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Andrew D. Evans, *Anthropology at War: World War I and the Science of Race in Germany*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010. Pp. ix, 293. ISBN 978-0-226-22268-4.

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A cursory look at the vast literature on race and racial thought in modern German history might lead one to believe that the Third Reich was either the only logical outcome of a preordained path or merely an aberration in the development of an otherwise tolerant society. With respect to this topic, of course, the Third Reich is a temporal black hole, pulling all apparent precedents inexorably towards it. On the other hand, scholarly efforts to weaken the hold of a *Sonderweg* (special path) thesis have often replaced it with interpretations that sever Nazi Germany from its historical moorings.

In *Anthropology at War*, Andrew D. Evans (SUNY New Paltz) offers a refreshing take that neatly avoids this dichotomy. For Evans, German anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries cannot simply be reduced to an intellectual breeding ground for National Socialism, even though its influence on the Nazis cannot be ignored. He seeks to explain how such a decidedly liberal and tolerant discipline as anthropology, led by anti-racist luminaries like Rudolf Virchow and Adolf Bastian in the days of Kaiser Wilhelm II, devolved into the radically nationalistic and inhumane racial science of figures like Eugen Fischer and Otto Reche during the interwar period and the Third Reich. He identifies World War I as the pivotal moment; no surprise, given the war's transformative impact on German society as a whole and its crucial influence on the rise of Hitler's regime. Yet, through his innovative methodology and judicious negotiation of overlapping research contexts (political, psychological, generational, professional), Evans challenges conventional assumptions about race science in Germany and adds a vital new perspective on modern German history.

Evans makes a definite departure from previous scholarship on the trajectory of German anthropology. Nearly all earlier studies locate a relatively abrupt transition of goals and practices sometime around the turn of the century, though considerable debate surrounds the exact timing, underlying causes, and historical ramifications of that transition. The two poles in the debate are represented in recent years by the work of Andrew Zimmerman¹ and H. Glenn Penny.² According to Zimmerman, German anthropologists in the 1880s had already developed an "anti-humanist" worldview that prefigured the Nazis in its embrace of a racist imperialism born in overseas colonial experience. By contrast, Penny sees a profoundly humanist and egalitarian coterie of scientists, whose methods changed only in 1900-1910 due to material factors—market capitalism and specialization, for example—with little relevance to the coming of the Third Reich. Though he is the first historian to analyze German anthropology during the First World War, Evans nonetheless takes a longer view, foregrounding a contested and incremental shift in perspectives. While arguing persuasively for a dramatic change during the war, he acknowledges that this caesura did not create a tabula rasa. Within a debate where chronology, causation, and significance are interdependent, this allows him to blend the emphases of both Zimmerman and Penny in making a more balanced case for continuity. His flexible application of Thomas Kuhn's sociological model of "paradigm shifts" is quite instructive in this regard.

The late nineteenth-century liberal paradigm in German anthropology entailed a set of shared assumptions, standards, and methods based on humanist, egalitarian, and progressive ideals, but it hardly represented a uniform or unequivocal outlook. Indeed, racist concepts existed alongside and were often indistinguishable from elements of the liberal tradition (85). Public denunciations of racism and anti-Semitism by leading figures in the discipline "did not immunize anthropologists from contradictions or

1. *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: U Chicago Pr, 2001).

2. *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 2007).

prevent them from adopting a hierarchical view of physical development. At times, deep-seated assumptions of cultural hierarchy crossed into physical and racial characterizations” (75). A change certainly occurred, but not all at once. Eugenics and *völkisch*³ racial ideas clearly gained wider acceptance between 1900 and 1914, but did not constitute the norm. On the eve of the war, German anthropology was a discipline in flux with many strands, some foreshadowing Nazi race science, others not (96).

Evans’s approach to the history of science skillfully weighs disciplinary and extradisciplinary factors. His book’s first two chapters deal mainly with the discipline itself. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, physical anthropology, in particular, was a neglected stepsister of ethnology (*Völkerkunde*). Physical anthropologists lacked both widespread acceptance and institutional and financial support within the university system, which left them all the more eager to secure state patronage (26–27). In terms of theory, the spread of Darwinism and Mendelian genetics bolstered the appeal of hyper-nationalist and eugenic arguments among a younger generation of anthropologists, who rejected the relatively apolitical stance of their elders by introducing biological science into the realm of social policy (116). These internal material and intellectual characteristics of prewar German anthropology help clarify the subsequent advent of *Rassenkunde* (racial science) in the 1920s.

For Evans, World War I served as the primary catalyst for radical change, even if it did so by intensifying preexisting tendencies. “The shift occurred as members of the discipline gradually accommodated their scientific goals and methods to the political and ideological context in which they worked. This process began around the turn of the century ... but it came to full fruition during the war” (8). The president of the Berlin Anthropological Society expressed his own inklings of this shift in October 1914: “The dreadful war that rages around us and reaches deep into all relationships has of course also affected our [anthropological] society” (101). He was referring primarily to increased material hardships for the discipline, as funds evaporated, the ability to conduct research abroad effectively disappeared, and young scholars were conscripted into the armed forces. At the same time, however, the polarizing psychological effects of war stimulated ideological radicalization and nationalist enthusiasm among anthropologists just as among Germans of all walks of life. The war not only dissolved scientific collaboration between Germans and enemy nationals; it exacerbated tensions between internationalism and nationalism within the German scientific community. Anthropologists came to identify almost exclusively with the interests of the German *Volk*. The material constraints and heightened patriotism of total war shattered previously held notions of universalism and opened the door to a crude, aggressive form of national glorification, in the process altering scientists’ understanding of their profession and its relevance to the wider world (100).

