,¹ are classics in the field and demonstrate the scope of his interests and abilities. In *The Jewish Enemy*, Herf examines the use of anti-Semitic propaganda by the National Socialist regime to make several bold claims about Adolf Hitler, the Nazi leadership, and the Holocaust: “the radical anti-Semitic ideology that justified and accompanied the mass murder of European Jewry was first and foremost *a paranoid political, rather than biological, conviction and narrative*” (150-1). He points out that, since anti-Semitism was not new to Germany, scholars need to ask what change in the nature of anti-Semitism allowed the Nazis to go from persecution to genocide. He surmises that a close investigation of anti-Semitic media explains the temporal framework of the Holocaust. Herf studies the speeches of Hitler, the speeches and diaries of the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, the headlines in the official Nazi newspaper, the *Völkische Beobachter*, and a plethora of propaganda leaflets to support his assertions. According to Nazi propaganda, a small group of powerful actors, referred to collectively as “international Jewry,” having come to power behind the scenes in the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States, started and later expanded the war against Nazi Germany in order to exterminate the German people. Herf assigns particular importance to Hitler’s response to the so-called threat of political Jewry, widely known as the “prophecy,” in which Hitler proclaimed, frequently for public consumption, that if the Jews started a world war, it would not lead to the end of the German people but rather to the extermination of the Jewish race. Consequently, Hitler’s prophecy not only provided National Socialism with a historical narrative of the danger of international Jewry, but, Herf suggests, demonstrates that Hitler and other Nazis actually believed in their fanatical ideology.

Herf employs a chronological approach, discussing first how the Nazi leadership portrayed a Jewish conspiracy as the driving force of political events in the 1920s and 1930s. He stresses that Goebbels and Otto Dietrich, Chief of the Reich Press Office, played key roles in disseminating Hitler’s anti-Semitic ideology at the *Gau* (regional), *Kreis* (city), and *Ort* (local) levels throughout Germany, especially via newspapers and walled posters such as the *Parole der Woche* (Word of the Week). The widespread distribution of such propaganda, Herf argues, gave Hitler and the Nazi elite an anti-Semitic “consensus” that

¹ *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Pr, 1986); *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance, and the Battle of the Euromissiles* (NY: Free Pr, 1991); *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Pr, 1997).

made possible the Führer's first prophecy speech during his 30 January 1939 address to the Reichstag.

Herf then analyzes the continuation of the Nazis' historical narrative during the opening years of the Second World War, when Hitler, Goebbels, Dietrich, and other Nazi leaders saw no contradiction between their belief in a pervasive Jewish conspiracy controlling the governments of the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and America, and the fact that Hitler and Joseph Stalin had signed a nonaggression pact in August 1939. As Herf notes repeatedly, the Nazi propaganda machine always had a justification for Hitler's provocative actions. In this case, Great Britain's refusal to surrender to Nazi Germany despite its precarious strategic position and America's economic support for Britain testified to the political power of international Jewry in the two western countries. Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt in particular became frequent targets of Nazi propaganda attacks, usually as stooges or puppets of the Jewish "wire-pullers" (*Drahtzieher*). At the same time, the Nazi-Soviet Pact demonstrated that even though the Jews were a formidable opponent, Hitler was able to outsmart and defeat them.

Herf then focuses on Nazi propaganda during the turning point of the war (1941-1943), when the regime was fighting against Great Britain, America, and the Soviet Union, and carrying out its genocide against the Jews. Operation Barbarossa, Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, beginning 22 June 1941, signified a return to Nazi orthodoxy, as claims of close bonds between Bolshevism and international Jewry once again became a hallmark of German propaganda; in this regard, the German-Soviet war actually clarified events and legitimized the Nazi elite's interpretation of history. First and foremost, the link between Bolshevism and international Jewry meant that any long-term alliance between Germany and the USSR was implausible; therefore, the Nazi offensive was necessary since international Jewry within Russia had been planning for the Red Army to launch a full-scale attack against Germany anyway. Hitler had simply carried out a preemptive war to save the German nation. In addition, Britain's continued stubbornness and America's entry into the war validated Hitler's conspiracy theory—Britain and America had allied with Stalin because international Jewry was controlling both countries.

Hitler and Goebbels also used the idea of an international Jewish conspiracy to justify the mass murder of the Jews. As both the carnage of the military conflict and the radicalization of Jewish policy intensified, according to Herf, so too did Nazi propaganda. From 1941 to 1943, public speeches by Hitler and Goebbels, private writings by Goebbels, and numerous propaganda posters included stark references to "annihilation" and "extermination" of Jews, which the author argues should be taken literally. When Hitler and Goebbels spoke of Hitler's prophecy, the audience knew what they meant; when millions of ordinary Germans walked by and presumably looked at walled posters which stated "The Jews will stop laughing," the message was clear. At the same time, the Nazi leadership carefully hid the details of the genocide from the German public, allowing for what Herf calls "plausible deniability," meaning the German public was able to interpret Nazi propaganda however it wished. Moreover, Hitler repeatedly painted a picture of the war as an act of Jewish aggression, and thus all Nazi actions as "preventive" or "defensive" in nature. He even blamed the Jews for the Allied bombing of German cities beginning in force by 1943. It may seem laughable that Germans should have been susceptible to such propaganda, but Herf re-

minds us that they received no alternative explanation for the hardships and brutalities of the war.

