The Course of History: Arno J. Mayer, Gerhard L. Weinberg and David Cesarani on the Holocaust and World War II[[1]](#footnote-1)\*

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How does change happen in historiography? This article examines three scholars’ writings on the Holocaust in order to shed light on this question. I argue that both internal (methodological) and external (socio-political) factors account for the changes in the questions asked by historians and the research agendas they pursue, as well for the different receptions works with ostensibly similar arguments enjoy at different points in time. But I stress that whilst much in work in theory of history examines methodological trends and problems, external factors tend to be given short shrift; they are often acknowledged but rarely analysed in any detail. By taking together three scholars who have provided an apparently similar framework for understanding the Holocaust as my starting point, the article shows how their different receptions owes as much, if not more, to external factors than to internal ones. This claim is not to neglect the fundamentals of historiography: source critique, use of evidence, contextualization, engagement with fellow historians’ writings, and so on. The works discussed here can be and have been criticized on these terms. Nor is it to overlook the works’ differences. But methodological factors alone do not account for the very different ways in which these works have been received by historians and by a wider readership.

Specifically, Arno J. Mayer, Gerhard L. Weinberg, and David Cesarani have all argued that the Holocaust needs to be understood in relation to the changing circumstances of World War II. This article, whilst noting the different emphases of each author’s position, observes that their fundamentally similar argument has been received very differently over a space of thirty years. I show that this different reception history tells us something about the course of Holocaust historiography since the end of the Cold War, on the one hand, and something about how the changing world in which historians operate has altered the ways in which their works have been received, on the other. With its emphasis today on Nazi ideology, transnational collaboration, the experiences of the victims, and approaches which bring new insights to the field (e.g. the “spatial turn” or the “forensic turn”), Holocaust historiography has moved a long way from the “functionalist” consensus of the 1980s, in which the murder of the Jews was seen less as a result of ideology than as the desperate endpoint of a “cumulative radicalization” driven by military failure, and which was dominated by historical reconstruction of the Nazis’ decision-making process for the “Final Solution.”[[2]](#footnote-2) The widespread rejection of a book (Mayer’s) making an argument for the connection between the Holocaust and the war in the late 1980s marked a historiographical turning point, working as a catalyst for the “return of ideology” in historical scholarship. Widespread sympathy for a similar argument put forward thirty years later (Cesarani’s, drawing on Weinberg’s work) needs to be understood in the context of a totally changed historiographical climate, in which even “functionalist” arguments – which stress the reactive or ad hoc nature of Nazi decision-making – take it as read that at the core of Nazism was an antisemitic consensus. In the last thirty years too, the adoption of transnational Holocaust commemoration and research means that an argument perceived as threatening in the context of the rise of nationalism at the end of the Cold War could now be regarded with equanimity, even in circumstances in which the success of right-wing nationalist parties, such as the Alternative für Deutschland or the Austrian Freedom Party, is far more marked than in the late 1980s or early 1990s.

When it appeared in 2016, David Cesarani’s *Final Solution* was just the latest in a long line of major synthetic histories of the Holocaust. By contrast with Saul Friedländer’s *The Years of Extermination* (2007) or Peter Longerich’s *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (2010), Cesarani’s huge work explains the unfolding of the “Final Solution” in relation to Nazi Germany’s war effort. The relative de-emphasis on antisemitism, perpetrator motivation, Nazi race theories, and Nazi ideology in general is striking from a historian who spent much of his career trying to make historians and the wider public understand the significance of the persecution of the Jews for the Nazis themselves and for postwar European self-understanding. Indeed, on a cursory glance, Cesarani’s book resembles nothing so much as Arno J. Mayer’s controversial work, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* (1988), which regarded the “Judeocide” (Mayer’s preferred term) as a by-product of the war and, in his estimation, impossible to understand outside of the context of military and strategic history. In less controversial vein, Gerhard Weinberg has argued for many years that the Holocaust is inseparable from the military context of World War II. How does Cesarani’s book differ, if at all, from these positions? In this article, I will trace the development of Cesarani’s argument and explain why, through a discussion of how change occurs in historiography, the intertwining of the war and the Holocaust has become a consensus position in a way that would have surprised historians, not least Cesarani himself, a decade or two ago.

*How Change Happens in Historiography*

It has become common currency that the Holocaust needs to be understood in relation to the course of the war. But that does not mean that the Holocaust was determined by the course of the war; rather, it was determined, if we have to use that word which is so inimical to historical thinking (because it suggests that things *had to* turn out the way they did), primarily by the desires and fears of the Nazi leadership, whose actions were facilitated and constrained by the war. The war explains immediate possibilities, options, and decisions, not the Nazis’ long-term aspirations, desires, or fantasies. Nor does the linkage explain why one interpretation prevails over another or why change occurs in historiography so that a view that might seem obscure or objectionable at one point in time can become mainstream at another.

Historical interpretation is undertaken in the context of shared disciplinary rules, including source critique and, primarily, dialogue between historians. This practice is perhaps best summed up by the term “rational constructivism” put forward by the Finnish theorist of history Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen. He notes that history is a rational practice sanctioned by shared rules and that this rational practice prevents an “anything goes” situation:

The availability of rational standards of evaluation explains why any fears that “anything goes” are baseless. A historian’s construct can be seen as epistemically authoritative if it is seen to be fit with respect to all dimensions of cognitive justification: the rhetorical, the epistemic and the discursive. That is, the text is a persuasive manifestation of reasoning for a thesis; it is an exemplary employment of epistemic values, including references to actual historical objects with regard to non-colligatory expressions; and it is a successful argumentative intervention in the relevant argumentative context. In this kind of case, a historiographical text has a rational warrant that gives it the epistemic authority for what is stated. Further, any text is an argumentative speech act and, in the ideal case, readers feel rationally compelled to accept the reasoning of the historian and the historian’s conclusion.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The argument is persuasive insofar as it describes what Paul Ricoeur calls the “historiographical operation” but less so when it comes to explaining why one interpretation prevails over another. Ricoeur writes that “there is interpretation at all levels of the historiographical operation; for example, at the documentary level with the selection of sources, at the explanation/understanding level with the choice among competing explanatory models, and, in a more spectacular fashion, with variations in scale.”[[4]](#footnote-4) In this discussion, which is internal to historiography, one cannot see how and why these different choices are made. In cases where competing interpretations may be considered valid – i.e. there is no wilful misreading or ignoring of sources, or where the discursive context is understood and entered into by the historian – one needs to look outside of the “historiographical operation” itself to find reasons for historians’ or their readers’ preferences.[[5]](#footnote-5) After all, one cannot judge competing interpretations of the past by reference to “the past” when in fact the past is only accessible through the artefacts (textual or otherwise) that remain of it and the representations that we construct as substitutes for it. As Hayden White observes, “The belief in the commensurability of different representations of any aspect of the past hinges on the prior belief in a past to which all representations of it can be referred and differentially assessed as to their validity and their status as contributions to our knowledge of it. But the real past is not, of course, accessible except by way of its representations – indexical, iconic, or symbolic, as the case may be.”[[6]](#footnote-6) History is unavoidably a poetic act and, as White says, “irredeemably tropological.”[[7]](#footnote-7) It follows that historians should investigate and experiment with many different ways of constructing the past, for there is no single “right” way to do so. With specific reference to the Holocaust, White has explained that “when it comes to an important historical event like the Holocaust, there is no ‘original’ structure of happenings to which any given account can be likened or considered to be a contribution.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

