

Why the Germans? Why the Jews?

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Equality, Envy and Racial Hatred 1800 - 1933

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The first English excerpt from historian Goetz Aly's new book "Why the Germans? Why the Jews? Equality, Envy and Racial Hatred 1800 - 1933".

The Prussian reforms of 1808 to 1812 granted all citizens freedom of trade, and put an end to serfdom and what until then had been utterly unchecked arbitrariness towards the Jews. The Jews were still only allowed to become public servants in exceptional cases and certainly never officers in the military, but unlike the Christian majority, they made the most of the new opportunities. They emancipated themselves and at high speed. Germany, with its half-hearted reformism, sluggish economic development (until 1870), and strong legal security provided a fertile ground. To top it all, Germany had some of the best Gymnasiums and universities in Europe, as well as some of the worst primary education.

Unlike the majority of their Christian and still largely illiterate peers, Jewish boys as a rule had always been taught to read and write Hebrew. Their parents did not put silver spoons in their cradles, but all manner of educational nourishment. Jewish parents knew exactly how much cultural skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic would improve their children's chances, whereas Christian parents and clerics were still claiming, right up into the 20th century, that "reading is bad for the eyes!"

This constellation led to huge differences in levels of education and rates of social advancement. In 1869, 14.8 of pupils in Berlin's Gymnasium schools came from Jewish families, although only four percent of the population was Mosaic by confession. In 1886, 46.5 percent of Jewish pupils in Prussia continued their education beyond primary school, and by 1901, this number had risen to 56.3 percent. During the same period of time the Christian interest in higher education crept up from 6.3 to 7.3 percent. Eight times more Jewish schoolchildren completed middle school and high school than their Christian counterparts. Likewise in Berlin 1901, in terms of population percentages, 11.5 times more Jewish girls attended girls' high schools than Christians.

Of course the successes in Gymnasium educations then translated to the universities. In Prussia, Jewish students made up just short of ten percent of university students in 1886/1887, and Jews constituted just short of one percent of the population. As a rule Jews went to university significantly earlier and completed their studies faster than their Christian peers, and as the Prussian statisticians confirmed: "On average Jewish students seem to possess more ability and to develop more diligence than the Christians."

In the school year of 1913/14 the Viennese commercial college teacher Dr. Ottokar Nemecek looked into the educational successes of Christian and Jewish commercial college students. He did not try to establish what percentage of the two groups attended such institutions of higher

education in the first place (the differences were evident), but how to measure average performance levels. To this end he analysed the school reports of 1539 schoolboys and girls and carried out a variety of additional tests to determine articulacy, memory, and speeds of association and writing.

The tests weighed overwhelmingly in favour of the Jewish pupils, except when it came to marks for comportment and diligence. Nemecek ascribed this to "the greater liveliness of the Jews who as chatterboxes and disturbers of the peace - as every teacher will confirm - stand head and shoulders above the Christian pupils." Despite their lack of discipline and diligence, the Jewish children clearly emerged on top (26:16 percent) in the category of "very good" and "good" marks for overall performance, whereas they hardly featured at all (4:23 percent) in the "average" performance group. In German, French, English and History they achieved consistently better results. The same picture emerged from marks in Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics as well as in Business and Law studies. The reasons Nemecek listed were "the greater maturity of the Jewish pupils in the areas of abstract thinking", mental agility, writing speed, width of vocabulary and emotional alertness. Only in drawing, calligraphy and gymnastics did the Christian children perform better.

Whatever reasons experts gave for the educational advantage of the Jews, the non-Jews felt the difference and reacted violently. In 1880 the liberal member of parliament Ludwig Bamberg talked about the "unusual learning drives" of the Jews, of "the visible haste" with which they were catching up on everything they had been denied for so long, and concluded: "Undoubtedly the recrudescence of ill-feeling is closely linked to these things."

The Social Democrat August Bebel described in a similar way the differing levels of educational zeal among Jews and Christians; in 1912 the difference between stubborn perseverance and quick-witted elasticity became the focal point of Werner Sombart's sociological analysis because he held this to be the principle contributor to the intellectual divide between Jews and Christians, and thus to the modern form of social and envy-driven anti-Semitism. Sombart found that the influence of the Jews was greater "the heavier, the more viscous and the less business-oriented" the conduct of the surrounding population, and he concluded that on average the Jews "are so much brighter and more bustling than us". With these words Sombart justified their widespread exclusion from university teaching positions. In the interest of science, he wrote, it was unfortunate that of two applicants the all round "more stupid party" would almost always be chosen over the Jewish one. Nevertheless, he believed such protective measures were necessary because otherwise "all lectureships and professorships would be occupied by Jews" whether baptised or unbaptised, it remains the same." In Sombart's comments "baptised and unbaptised" Jews "the fact remains the same" it becomes obvious where the racial anti-Semitism begins. He based his conclusions on the simple experience that the intellectual superiority of the Jews was no way eradicated by conversion to Christianity.

