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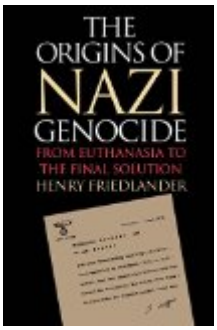
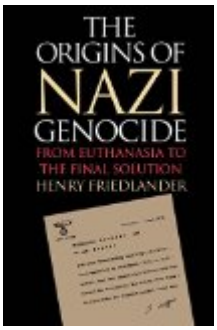


Michael Burleigh. *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany, c.1900 to 1945.* Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1994. xvii + 382 pp. $22.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-521-47769-7.



Henry Friedlander. *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. xxiii + 421 pp. $34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8078-2208-1.

Reviewed by Alan E. Steinweis

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One of the salient features of Holocaust historiography in recent years has been a divergence between an essentially Judeocentric approach that pays relatively little attention to the non-Jewish victims of Nazi Germany, and an approach that endeavors to contextualize the persecution and murder of the Jews as a part of a broader Nazi program of racial purification and territorial aggrandizement. The two studies under review fall into the latter category. Both posit a close connection, ideologically and even organizationally, between the notorious Nazi "euthanasia" policy and the "Final Solution" of the "Jewish Question." But, even more significantly, both works place their primary focus on Nazi eugenics measures targeted at the disabled, emphasizing the point that Nazi "euthanasia" can no longer be understood as a mere preface to the Final Solution. The murder of the disabled was, according to these books, an integral part of the Holocaust. Nazi "euthanasia" was a human tragedy of immense proportions and terrifying cruelty, one that ought to prove instructive to a society such as ours in which efficiency is often placed before human compassion, and in which hereditarian notions of human worth and achievement are enjoying renewed legitimacy.

The attention focused on Daniel J. Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in recent months has generated what we can only hope will prove to be a productive debate about the ideological and social origins of the Holocaust. One very

unfortunate result of the Goldhagen debate, however, has been the relative neglect of another highly consequential book that deals with the same fundamental question of Holocaust origins, although from a much different perspective, and in a far more sober, balanced, and intellectually responsible manner. Henry Friedlander's ***Origins of Nazi Genocide: >From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*** is not only the most formidable study to date of the Nazi regime's murder of the disabled; it also is one of the most compelling statements in favor of an expansive conceptualization of the Holocaust.

Most Holocaust historiography treats the Nazi "euthanasia" program as a step along the path to the "Final Solution," or in Friedlander's formulation, as a "prologue" to the Holocaust rather than as an actual "chapter" of that event. Friedlander, himself a survivor of Auschwitz who is a professor of Judaic Studies at Brooklyn College, maintains that Nazi policy aimed at the physical destruction of three groups: Jews, Gypsies, and the disabled. The genocide of all three grew out of the same racist biomedical vision, although the timetables, modalities, and dimensions of the murder of each group differed significantly. The contrast between this view and that of Goldhagen could not be more stark. Goldhagen, whose concern is almost exclusively on the war against the Jews, radically disassociates the murder of the disabled from that of the Jews in order to buttress his argument about the universality and intensity of German anti-Semitism; he repeatedly points out that the "euthanasia," based on a cold, calculated biomedical vision, generated protests from the German population, whereas the killing of the Jews, based on anti-Semitism, produced no such reaction.

Instead of emphasizing the role of anti-Semitism as the engine of official Nazi policy, and as the personal motive of those individuals who carried out genocidal policy on a daily basis, Friedlander does indeed underscore the centrality of eugenics and a biomedical sensibility. But it would be unfair to suggest that Friedlander discounts the importance of anti-Semitism. This point must be emphasized in view of the accusation, which can be heard nowadays at Holocaust and German Studies conferences, that anti-Semitism has been written out of the Holocaust by scholars who seek to interpret the genocide in a more universal framework. Friedlander makes clear early in the book that racial anti-Semitism was an integral component of the eugenicism that had come to hold sway in Germany by 1933. Throughout his study, Friedlander traces how the evolution of Nazi anti-Jewish policy was intertwined with eugenicist measures targeted at "Aryan" Germans, at Poles, and at Gypsies (evidence entirely ignored by Goldhagen). He also discusses the fate of individual Jews who fell victim to the "euthanasia" program, an often overlooked dimension of the Jewish experience under Nazi rule.