According to Gabrielle Spiegel, following Michel de Certeau’s identification of the strange relationship between presence and absence that characterizes all historiography, place (social recruitment), procedures (the discipline of professional history and its changing conceptual resources) and text (the revisions to historical objectivism effected by postmodernism and poststructuralism) are the key factors which shape historical interpretation and which account for revision over time in interpretation. In other words, she focuses convincingly on the contexts in which a history is written in order to explain why it is different from what has been written before.[[9]](#footnote-9) These factors do not, however, explain why any particular interpretation wins support at a given moment. They are descriptions of the historian’s specific approach, not explanations of the text’s reception, successful or otherwise.

Spiegel’s three factors of place, procedures and text correlate quite neatly with Aviezer Tucker’s consideration of historical revision. Tucker identifies three drivers of change: evidence, i.e. when new evidence changes an accepted interpretation; significance, i.e. when what historians find significant changes; and value-driven, i.e. when a new system of values prevails in society and historians reinterpret the past accordingly.[[10]](#footnote-10) Tucker’s general view of historiography is markedly different from Spiegel’s; he presents a “common sense” understanding of history that is closer to Richard Evans’s in *In Defence of History* than to the sort of “postmodern” sensibility for absences and the nuances of culture that one finds in Spiegel. His argument about revision is set out in the context of a book on historical revisionism in the former communist countries of Central Europe (especially the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) and is meant as a way of distinguishing revision – which is the normal process of historical reinterpretation – from revisionism – which is what the French call negationism, especially in the context of Holocaust denial. Like Kuukkanen, Tucker argues that consensus amongst historians – “a uniquely heterogeneous, large and uncoerced group” – is “a likely indicator of knowledge because shared knowledge rather than any complex set of biases is a more probable explanation of such a uniquely heterogeneous consensus.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

Again, like Kuukkanen, Tucker’s claim is persuasive insofar as it describes the “historiographical operation”; it does not account for the competing interpretations that exist within the broad consensus. His analysis accounts for the difference between revision and revisionism and provides a compelling explanation as to why Holocaust denial cannot be considered as history. But it does not account for the differences between historians who all agree, say, that the Holocaust and the war need to be understood in relation to one another. Once again, the broader context external to the discipline – what Tucker calls “value-driven revision” – needs to be brought into the discussion. Tucker writes: “Historiographic interpretations are affected by moral and aesthetic values, by affiliations, political biases and perspectives of the historians who write them. This is the main reason for the differences between historiographic interpretations of similar historical processes and events.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Arno Mayer, Gerhard Weinberg, and David Cesarani all share the fundamental principles of historical inquiry in the way Tucker sets out – with cognitive values prevailing over other values – but that explains their shared framework, not the different stances they take within it, nor the markedly different reception of their work. In what follows, I will show how the different receptions their works have enjoyed – despite the superficial similarities between them – derive primarily from changes in the broad socio-political framework within which they operated, and not only from changes internal to the discipline, important though the latter are. This may seem obvious but analyses of historiography and how history operates tend to focus far more on internal, methodological issues than on external, socio-political, value-driven factors. The following analysis of the differing receptions of these three scholars’ works (but particularly Mayer’s and Cesarani’s) provides an intellectual history of the course of Holocaust historiography in particular and an explanation of change in historiography more generally.

*The Historians*

Three quotations suggest that, superficially at least, historical interpretation hardly changes but that a particular view is, for one reason or another (we will return to those reasons later) more or less dominant at any given moment in time. The first comes from Arno J. Mayer. In *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* he set out the view that the war and the Holocaust were interlinked:

As of the winter of 1941-42, the unique torment of the Jews was correlated with and facilitated by the savageries and miseries of war which increasingly scourged most of Europe. … The murderous persecution of the Jews was not so much a separate policy as part of the desperate political hubris of political leaders who more than half-realized that their dreams of power were unrealizable but were incapable of surrendering them. These blighted dreams led the Nazi regime to violate most traditional political, moral, and religious norms and, more importantly, the notions of humanity defined by them, so that naked power now normalized brutality as its response to its own irreversible loss of control. There were, of course, momentary and local remissions in this spiral of general and anti-Jewish ferocity. But these were due, essentially, to the intermittently neutralizing contradictions in the parallel but discordant exercise of functional and nihilistic violence. All in all, the “Final Solution” may be said to have been forged and consummated in the crucible of the abortive crusading war against Soviet Russia and “Judeobolshevism,” which in eastern Europe created the context of extreme cruelty and destruction apart from which the Judeocide would have been unthinkable and impracticable.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The second comes from Gerhard Weinberg, making a similar point but placing less emphasis on anti-communism and more on the timing of the war as it affected the Nazis’ policy of exterminating the Jews:

As World War II differed from all previous conflicts not only in dimension but also in its very nature and aims, so the Holocaust was not some incidental if terrible aspect of World War II but rather an integral part of it. It has to be seen in the context of the fighting that took place. Those who study the military and economic history of the war do not have to analyse the details of ghetto administration, and those who study the Holocaust have no need to familiarise themselves with the comparative details of Axis and Allied tanks. They must both, however, always keep in mind that the two fields are not merely related in time but are integral parts of the same process, and that each must be examined in its inter-relationship with the other.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Finally, in his last major work, *Final Solution*, David Cesarani argued that the war and the Holocaust were inseparable. Writing that “military exigencies drove anti-Jewish policy, not the other way round,” that Hitler’s perception of himself as a warrior was even more important to the fate of the Jews than antisemitism, and that “The Jews paid the price for German military failure,” Cesarani also equated Hitler’s war against Bolshevism with the war against world Jewry and argued that the prolonging of the war thanks to the Allies’ failure to provide a knock-out blow had disastrous consequences for the Jews still alive in 1944.[[15]](#footnote-15) In short, “The fate of the Jews between 1933 and 1949 was rooted in antisemitism but it was shaped by war. … Hitler believed that Germany was at war with international Jewry, a contest on which hinged the fate of all mankind.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

What we see in these three quotations is that all three historians, Mayer, Weinberg and Cesarani, not only see the Holocaust and the war as inseparable in the minds of the Nazis but argue that the course of the Holocaust was to a large degree determined by military circumstances. We need to consider how this interconnection functioned.