The "Jewish ingenuity's sanguine, bold humour that borders on the frivolous" and its "wonderfully agile, sarcastic, skeptical spirit that is impossible to discipline" incensed the placidly obedient Christian popular majority, as the Social Democrat Karl Kautsky commented and concluded: "The mental qualities of the Jews are the bone of contention." The British historian John Foster Fraser scoffed in 1915 that German academics were falling over themselves to

keep the Jews out because the competition "between the sons of the North with their blonde hair and sluggish intellect and the sons of the Orient with their black eyes and alert minds" was so unequal.

In other words, the extent to which the latecomers were catching up reflected their own shortcomings in education and dexterity. These shortcomings were becoming embarrassing and could easily be concealed behind racial theory. A good example stems from the Leipzig student Curt Mueller who in 1890 wrote a pamphlet on "Judaism among German students." There were two things he didn't like about his fellow students: they would do anything "to the point of self-sacrifice" for their fellow believers and that in terms of percentages there were "not nearly as many failed Jewish students as there were Germanic." And why? Mueller of course had the answer. The Jews are "more hard working and assiduous" you have to give them that", they "swot like mad at home": "like all money-loving tribes" the Jews eat modestly. Over a glass of beer the Jewish law student speaks about his studies far more than is necessary! He doesn't stop chattering and that impresses people. He understands rapidly but with no depth. Why should he? Like this he gets through his exams in the prescribed time, and Germany is blessed with another Jewish referendarius." Later on they earn fast money as doctors, lawyers and chemists! This is the sort of language that informs every second sentence in Mueller's pamphlet, until he finally chimes in: "Stand up to the Jewish students with superiority and pride!" German racial pride fed exclusively on feelings of inferiority.

In 1922 Wilhelm Stapel published his book "Anti-Semitism" for the cultivated, middle-class Jew adversary. If it is determined, he wrote, that our own kind "is being confused to the point of discomfort by another intellectual being, then "the devil take me" I have the right to defend myself in my way, regardless how brilliant and illustrious this other mind may be." Ten years later Stapel spoke out in response to the question of why Jewish quick-wittedness was so bothersome: "There would be no anti-Semitism if the Jews were capable of keeping their mouths shut. They can do everything except keep their mouths shut." In his day this widely read popular philosopher ascribed marvellous qualities to the most inhibited German silences: "grace", "aristocratic nature", "refinement" and "depth".

An incident experienced by philosopher Rudolf Schottlaender in 1936, which he later so relished retelling, took place in proletarian surroundings. Schottlaender had been forced to retreat with his Christian wife and children to the more affordable Berlin district of Heiligensee. The neighbours knew why. Having financial difficulties, he sublet two rooms to a working-class family, whose children went to school together with the children of the SS family across the road, but brought home better school reports. This incensed the racially noble SS mother who shouted over the garden fence in a loud voice: No wonder, when you live with Jews!"

In 1924 Karl Kraus heard an "authentic Germanic lady newspaper seller" in Berlin, peddling the day's Fridericus at the top of her voice: "Why does the Jew earn more money and faster than the Christian?" In 1933 Kraus recounts the incident again in "The Third Walpurgis Night", commenting: "Suddenly I had it, I hit up against the root, I sensed what is so hard to put into words." That same year the retired Bavarian civil servant Siegfried Lichtenstaedter described the Nazi Party as the party of social advancement, and drew conclusions from this insight regarding his own future and that of other German Jews. On average, he stated, the Jews in

Central and Western Europe held higher positions in society and this was increasingly being held against them by the less mobile non-Jews. The Jews' efforts to catch up and move upwards in society meant their opponents were rapidly growing in number. According to Lichtenstaedter's impressions, such motivated anti-Semites considered the Mosaic religion and the Jewish race as "practically irrelevant". They were competing for "food, honour and esteem." In Lichtenstaedter's mind anti-Semitism was based on social envy, competition and social ambition: if the group of Jews seemed "disproportionately 'happier'" than the others, "why should this not provoke envy and resentment, worries and concern for future in the heads and hearts of the others, as it does all too often in relations between individuals?"

The gnawing envy which the individual is prepared neither to admit to himself nor others - and not only a popular collectivist dream of a life among equals - was what led directly to racial theory. It came right on cue for the oppressed Germans so unhappy with themselves. Maladroit Christian students, businessmen who lacked ideas or salesmen who had miscalculated could not permanently complain about the superior results of their Jewish rivals. This was not only bad for morale, it also increased the fear of failure. It was an obvious step to transform envy and social anti-Semitism into racial defamation. Racial theory transformed weak Germans plagued by self-doubt and feelings of inferiority into members of a purportedly so strong and intellectually superior collective. Racism is nothing other than the flight into collectivism propelled by weakness.

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"Warum die Deutschen? Warum die Juden? Gleichheit, Neid und Rassenhass 1800 1933" (S. Fischer Verlag, August 2011).

Goetz Aly is a Holocaust researcher, former journalist, and author of a number of books, including "Unser Kampf" and "Hitlers Volkstaat". Read more articles by Goetz Aly at signandsight.com [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

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