



A Deadly Legacy: German Jews and the Great War by Tim Grady.

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In *A Deadly Legacy*, historian Tim Grady¹ (Univ. of Chester) clarifies the complex situation of the Jewish community in Imperial Germany during the First World War. Current historiography on the subject generally holds that the escalation of violence and the length of the Great War made eliminationist antisemitism possible two decades later. But some scholars argue that the war did not in fact make German Jews the victims of other Germans during that era, either. Grady offers a more nuanced synthesis of relevant primary and secondary source materials (notably, some important work in German) in an engaging narrative featuring telling vignettes from the biographies of various Jewish families.

The early part of the book (chaps. 1–5) is the best. In it, Grady demonstrates that antisemitic parties before World War I gathered barely 2 percent of the vote, in stark contrast to, for instance, nationalist parties in France. The ca. 900,000 German Jews (0.5 percent of the population) were mostly fully integrated city-dwellers who rushed to support the war effort. About 100,000 of them, including many intellectuals, went into the trenches; others, like Walter Rathenau, helped put the German economy on a wartime footing that allowed the nation to withstand four years of conflict.

Grady also covers the Eastern Front, where German pacification plans appealed strongly to Jewish officers who saw in them a chance to punish Russia for its history of pogroms. Of course, many of those officers then found it hard to relate to the far less cosmopolitan Jewish communities in the Russian Empire.

The rest of the volume (chaps. 6–9) proceeds chronologically through the war, highlighting turning points like the ill-begotten Jewish census of 1916, which purported to assess whether Jews were shirking their patriotic duty. Grady shows that the people he documents resented the census, yet continued to further prove their solidarity with other Germans. Grady's discussion (chap. 9) of the "stab in the back" myth, which blamed Jews in the rear for losing the war, is a little confusing: it seems to imply that some Jewish leaders, blinded by their patriotism, actually abetted the myth. Some of these were liberal businessmen who blamed Socialism. And, since the German left included leaders like Kurt Eisner, Karl Liebknecht, and Rosa Luxemburg, their right-wing opponents eagerly conflated left-wing ideologies with Judaism. But the feelings of Jews on the matter are not well defined here.

The question arises as to who among the figures Grady portrays should be considered truly Jewish. Several of them, like chemist Fritz Haber, were born in the Judaic faith, but openly converted to Christianity to advance their careers. Are they to be identified as Jews? Cultural affinity may have played a role, but the author does not specify his rationale; this is problematic in a context where Nazis designated anyone with any Jewish background an enemy. For all his bellicosity, Haber, a father of gas warfare, had surprisingly cordial relations with Albert Einstein, one of the

1. His earlier work includes *The German-Jewish Soldiers of the First World War in History and Memory* (Liverpool: Univ. Pr, 2011).

few scientists who never wavered from his pacifism. Yet Einstein, like Haber in his youth, was very much a secular person. How then does one posit a Jewish identity? Zionism may have played a role, but in this case neither man developed an enthusiasm for a Jewish homeland until the inter-war years (in Haber's case, only by default after he was dismissed from his post in 1933). Grady provides some examples that hint at the complexity of various Jewish leaders' feelings about the war:

While [founder of the German communist party Karl] Liebknecht's feelings were based on Marxist principles, the young [philosopher] Gershom Sholem's stemmed from a belief in Jewish nationalism.... As far as Sholem was concerned, the war was purely a German issue, one in which the Jews had no reason to ensnare themselves. (100)

There remains the matter of generalizing the reactions of about one million people from the writings of a small minority of middle- and upper-class Jews. Granted, this question also complicates most Great War social narratives. However, Grady does make clear that, but for the 1916 Jewish census, German Jews' range of reactions to the war mirrored those of German gentiles, from strident nationalism to discreet pacifism. This shows the degree to which the Jewish community had become thoroughly "German," much to the horror of some German conservatives and the extreme right.

Overall, Tim Grady's at times problematic new book is a fine cultural history that relies on interesting, beautifully interwoven tableaux culled from family archives. These scenes and the author's elegant and crisp narrative style will strongly appeal to general as well as specialist readers.