*The Intertwining of the War and the Holocaust*

It was not always the case that this connection was obvious. Until quite recently, it was possible to write a military history of World War II without mentioning the murder of the Jews, or doing so in passing as if the matter were only tangentially related to the war. Weinberg, for example, gives the example of H.P. Willmott’s 1989 book *The Great Crusade: A New Complete History of World War II* (1989), a book he praises for its detailed reconstruction of operational matters but condemns for having “not the slightest clue as to what it was all about.”[[17]](#footnote-17) One could easily add similar examples, although more recent surveys of the war tend not to make the same mistake, at least not to the same extent as Willmott.[[18]](#footnote-18) This should not be surprising; after all, it was equally possible for historians to write surveys of twentieth-century European history without mentioning the Holocaust too, just as historians of the Holocaust often had little to say about the military context, as Michael Marrus pointed out some years ago in one of the few books which grapple directly with this problem.[[19]](#footnote-19) Nevertheless, by now there remain few historians who would not agree with pioneering military historians such as Christian Streit and Jürgen Förster that in order to understand the war, one needs to know something about the genocide of the Jews, and vice versa.[[20]](#footnote-20)

What we are talking about then is not a question of the Wehrmacht’s involvement in Nazi crimes – something that was definitively proven already by the end of the Cold War and reconfirmed by the so-called Wehrmacht Exhibition of the mid-1990s[[21]](#footnote-21) – but of the precise relationship between the war, especially the war in Eastern Europe, and the Final Solution. Military historians, especially “new military historians” who are interested in military culture and the social context of war as much as in strategy, now take it as read that the Wehrmacht was involved in war crimes. This includes the genocide of the Jews, which one such historian, Jeff Rutherford, considers “the vilest stain on its mantle,” even if the treatment of Soviet civilians (presumably non-Jews is meant), “constituted the largest war crime in terms of scale that it committed during the war.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Most historians now understand the murder of the Jews in terms of Hans Mommsen’s notion of “cumulative radicalization,” whereby policy gradually (or not so gradually) widened as German military brutality increased and as the expected victory over the Soviet Union did not materialise. Kay, Rutherford and Stahel, for example, write that the Holocaust emerged out of initial plans for doing away with presumed enemies in the Soviet Union:

The circle of those targeted for removal in their entirety during the course of the war of annihilation in the east was constantly widened, both in the weeks and months prior to the military campaign being launched and in the aftermath of the invasion; the “Jewish-Bolshevik” intelligentsia, all Communist Party functionaries, everyone who demonstrated any form of passive or active resistance, all Jewish prisoners of war, Soviet Jewry root and branch. Radicalizing impulses emanated not only from above, from the center in Berlin, but also from below, on the ground in the killing fields of the east, as the incorporation of the Soviet *politruks* among the targeted victims of the notorious Commissar Order demonstrates, to cite just one example. Hundreds of thousands of Jews, as well as countless other Soviet civilians, fell victim to actions either carried out or incited by the occupying forces, especially during antipartisan raids that commenced mere days after the opening of hostilities, as well as to those led by local civilians who exploited the shift in the balance of power. This approach was soon applied to the entire Jewish population of the Soviet Union and paved the way for the Continental-wide annihilation of European Jewry.[[23]](#footnote-23)

As they go on to say, “The extensive research carried out on Nazi decision making and the origins of the ‘Final Solution’ has established beyond doubt that the Nazi *Vernichtungskrieg* against the Soviet Union coincided with the physical extermination of all Soviet Jews and other so-called undesirables, and that we can no longer study the military history of the eastern campaigns and occupation policies without their genocidal components.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Indeed, the inseparability of the war and the Holocaust makes sense when we consider that the two wars that co-existed in Hitler’s mind – the conventional military kind and the racial war between the Aryans and the Jews – were the driving forces for the radical nature of the war in the east.[[25]](#footnote-25)

What is at stake then, is the nature of the link. Only by focusing on what Mayer, Weinberg and Cesarani consider to be the precise connection between the two Nazi wars can one differentiate between them and show how their views can be understood in terms of historiographical change. For they are in fact not identical, even if they operate in a shared framework.

The first thing to note about Mayer’s argument was that it was very widely criticized by his peers. The most compelling critique came from Christopher Browning who, as Omer Bartov noted, “questions most of the major arguments presented by Mayer”:

He shows that mass killing of Jews began long before there were any signs of a slowdown in the Blitzkrieg campaign; he disproves Mayer’s curious idea that more Jews died of “so-called ‘natural causes’” than by direct killing; he corrects Mayer’s inaccurate description of the emergence of death camps, showing that they were anything but the result of an afterthought sometime in the winter of 1941-42 and that in fact they were already in preparation the previous fall. Finally, he criticizes Mayer for failing to take Hitler’s racism, and Nazism’s “biological politics,” seriously, arguing that they were essential to National Socialism.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Indeed, as Browning himself wrote, Mayer understood the Holocaust “as a byproduct of Nazi Germany’s anticommunist crusade on the one hand and its hyperexploitation of impressed labor on the other,” an interpretation that Browning found “quite mistaken.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Indeed, Mayer’s contention that had Nazi Germany’s Blitzkrieg in the east succeeded, the Jews might have been spared the worst horrors, irks Browning, for it suggests that, for Mayer, the Holocaust was “grafted” on to the war and was not a goal in its own right. For Mayer, the war against Bolshevism was the decisive factor, the murder of the Jews a by-product of its failure.[[28]](#footnote-28) Thus, Browning is most offended by Mayer’s failure to consider plans for population rearrangement that were already in place before the war against the Soviet Union (when Germany and the USSR were allies), plans that Browning calls “racism gone berserk” and which he claims that Mayer misses “because he does not take Hitler’s racism seriously.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

One reason why many Holocaust historians were so infuriated by Mayer’s claims was that they came hard on the heels of the *Historikerstreit*, the “historians’ debate” in West Germany of the mid- to late-1980s which saw the longstanding consensus that West German political culture could not question the uniqueness of the Holocaust seriously challenged for the first time. In particular, the writings of right-wing historians such as Ernst Nolte and Michael Stürmer caused a storm for suggesting that Nazism copied Stalin’s Soviet communism and that the time had come to de-emphasize the Third Reich in favor of a long-term understanding of German history. Indeed, Peter Baldwin noted that Mayer’s arguments resembled Nolte’s, in the latter’s *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg*. Baldwin notes that the authors’ politics are diametrically opposed and that where Nolte sees the Soviet Union as a precedent, Mayer regards the crusade against Judeo-Bolshevism as unprecedented. Nevertheless, he also observes that “For both [Mayer and Nolte], the emphasis has shifted away from the Jews to the Soviets. For both, Hitler’s enemy was ultimately the modern world, for which the Jews stood in as convenient scapegoats.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

Most recently, Wendy Lower has summarized these earlier criticisms: “Mayer argued that Hitler’s defeatist attitude in December 1941 incited his decision for a final solution and that Nazi anti-bolshevism was a more significant ideological force than antisemitism. Some of his points have been elaborated on by others, but Mayer’s overall thesis has not held up against the evidence of an earlier decision to annihilate the Jews in the Soviet Union and Europe.”[[31]](#footnote-31) It seems then that whilst Mayer advocated seeing the Holocaust as inseparable from the war in the east – a point which made him one of the few historians at the time to follow the lead of specialists such as Gerhard Weinberg and Jürgen Förster – his emphasis on anti-Bolshevism rather than antisemitism confused the issue.