In one short opening chapter Friedlander recapitulates the development of eugenicist and racist thinking before 1933, a subject that has already been adequately examined by several scholars. Friedlander moves quickly through the 1933-1939 period in a second chapter, devoting the remaining twelve chapters to an extremely thorough account of events during the war. Some readers might be disappointed that the sterilization measures of the 1930s are not examined in greater depth, but a detailed analysis of this earlier phase is not Friedlander's intention.

Readers who have kept up with the field will be familiar with the key events of the story Friedlander tells: the initiation of the "children's euthanasia" program, the expansion of that program to encompass adults, Hitler's personal role in making key decisions, the structure and procedures of *T-4*, the killing "pause" of 1941, the subsequent continuation of the systematic murder outside the notorious killing centers, the transfer of personnel and know-how from the "euthanasia"

operation to the Final Solution, and so forth. In several respects, however, the book does present heretofore unfamiliar material. The book's analysis of the "pause" of 1941 stands as the most authoritative explanation of how the killing was continued under altered circumstances rather than halted. The chapter on "Killing Handicapped Jews" should prove most illuminating even to erudite students of the Jewish dimension of the Holocaust. Friedlander's account of how the killing centers functioned conveys a great deal of new, often gut-wrenching detail, gleaned from judicial records. We should be particularly grateful to the author for his effort to convey the humanity and individuality of the victims themselves, qualities that most often tend to become lost in academic studies of Nazis and their crimes.

This is a remarkably well-researched book. Friedlander has examined materials from over two dozen archives and has made extensive use of judicial records from roughly three dozen courts and state prosecutors. This massive original research has been synthesized into a work that also makes very effective use of previous studies of the subject by Ernst Klee, Benno Mueller-Hill, Goetz Aly, and many others. Its original contributions notwithstanding, the brilliance of the book lies not in the disclosure of shocking revelations or dramatic new evidence, but rather in the combination of rich detail and moral force. The latter quality is especially worthy of note, for here is an example of a compelling, at times gripping, work of scholarship that does not sacrifice precision or intellectual rigor. As it assumes its rightful place as a standard work, let us hope that *The Origins of Nazi Genocide* attains the wide audience it deserves.

Michael Burleigh's *Death and Deliverance* is a less polished, although altogether worthwhile study that covers much of the same ground. Burleigh's account of the years before 1939, and especially of the period 1933-1939, is fuller than Friedlander's. Burleigh also deals more extensively with developments after 1945. Burleigh's primary source research base, though considerably narrower than Friedlander's, is impressive in its own right.

Burleigh is less successful than Friedlander in his attempts to move back and forth between the levels of policy formulation and implementation. This is particularly problematic when Burleigh neglects to undertake a patient, careful analysis of an interpretive issue that is central to Friedlander's study, namely the connection between "euthanasia" and the broader program of Nazi genocide. "On the ground" is where Burleigh places his emphasis, and it must be said that he does excel at evoking the mood of the time and at reconstructing the rich texture of specific events. Numerous photographs and extended quotations from primary sources endow many sections of the book with a documentary quality, which students especially might appreciate, although scholars who are better versed in the material might consider such passages insufficiently digested.

Burleigh gives considerably more attention than does Friedlander to the Nazi regime's efforts to legitimize eugenics measures within German society. Particularly useful is a long chapter called "Selling Murder: The Killing Films of the Third Reich," a title identical to that of a fine documentary film produced by Burleigh on this very subject. This chapter analyzes at length the notorious ***Ich klage an***, as one might expect, but also describes a host of other films that have remained obscure. I have found this chapter quite useful in my own teaching. I tend to devote considerable class time to German propaganda efforts of this sort, which students find compelling, deeply troubling, and frighteningly relevant in our own age of mass manipulation.

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