The core of the study lies in its two fascinating chapters on projects for the anthropological examination of prisoners of war. Evans describes the crucial transformations as they happened in response to political contexts, material circumstances, and intellectual attitudes. If the war itself restricted the work of anthropologists in key respects, the internment of Allied prisoners from all over the world presented an unparalleled research opportunity. One young scholar referred to the camps as “a *Völkerschau* without comparison,” referring to the traveling shows and exhibits of native colonial peoples that had become a staple of popular entertainment in late nineteenth-century Europe (131). Arguing against the traditional assumption that science is a non-ideological phenomenon politicized only due to pressure from the state, Evans points out that the anthropologists themselves supplied the impetus for the POW project—the largest state-sponsored scientific undertaking of the war. Thus, while the state used scientific institutions to support its political and military aims, scientists not only informed these aims but capitalized on state support to pursue their own goals (8–9). Having “mobilized the content of their discipline for war” and deployed their expertise in service to the state, German anthropologists abandoned all claim to an apolitical stance and consciously embraced the cause of the *Reich* (115).

POW camps throughout Germany and Austria became “veritable laboratories for the study of race” (139), where the accelerating change of paradigms was directly perceptible. Although the anthropologists

3. This word (literally, “pertaining to the German ‘Folk’”) and its variants carried a special, distinctly racist meaning in the lexicon of, esp. National Socialist, nationalism.

initially hoped to investigate colonial peoples, they quickly turned their attention to European soldiers instead, particularly Slavic soldiers from Eastern Europe. The notion of racial differences among European peoples—rejected by earlier doyens of German anthropology like Virchow and Bastian—now became a guiding principle. Anthropologists in the camps not only sought to define Germanness as a racial phenomenon, they “portrayed the enemies of the Central Powers as racial ‘others,’ assigning distinct racial and biological identities to European nations” (132). Beyond nationalist ideology, on the other hand, a host of situational factors conditioned these developments as well.

The militarized atmosphere of the POW camps created a fundamental social divide between examiner and subject, not to mention an imbalance of power relationships (138–139, 141). Efforts by prisoners to resist the more unpleasant aspects of anthropomorphic examination certainly did not improve the anthropologists’ impressions of them. Moreover, the crowding together of all prisoners, irrespective of ethnicity or geographical origin, eroded traditional distinctions between Europeans and non-Europeans (143–44). In their attempt to demonize Slavic populations, German and Austrian anthropologists asserted, for instance, that the various nationalities of the tsarist Russian Empire could all be designated as one alien and inferior “Mongolian race.” (185) The POW camps were an institutional site where “the turn toward *völkisch* modes of thought and the conflation of race and nation were contingent on the political, personal, and environmental contexts ... in which experience influenced anthropological discourse and practice re-shaped theory” (133). And just as a broader societal milieu framed the terms of the anthropologists’ studies, conversely, the anthropologists influenced the milieu by publishing a series of “type” photographs designed to heighten racial consciousness and make the enemy physically legible to the general populace (155–56).

By the early 1920s, German anthropology looked very different than it had in 1914. The broader social perceptions and specific professional concerns of scientific discourse assumed radically new forms in the wake of war, defeat, and political chaos. The eugenic component of *Rassenkunde*, in particular, would have been impossible without the widespread fear of demographic decline that followed the bloodletting of 1914–18. For German anthropologists, moreover, a genetic science that purported to explain culture by way of race “seemed to offer the golden chance to break anthropology out of its disciplinary isolation, increase its overall viability, and even combat the negative effects of specialization” (205). Thus, a discipline that had once discounted connections between race, *Volk*, and nation now placed them at the forefront of discussion. Its previous affirmation of the basic equality of all peoples gave way to a dogmatic stress on German superiority and the inequality of races: “The emergence of *Rassenkunde* as the dominant paradigm in German anthropology marked the demise of the liberal tradition” (191).

The careers of two men, Eugen Fischer and Otto Reche, well illustrate how anthropologists previously situated closer to the fringe suddenly moved to the center. Fischer, who cut his teeth conducting research on biracial populations in colonial Africa before the war, became a prominent advocate of racial hygiene, even serving on one of the Nazis’ infamous “hereditary health courts.” Reche, who had been involved in the POW project during the war, championed “Nordic” race theory afterwards; some scholars consider a memorandum he issued in 1939 to be the first draft of the notorious “General Plan for the East”—the Nazis’ grandiose scheme for enslaving and exterminating indigenous Eastern European populations and replacing them with German settler-farmers.⁴

Drawing on an impressive array of archival materials, *Anthropology at War* offers a basic history of German anthropology from the 1870s to the 1930s. Though meant for an academic audience, it is surprisingly accessible to a general readership, despite its often highly specialized subject matter. By joining the techniques of scientific, cultural, and intellectual history in a study of war and society, Evans reveals just how and why German-speaking anthropologists changed so dramatically during the First World War and what the broader implications of that change were. His novel approach to the history of science highlights the importance of discourse without neglecting the force of circumstance and escapes the pitfalls of teleology

4. See Mechthild Rössler, Sabine Schleiermacher, and Cordula Tollmien, eds., *Der Generalplan Ost: Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* (Berlin: Akad. Verlag, 1993) 350–55; also Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 1988) 171.

without inordinately privileging discontinuity. Evans addresses an old and hotly debated historical enigma—the role of science in National Socialism—but asks new questions about that phenomenon and answers them with unmatched precision and explanatory force.