Mayer, in short, placed the primary emphasis on the military destruction of Bolshevism, making communism rather than “the international Jew” the main target of Nazi fear and hatred. In this reading, the murder of the Jews is not exactly accidental, for Mayer knows that communism was equated with Judaism in the Nazi leadership’s eyes, but it was a secondary product of the military war’s failure.

For Weinberg, the two wars are related in a more practical way. He offers numerous examples of moments when changes in military circumstances affected the Germans’ room for manoeuvre with respect to the Jews. World War II, according to Weinberg, was started by the Nazi leadership “to initiate a demographic revolution of global dimensions.” As a consequence, as Weinberg has been arguing for many years now, “those who study the war and the demographic revolution – of which the Holocaust was a central part – need to see the two as the two sides of the same coin, not as separate fields of study only connected by chronological overlap.”[[32]](#footnote-32) The course of the war and the course of the Holocaust were inseparably interconnected. The places that were accessible to the Nazis changed over time, and the Allies’ decisions, losses and victories all affected which groups of Jews did and did not fall into the Nazis’ hands. Most important, Weinberg shows that the Nazi leadership’s goal of world domination – and with it, the annihilation of Jews everywhere in the world – remained a real ambition throughout the life of the Third Reich, and thus only the military defeat of the Nazis prevented Jews from outside of Nazi-occupied lands from being murdered.[[33]](#footnote-33)

In places ranging from the inaccessible Middle East and North Africa (following El Alamein), Sweden and Switzerland (neutral but with German plans for future invasion), and Finland and Bulgaria (allies unwilling to deport “their” Jews), the Jews’ murder was temporarily postponed until circumstances became, from the Nazi point of view, more auspicious. Likewise, the course of the war also made some groups of Jews more accessible to the Nazis, such as those in the Italian sphere of interest (Italy proper, Italian-occupied France, Albania or Greece, including the islands of Rhodes and Corfu). 1943, as Weinberg shows, was a crucial year in that respect, since the military situation in that year determined which groups of Jews would remain outside of the Nazis’ grasp and which they would redouble their efforts to exterminate before they lost the war.[[34]](#footnote-34)

In other words, Weinberg, unlike Mayer, is very much an intentionalist:

When it became obvious that these [Einsatzgruppen] massacres ran into little resistance from the military, and were in fact often assisted and even urged on by them, the heady days of victory of July seemed to provide the opportunity to extend this process both to the rest of the territory that would be occupied by the German army and to the whole of German-occupied and controlled Europe. Here was, or at least seemed to be, the opportunity to kill all Jews German power might reach.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Cesarani sounds superficially like both of his predecessors. In some ways, he sounds very much like Mayer in stressing that the course of the Holocaust was shaped by the war. But he does not place the same emphasis on anti-communism as Mayer does. Recognizing that the attack on “Judeo-Bolshevism” meant a war against the Soviet Union from a military and ideological perspective, Cesarani sees that this meant an attack on the Jews from the start (clear, for example, in the very rapid widening of the orders to the Einsatzgruppen, the four killing squads which followed in the wake of the Wehrmacht, shooting Jews in or near the towns in which they lived). He also sounds like Weinberg – indeed, it is clear that Weinberg is one of Cesarani’s main sources of inspiration – in showing how military events changed the course of the Holocaust. But in some key respects, he takes the argument much further than does either Mayer or Weinberg.

Where Cesarani’s book departs most from his predecessors’ is in his insistence that the Holocaust was driven less by ideology than by venality: apart from the Nazi leadership stratum, most perpetrators across Europe were motivated less by antisemitism, though this may have been part of their cultural background, than by greed and opportunism. The killing process itself was chaotic and disorganized and unfolded on an ad hoc basis. The Nazi leaders were by no means as single-minded as they claimed and as historians have often painted them; rather, they were quite willing to allow ideological tenets to take a back seat, at least temporarily, if military or economic necessity required. The surprise of Cesarani’s book is that a historian who had contributed to advancing the “return of ideology” in the interpretation of Nazism and the Holocaust in the 1990s was now arguing, in the culminating book of his career, that the Holocaust owed little to ideology; there is, for example, no sustained discussion of Nazi thinking about “race” in the book.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Some years ago, Omer Bartov wrote of Götz Aly – another historian whom one would never have imagined one could place side-by-side with Cesarani – that:

to argue that one can explain the origins of the Holocaust without any attempt to analyse the impact of traditional antisemitism, the regime’s anti-Jewish propaganda and indoctrination, and the attitudes of the men who were actually organizing the genocide, is to misunderstand much of what the Holocaust was about.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Not all of these criticisms apply to *Final Solution*, but some of them do. Cesarani’s work is not the same as Mayer’s or Weinberg’s, but it clearly comes from a tradition of quite long standing that puts the greatest stress on the war, devotes relatively little attention to Nazi ideology (or takes it for granted), and regards the military situation as the primary factor in understanding the emergence of the genocide of the Jews.

Clearly, the three historians’ works have different emphases. Nevertheless, they are more than superficially alike and share an overall interpretive framework, which is that the Holocaust needs to be seen in relation to the course of the war. This shared framework means that the fates of their works, especially those of Mayer and Cesarani, are more different than the interpretive differences that separate them would suggest.

*The Course of Holocaust History*

The contexts of the *Historikerstreit*, the end of the Cold War and the rise of nationalism in Eastern Europe and Germany generated a fear amongst historians of granting too much credence to the view that Nazism was focused on communism. The worry was that the focus on the specific Nazi animus against the Jews would be side-lined and thus the memory of the Holocaust which had been so crucial to postwar West German memory politics since the 1960s would start to wane. This process was already observable, according to some historians, in the wake of German unification and the articulation of a new German nationalism in the works of scholars such as Rainer Zitelmann.[[38]](#footnote-38) Mayer was roundly criticized as a result of these fears as much as because of the substance of his argument.