The remainder the book investigates Nazi propaganda from the German defeat at Stalingrad until the end of the Second World War. Herf notes that in this phase the propaganda emphasized the specter of a Jewish conspiracy to galvanize the German population to continue prosecuting the war long after victory was out of reach. Hitler, Goebbels, and other Nazi leaders warned that if Germany were to be defeated by the Bolsheviks and the western powers, international Jewry would not only punish the Nazi regime, but exterminate the entire German nation. Ironically, the National Socialist government maintained that international Jewry was responsible for Germany's defeat; thus Hitler's conspiracy theory simultaneously characterized it as an omnipotent force and yet able to be resisted and overcome. Herf concludes by urging scholars to think about the Second World War and the Holocaust as the Nazi leaders themselves viewed them—as together constituting the single seminal event of the era, and to recognize that such a perception arose from a fanatical ideology that targeted the supposed danger of international Jewry.

The Jewish Enemy will rekindle the well known functionalist-intentionalist debate among Holocaust scholars. Herf is clearly an intentionalist, arguing that Hitler played the central role in the Holocaust and had consistently, albeit infrequently, spoken about the Jewish problem in apocalyptic terms during the 1920s and 1930s, long before the Nazi genocide occurred. He uses commonly cited speeches and writings of Hitler and Goebbels to support his contentions, but he strengthens his argument by stressing the importance of Dietrich, who, unlike Goebbels, interacted with Hitler on a regular basis throughout much of the war (22-6, 160-1). Hitler conveyed all his orders regarding propaganda to Dietrich, who in turn passed them along to the press staff. In addition, Herf surmises that the Nazi propaganda organizations functioned as a well-oiled machine, due largely to the anti-Semitic consensus among the Nazi elite and the hands-on approach of Hitler and Dietrich. He connects the seriousness with which Hitler treated propaganda to his pivotal role in the extermination of the Jews. In general, Herf's analysis of propaganda offers scholars an additional lens for examining the origins of the Holocaust.

The book does contain some weaknesses. First, many of Herf's arguments are not as novel as he claims. It is now commonplace among scholars to conceptualize the German military conflict and the Holocaust as part of the same goal, the realization of Hitler's fanatical ideology. Furthermore, the author is obsessed with proving that the Nazi propaganda was false—as if he must take it seriously because he believes the Nazis themselves did. Herf often devotes entire pages to refuting Nazi conspiracy theories. To cite just one, he states that Churchill and Roosevelt sided with Stalin for geopolitical reasons, not because they were Jewish puppets, as if that needed reaffirming. This not only makes the book extremely repetitive, but results in missed opportunities to solidify some of its other contentions. For instance, Herf asserts that the Nazi leaders genuinely believed their anti-Semitic propaganda, referencing, like other intentionalist scholars, the writings of Hitler and Goebbels as evidence. But these writings do not prove what other Nazi elites believed. In fact, besides occasional references to Robert Ley, leader of the German Labor Front, the author focuses narrowly on the aims and actions of Hitler, Goebbels, and Dietrich. A more

systematic investigation of how others in the leadership used propaganda would have strengthened this strand of the overall argument.

Most controversial, however, is Herf's thesis itself—the primacy of politics over race in the Nazis' construction of their fanatical anti-Semitic ideology. It is doubtful that hundreds of scholars studying German history and the Holocaust have, unlike Herf, misread the Nazis' motivations for persecuting and then carrying out genocide against the Jews. At best, Herf is erroneously distinguishing between politics and race; even scholars who accentuate the role of ideology regarding Nazi atrocities realize that Hitler believed politics and race to be intertwined. Herf intentionally downplays race to bolster the credibility of his sources. He is right that scholars should take propaganda very seriously, but walled posters and bellicose speeches do not adequately explain why Hitler and the Nazis tried to exterminate the Jewish people: why not formulate and promote a conspiracy about the French, the British, or the Russians? Politics certainly contributed to, but does not fully explain, Nazi conspiracy theories against the Jews.

In the end, Herf's study is one of unfulfilled potential. On the one hand, his concentration on propaganda will open many avenues for future research on the Holocaust and likely revive the functionalist-intentionalist debate. On the other, his eschewing of nuanced arguments in favor of extremely bold assertions leaves many questions unanswered. Despite the abundance of literature on the topic, scholars still cannot find a common ground and accept that perhaps several causal factors drove the Nazi implementation of mass murder.