Weinberg’s career trajectory sets him slightly apart from most Holocaust historians so that in his case the wider social/political context seems to have impinged less on the reception of his work. For Weinberg, his own biography allowed him to develop an account in which it seemed obvious that to be a military historian of World War II one had also to understand what happened to the Jews – and vice-versa. But Weinberg’s career has been as a military and diplomatic historian, and thus although he has contributed a great deal to Holocaust Studies, his work has not been appraised in the context of Holocaust historiography in quite the same way as Mayer’s or Cesarani’s.

When one looks at Cesarani’s career path, there seems on the face of it to have been a considerable personal change in his interpretation. The almost universal praise for *Final Solution* is rather surprising when one considers the de-emphasis on ideology. One suspects that many reviewers in the popular press simply do not know enough about the historiography to see the extent to which *Final Solution* marks a departure not only from Cesarani’s own previous work but from the work of other leading Holocaust historians. Even Browning, who considers himself a “moderate functionalist,” does not downplay Nazi ideology to the extent that Cesarani does in *Final Solution*.

It is thus worth considering the development of Cesarani’s thinking on this issue. For although the argument put forward in *Final Solution* surprised his colleagues, in fact one can see how over the previous twenty years an interest in military history, especially a strong awareness of the “new military history” was informing Cesarani’s thinking. In the 1990s, Cesarani edited two books which strongly shaped his ideas: *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (1994) and *Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary 1944* (1997). Along with several related projects, such as working on the book accompanying the documentary *The Last Days* (1999), these volumes indicate how an incorporation of military history into his history of the Holocaust was changing Cesarani’s interpretation. In the latter, for example, the course of Hungarian-German relations and the effect these had on Hungary’s Jews was closely correlated with the state of the war, especially on the eastern front. Cesarani also here noted that the German occupation of Hungary (19 March 1944) was undertaken primarily to prevent the country from defecting to the Allies, a claim he repeated in *Final Solution*, now in a context where it made far more sense given that it was embedded in a much wider survey of the whole course of the war:

Although the eradication of Jewish influence in Hungary was fundamental to Hitler’s decision to occupy the country, antisemitism alone did not drive the invasion and the Jewish tragedy that ensued from it. The occupation of Hungary and the destruction of the Hungarian Jews had a compelling, if perverted, logic. The primary aim was to keep Hungary in the Axis coalition and ensure that Hungarian armies remained in the field.[[39]](#footnote-39)

But is Cesarani’s own changing understanding of Holocaust history sufficient for explaining the interpretation he took in *Final Solution*? That might not be the case; after all, his work needs to be seen in the context of the post-Cold War period, of the “memory wars” that have characterized Europe, especially Eastern Europe, where the memory of communism and Nazism are concerned, and rising nationalism in the West, especially in the immediate context of the so-called “refugee crisis” shortly before his death in 2015.[[40]](#footnote-40) These conditions did not pertain when Mayer and Weinberg were writing their major works and it is a truism that the questions historians ask are shaped to some extent by their situation in the ever-changing present. Whatever the case, Cesarani produced a book that in many ways echoes the previous work of Mayer and Weinberg.

Yet, for all their similarities (and, of course differences), Mayer’s, Weinberg’s and Cesarani’s approaches have had markedly different receptions. Mayer’s was widely condemned for paying insufficient attention to Nazi ideology, making the Holocaust a “by-product” of the war and insufficiently important in its own right; Weinberg’s well-respected and informative analyses remain largely confined to the historical profession in terms of their appreciation (with the partial exception of *A World at Arms*); and Cesarani’s has been widely appreciated in the popular as well as scholarly press. To be fair, some reviewers did express reservations about the extent to which Cesarani downplayed Nazi ideology. For example, the reviewer in *The Guardian* wrote: “Killings followed the rhythm of war, and Cesarani is correct in his conclusion that fewer would have died if the war had finished earlier. But I think he underestimates the significance of the 1942 rampage in Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia and Estonia … Surely there was among Nazis (and their Latvian, Estonian and Ukrainian proxies) a desire ultimately to dispose of Jews.”[[41]](#footnote-41) In *The Spectator*, Jonathan Steinberg argued that orderliness and painstaking bureaucracy rather than chaos were the chief characteristics of the Holocaust.[[42]](#footnote-42) Most, however, were much more unequivocal in their praise, even if they had some points of criticism. Neil Gregor, for example, noted (not as a criticism) the ways in which Cesarani’s position recalled older arguments put forward by the likes of Karl Schleunes or Hans Mommsen.[[43]](#footnote-43) Nicholas Stargardt accepted Cesarani’s claim that the Holocaust was “low-cost and low-tech”, although he also worried about what this meant for “how we understand Hitler’s overall aims.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Perhaps most enthusiastic was Richard Overy, himself one of the world’s leading historians of World War II.[[45]](#footnote-45) What accounts for this – by comparison with Mayer at least – remarkably favourable reception?

The answer is not only that change has happened *in* historiography – although that is also the case – but that the framework in which historiography is understood has changed. There is always an internal dimension to historians’ disputes; new sources, new approaches, methods borrowed or adapted from cognate disciplines – these all shape the ways in which historians pose their research question and mold their research strategies. In this case, major historiographical shits have occurred since Mayer published his book. *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* acted as a spur to further research, as did Daniel Goldhagen’s equally-disputed *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* of 1996. Both inspired more detailed and rigorous research into perpetrator motivation and the role of ideology at all levels in the Third Reich and, in light of Goldhagen’s insistence only on Germans (without the definite article) as perpetrators, into the role of collaborators at all levels too, from individuals to institutions to states. The discovery of an “antisemitic consensus” at the heart of the Third Reich has dominated the historiography ever since.[[46]](#footnote-46) Biographies of leading Nazi perpetrators, studies of SS, Nazi Party and non-Party organizations, of universities, scientific research institutions, and the arts have all shown the extent to which the Third Reich was suffused with a shared framework of anti-Jewish ideology.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Perhaps equally important, the turn to transnational approaches in historiography has also left its mark on the history of the Holocaust. Nazism was more than a form of ultra-nationalism, appealing to all those, across Europe, who believed in the need for a demographic reshaping of the continent (under German hegemony, to be sure) so that internal enemies, primarily Jews and Bolsheviks, but also Roma and other ethnic minorities would be eliminated and so that a peace based on racial hierarchy (with “Aryans” at the top) could prevail. Hence the transnational nature of the Waffen-SS, or the ease with which nation-building agendas in countries from France and Norway in the West to Romania and Hungary in the East could find common cause with the Nazis’ war for *Lebensraum* and racial annihilation.[[48]](#footnote-48) The transnational turn shifts the focus somewhat from purely German affairs to continent-wide ones, with the investment of the other Axis countries in the war effort falling more sharply into view. At the same time, it speaks to the “return of ideology” insofar as we can see – much to the chagrin of post-Cold War nationalists across Europe, the extent to which certain groups in all countries of Europe sympathized with the Nazis’ goals. Transnationalism thus might assist us in understanding a renewed focus on the military situation but it by no means explains why a historian might choose to downplay ideology.

But change is not only internal. The wider context is always crucial to the reception of a historian’s work, both within the discipline and beyond it. In this case, the external context is of greater significance than the internal, as the ways in which “Holocaust consciousness” have developed since the 1980s mean that a given interpretation will be understood differently now than would have been the case thirty years ago. This may seem an obvious point but discussions of historiography pay insufficient attention to the frameworks pertaining outside the discipline. Histories of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century history writing might note the occurrence of revolutions, the growth of imperialism, or the influence of the industrial revolution on shaping the questions asked by historians in those periods – and the answers to them that they gave. But contemporary guides to historiography tend to focus only on internal debates concerning methodology. Exceptions, as in the work of Martin L. Davies or Keith Jenkins, often lead in the direction of a rejection of history as such, or at least to “putting it in its place” by denying it any epistemic privilege.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Cesarani argued – and this was one of the drivers for his de-emphasis on Nazi ideology – that Holocaust commemoration had become instrumentalized and formalized and thus tended to neglect its primary purpose: to remember. In one of the last pieces he wrote before his death, Cesarani wondered “whether it is not better to let history remain in the past, whether the utilization of history for whatever purpose inexorably degrades it.”[[50]](#footnote-50) This is perhaps an odd view for a historian; one cannot be a historian and let history remain in the past. As Jacques Rancière nicely puts it:

There is history because there is a past and a specific passion for the past. And there is history because there is an absence of things in words, of the denominated in names. The status of history depends on the treatment of this twofold absence of the “thing itself” that is *no longer there* – that is the past; and that never was – because it never was *such as it was told*.[[51]](#footnote-51)

Nevertheless, one can understand Cesarani’s frustration and where it came from. Cesarani was to some extent the author of his own misfortunes; after all, he received his OBE for services to Holocaust education, including promoting Holocaust Memorial Day in the U.K.[[52]](#footnote-52) Yet he can hardly be held solely or even primarily responsible for the tendency towards platitudinous commemoration or the use of Holocaust education to promote unrelated aims, such as anti-bullying in schools. Indeed, his highly critical review of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* suggests that these problems had been plaguing him for some time.[[53]](#footnote-53) His views in the 2015 chapter, and his arguments in *Final Solution* which aimed to complicate the prevailing simplistic narrative of the Holocaust in the public sphere could only be espoused following twenty years’ worth of public, state-sponsored Holocaust commemoration in the U.K. and elsewhere.[[54]](#footnote-54) They were not positions that were available to Mayer in 1988 or Weinberg in the 1990s.

Cesarani’s criticisms of Holocaust commemoration took for granted the understanding of the Holocaust as an ideologically-driven, state-sponsored, multi-agency, continent-wide crime, and which therefore was able to draw on that knowledge as a means of drawing back a little.[[55]](#footnote-55) There was no danger now that placing the emphasis on greed instead of ideology would lead to accusations of downplaying the uniqueness of the Holocaust. To the contrary, in a context of post-Cold War national commissions of inquiry into local collaboration in the Holocaust across former communist Eastern Europe (and beyond, in countries such as Switzerland), the opposite was true: an emphasis on greed would help to explain the current difficulties that many countries across Europe seem to be having in accepting that Nazism was not just a foreign invention which led to the occupation of their countries, but that states and individuals, from the highest to the lowest levels of society, in different combinations depending on the country concerned, were intimately involved in the commission of the crime against the Jews.

Even though Cesarani’s book is in some ways even more radical than Mayer’s – the latter at least has a lot to say about Nazi ideology, even if he gets it topsy-turvy, instating anticommunism as the priority over antisemitism – the argument is less offensive in today’s climate than it was immediately after the *Historikerstreit* when fears of German right-wing *revanchism* and revivified Eastern European nationalism abounded. Indeed, it has become a consensus position that there is a link between the war and the Holocaust, even if the precise nature of that link remains contested. Many historians can write in a way that would be regarded as unproblematic, as in Adam Tooze’s claim that, where the Holocaust is concerned, “ideological imperatives were clearly paramount, but subject to pragmatic compromise as circumstances demanded.”[[56]](#footnote-56) No one thinks Cesarani is channelling Ernst Nolte, though the fact that one can write such a thing is in itself noteworthy. Nevertheless, he sounds, rather remarkably, like no one so much as the arch-functionalist Hans Mommsen who argued that the final solution was a result of the Nazi leadership having manoeuvred itself into a situation in which “internal antagonisms within the system gradually blocked all alternative options, so that the physical liquidation of the Jews ultimately appeared to be the only way out.”[[57]](#footnote-57) Yet Cesarani was of course not rerunning Mommsen’s arguments, at least not in quite the same way. Rather, he was responding to Holocaust historiography and, perhaps more importantly, Holocaust commemoration as they had developed in the thirty years since Mommsen put forward his arguments. This shift acts as a reminder that there are always more questions than answers in historiography and that historical revisionism and an openness to the plurality of pasts is the norm when thinking and writing about the past. As philosopher of history Paul A. Roth says, “tolerating a pluralism of worlds does not sanction sacrificing rigor”[[58]](#footnote-58); it would be strangely ahistorical for historians to imagine that their writings are the last word on any subject, for their texts, like everything else in the world, are historicizable.

These texts by Mayer, Weinberg, and Cesarani are histories which are very much of the present, in the sense that the historian understands the present-day concerns which motivate his or her research question and in the sense that they are problems which not only shed light on the past but, as in Allan Megill’s formulation, grapple self-consciously with the present use of the past in order to offer “a critical perspective on the past, on the present, and on our present use of the past.” Subjecting them to historiographical analysis and criticism means, as Megill goes on to explain, “the revealing of fissures and contradictions – in the past, in historians’ representations of the past, in historians’ assumptions as they seek to represent the past, and in dominant and perhaps also nondominant assumptions in the present concerning the future, the present, and the past.”[[59]](#footnote-59) This is not the same as saying that the past can act as a guide to present or future action but rather that it helps us to understand how and why things have turned out the way they did, often despite anyone having foreseen the course of events. Or, as Zoltán Boldizsár Simon puts it, “historical writing – by providing *essentially contested knowledge of the past* – is the best tool we have for negatively indicating the contours of the future community that is presently taking place.”[[60]](#footnote-60) There is, in other words, nothing but the course of history.

1. \* I am extremely grateful to my friend and colleague Jens Meierhenrich for reading an earlier version of this article and for helping me to reconceptualize it. My thanks too to the two anonymous reviewers, whose comments were very trenchant and insightful. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (London, 1989); Tom Lawson, *Debates on the Holocaust* (Manchester, 2010); Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford, 2010), esp. ch.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativst Philosophy of Historiography* (Houndmills, 2015), 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago, 2004), 235. See also the section on “Interpretation in History,” 333-342. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Although Kuukkanen has discussed “conceptual change” – see “Making Sense of Conceptual Change,” *History and Theory* 47 (2008): 351-372 – that article concerns the difference between the history of concepts and the history of linguistic entities, and the notion of continuity or discontinuity that prevails in their respective analyses; it is an analysis of what “change” means in the context of history of ideas rather than, as here, an explanation of what drives change in historiography. For further discussion of “rational constructivism,” see Dan Stone, “Excommunicating the Past? Narrativism and Rational Constructivism in the Historiography of the Holocaust,” *Rethinking History* 21, no. 4 (2017): 549-566. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hayden White, “History as Fulfillment,” in *Philosophy of History after Hayden White*, ed. Robert Doran (London, 2013), 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. White, “History as Fulfillment,” 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Hayden White, “Coda: Reading Witness Discourse,” in *Representing Auschwitz: At the Margins of Testimony*, ed. Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams (Houndmills, 2013), 225-226. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “Revising the Past/Revisiting the Present: How Change Happens in Historiography,” *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 1-19, esp. 18. Spiegel follows Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Aviezer Tucker, “Historiographic Revision and Revisionism: The Evidential Difference,” in *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989*, ed. Michal Kopeček (Budapest, 2008), 1-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Tucker, “Historiographic Revision and Revisionism,” 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Tucker, “Historiographic Revision and Revisionism,” 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The “Final Solution” in History* (London, 1990 [1st edn 1988]), 313-314. Mayer was born in Luxemburg in 1926 and is Emeritus Professor of History at Princeton University. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Gerhard L. Weinberg, “Two Separate Issues? Historiography of World War II and the Holocaust,” in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*, ed. David Bankier and Dan Michman (Jerusalem, 2008), 401. Weinberg was born in Hannover in 1928 and is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. David Cesarani, *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-49* (London, 2016), xxv, xxvii, 700, 737. Cesarani was born in 1956 and died in October 2015. At the time of his death he was Research Professor in History at Royal Holloway, University of London and was one of the U.K.’s most noted public intellectuals. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Cesarani, *Final Solution*, 792. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Weinberg, “Two Separate Issues?,” 380. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See for example Rolf-Dieter Müller and Gerd R. Ueberschär, *Hitler’s War in the East: A Critical Assessment* (New York, 2002), Part C. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Michael R. Marrus, “The *Shoah* and the Second World War: Some Comments on Recent Historiography,” in *The Shoah and the War*, ed. Asher Cohen, Yehoyakim Cochavi, and Yoav Gelber (New York, 1992), 1-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See for example Jürgen Förster, “The Relation between Operation Barbarossa as an Ideological War of Extermination and the Final Solution,” and Christian Streit, “Wehrmacht, Einsatzgruppen, Soviet POWs and Anti-Bolshevism in the Emergence of the Final Solution,” both in *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation*, ed. David Cesarani (London, 1994), 85-102 and 103-118. See also Cesarani’s introduction to this book, 11-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For recent statements of this consensus, see Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006); Dieter Pohl, *Die Herrschaft der Wehrmacht: Deutsche Militärbesatzung und einheimische Bevölkerung in der Sowjetunion 1941-1944*, 2nd edn (Munich, 2009), ch9; Christian Hartmann, *Operation Barbarossa: Nazi Germany’s War in the East, 1941-1945* (Oxford, 2013), ch6. On the Wehrmacht Exhibition, see Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, ed., *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944* (Hamburg, 1995); Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, ed., *War of Extermination: The German Military in World War II 1941-1944* (New York, 2000) – this latter somewhat different from the German original on which it is based; and the exhibition catalogue prepared by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944* (Hamburg, 2002). See also the chapters by Saul Friedländer and Omer Bartov in Omer Bartov, Atina Grossmann and Mary Nolan, ed., *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2002) and Omer Bartov, “German Soldiers and the Holocaust: Historiography, Research and Implications,” *History & Memory* 9, nos. 1-2 (1997): 162-188. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Jeff Rutherford, *Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front: The German Infantry’s War, 1941-1944* (Cambridge, U.K., 2014), 100. See also Wette, *The Wehrmacht*, ch3. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel, “Introduction,” in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization*, ed. Kay, Rutherford and Stahel (Rochester, NY, 2012), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kay, Rutherford, and Stahel, “Introduction,” 10-11. For an earlier statement along these lines, see Tobias Jersak, “Die Interaktion von Kriegsverlauf und Judenvernichtung: Ein Blick auf Hitlers Strategie im Spätsommer 1941,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 268, no. 2 (1999): 311-374. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany’s Defeat in the East* (Cambridge, U.K., 2009), 400-401. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (New York, 1996), 91-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Christopher R. Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (New York, 1992), 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Browning, *The Path to Genocide*, 80-81, citing Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?* [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Browning, *The Path to Genocide*, 85. For Browning’s own analysis of the link between the decision-making process for the “Final Solution” and the war, see “The Emergence of the Final Solution and the War, 1939-41,” in *The Shoah and the War*, ed. Cohen, Cochavi, and Gelber, 35-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Peter Baldwin, “The Historikerstreit in Context,” in *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians’ Debate*, ed. Baldwin (Boston, 1990), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Wendy Lower, “Axis Collaboration, Operation Barbarossa, and the Holocaust in Ukraine,” in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941*, ed. Kay, Rutherford and Stahel, 211 n3. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Weinberg, “Two Separate Issues?,” 382. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See also Jochen Thies, *Hitler’s Plans for Global Domination: Nazi Architecture and Ultimate War Aims* (New York, 2012 [orig. 1976]). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Gerhard L. Weinberg, “The ‘Final Solution’ and the War in 1943,” in Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler and World War II: Essays in Modern German and World History* (Cambridge, U.K., 1995), 217-244. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, 2nd edn (New York, 2005), 301. See also the chapter by Weinberg’s former student Doris L. Bergen, “Holocaust und Besatzungsgeschichte,” in *Der Holocaust: Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung*, ed. Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw (Frankfurt am Main, 2015), 299-320. Here Bergen expands the discussion so that the Holocaust is considered not just in terms of the military situation but the nature of the different occupation regimes in place throughout Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. By contrast, see the essays which accept the analytical value of but also question the limits of the “race” paradigm in Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard F. Wetzell, ed., *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany* (New York, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Omer Bartov, *Germany’s War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See for example, Karl-Heinz Roth, “Revisionist Tendencies in Historical Research into German Fascism,” *International Review of Social History* 39 (1994): 429-455. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. David Cesarani, “Introduction,” in Steven Spielberg and Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, *The Last Days* (London, 1999), 28; Cesarani, *Final Solution*, 702. These claims are more decisive than the comments in Cesarani’s introduction to *Genocide and Rescue*. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See Dan Stone, “Memory Wars in the ‘New Europe,’” in *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History*, ed. Stone (Oxford, 2012), 714-731. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Nick Fraser, “Review of David Cesarani, *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-1949*,” *The Guardian*, February 7, 2016, online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/feb/07/final-solution-fate-jews-david-cesarani-review> (accessed 16 July 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Jonathan Steinberg, “David Cesarani’s Final, Fascinating, Wrong-headed Book,” *The Spectator*, February 6, 2016, online at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/02/david-cesaranis-final-fascinating-wrong-headed-book/> (accessed 16 July 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Karl A. Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy toward German Jews 1933-1939*, 2nd edn (Urbana, 1990 [1970]); Hans Mommsen, “The Realization of the Unthinkable: The ‘Final Solution of the Jewish Question’ in the Third Reich,” in *The Policies of Genocide: Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld (London, 1986), 97-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Neil Gregor, “Review of David Cesarani, *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-1949*,” *Times Higher*, January 27, 2016, online at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/books/review-final-solution-the-fate-of-the-jews-1933-1949-david-cesarani-pan-macmillan> (accessed 16 July 2018). Nicholas Stargardt, “Two New Books Look at the Holocaust in Civic and Military Terms”, *New York Times*, January 3, 2017, online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/03/books/review/final-solution-david-cesarini-why-explaining-holocaust-peter-hayes.html> (accessed 16 July 2018); Stargardt also refers to Weinberg as an important predecessor of Cesarani. He concludes that Cesarani “reveals a central will to destroy”, but this is something more taken for granted than demonstrated in *Final Solution*. See also Daniel Snowman’s review in *History Today* 66, no. 5 (2016), online at: <https://www.historytoday.com/reviews/final-solution-fate-jews-1933-49> (accessed 16 July 2018), which also references Mommsen and Martin Broszat. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Richard Overy, “Last Words,” *Literary Review* 440 (March 2016), online at: <https://literaryreview.co.uk/last-words> (accessed 16 July 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See, for example, Jürgen Matthäus, “Anti-Semitism as an Offer: The Function of Ideological Indoctrination in the SS and Police Corps During the Holocaust,” in *Lessons and Legacies, Vol. VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (Evanston, 2006), 116-128. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The literature is very large. For representative examples, see: Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft* (Bonn, 1996); Isabel Heinemann, *“Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut”: Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen, 2003); Wolfgang Bialas and Anson Rabinbach, ed., *Nazi Germany and the Humanities: How German Academics Embraced Nazism* (London, 2007); Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Madison, WI, 2009); Catherine Epstein, *Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland* (Oxford, 2010); Susanne Heim, Carola Sachse, and Mark Walker, ed., *The Kaiser Wilhelm Society under National Socialism* (Cambridge, 2009); Dirk Rupnow; *Judenforschung im Dritten Reich: Wissenschaft zwischen Politik, Propaganda und Ideologie* (Baden-Baden, 2011); David B. Dennis, *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture* (Cambridge, 2012); Julien Reitzenstein, *Himmlers Forscher: Wehrwissenschaft und Medizinverbrechen im “Ahnenerbe” der SS* (Paderborn, 2014); Hans-Christian Harten, *Himmlers Lehrer: Die weltanschauliche Schulung in der SS 1933-1945* (Paderborn, 2014); Johann Chapoutot, *The Law of Blood: Thinking and Acting as a Nazi* (Cambridge, MA, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See, for example: Jochen Böhler and Robert Gerwarth, ed., *The Waffen-SS: A European History* (Oxford, 2017); Raz Segal, *Genocide in the Carpathians: War, Social Breakdown, and Mass Violence 1914-1945* (Stanford, 2016); Alexander Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs: Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien, 1941-1945* (Hamburg, 2013); Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania* (Washington, D.C., 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Martin L. Davies, *Historics: Why History Dominates Contemporary Society* (Abingdon, 2006); Davies, *Imprisoned by History: Aspects of Historicized Life* (Abingdon, 2010); Keith Jenkins, *On “What is History?” From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London, 1995); Jenkins, *Refiguring History: New Thoughts on an Old Discipline* (London, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. David Cesarani, “Autobiographical Reflections on Writing History, the Holocaust and Hairdressing,” in *Holocaust Scholarship: Personal Trajectories and Professional Interpretations*, ed. Christopher R. Browning, Susannah Heschel, Michael R. Marrus and Milton Shain (Houndmills, 2015), 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (Minneapolis, 1994), 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See David Cesarani, “Seizing the Day: Why Britain Will Benefit from Holocaust Memorial Day,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 34, no. 4 (2000): 61-66, a response to Dan Stone, “Day of Remembrance or Day of Forgetting? Or, Why Britain Does Not Need a Holocaust Memorial Day,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 34, no. 4 (2000): 53-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. David Cesarani, “Striped Pyjamas,” *Literary Review* 359 (October 2008), online at: <http://holocaustcentre.com/cms_content/upload/PDFs/Cesarani%20Review%20Striped%20Pyjamas.pdf> (accessed 14 March 2018). Cesarani claims here that the film of Boyne’s book turns the Holocaust into a “bizarre health and safety incident” and argues that it shows that “a heavy price is being paid for the popularization and instrumentalization of the Holocaust.” [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. For critical discussions of HMD in Britain, see Donald Bloxham, “Britain’s Holocaust Memorial Day: Reshaping the Past in the Service of the Present,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 21, nos. 1 and 2 (2002): 41-62; Tony Kushner, “Reflections on Britain’s Holocaust Memorial Day,” *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture* 23, no. 1 (2004): 116-129. For a corrective that emphasizes the counter-narratives promoted at local HMD events, see John Richardson, “Making Memory Makers: Interpellation, Norm Circles, and Holocaust Memorial Day Trust Workshops,” *Memory Studies* (online first 31 July 2017), DOI: 10.1177/1750698017720259. And for recent analyses of the state of Holocaust education in Britain, see Andy Pearce, “The Holocaust in the National Curriculum after 25 Years,” *Holocaust Studies* 23, no. 3 (2017): 231-262, and Tom Lawson, “Britain’s Promise to Forget? Some Historiographical Reflections on *What Do Students Know and Understand about the Holocaust?*,” *Holocaust Studies* 23, no. 3 (2017): 345-363. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. For a survey of the scholarly literature that constituted this background, see, for example, Dan Stone, “Beyond the ‘Auschwitz Syndrome’: Holocaust Historiography after the Cold War,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 44, no. 5 (2010): 454-468. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London, 2007), 528. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Mommsen, “The Realization of the Unthinkable,” 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Paul A. Roth, “Ways of Pastmaking,” *History of the Human Sciences* 15, no. 4 (2002): 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Allan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice* (Chicago, 2007), 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, “We are History: The Outlines of a Quasi-Substantive Philosophy of History,” *Rethinking History* 20, no. 2 (2016): 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)