

Books in Review

Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, Volume 1

By Saul Friedlander, Harper Collins, New York, 1997, 436 pp., \$30.00

Reviewed by Walter Laqueur

On Nazism and the Jews a great deal has been written—personal accounts and learned monographs—but there are very few full-scale, general works and, as far as the prewar period is concerned, Saul Friedlander's work (the first of two volumes) is not just a fine book, it is the only one we have so far. He covers the period from Hitler's rise to power to the outbreak of World War II, and he describes both how decisions were taken by the Nazi top leadership to solve the "Jewish question" and how the Jews of Germany (and later also Austria) reacted.

The author belongs to the generation of historians born on the eve of the Nazi era, and he spent his early years in Nazi-occupied Europe. He now teaches at UCLA and at Tel Aviv University and is well known as an advocate of various innovative approaches, such as psychohistory and the whole complex of "history and memory."

At a certain stage in his professional career, he became prominently involved in a dispute among historians that has raged for almost a quarter of a century, the debate between "functionalists" and "intentionalists."

The argument of the functionalists in briefest outline (to paraphrase the author) is that Nazism was driven by the chaotic clash of competing bureaucratic and party fiefdoms and that the planning of its anti-Jewish policy was mainly left to the cost/benefit calculations of technocrats.

In other words, ideology was of relatively little importance, Hitler was ba-

sically a weak dictator and the Holocaust happened at least partly by accident. One thing led to another, having killed some Jews, the bureaucrats had to also kill the rest. Most of the functionalists are German, but there are also some in England and America. They do not deny that mass murder took place, but they certainly deny its uniqueness—mass murder after all, did take place at various times throughout history.

The intentionalists, on the other hand, emphasized the crudest of racial and anti-Semitic rhetoric in Nazi ideology, while Hitler was not omnipotent, he was involved in an all important decisions (or at least could have made had he wanted); while he did not have a blueprint as to how exactly to exterminate the Jews from the beginning and which he considered a variety of schemes over the years—to deport, shoot or poison them—his central aim, his basic intention, never changed.

Friedlander is an intentionalist, though he stresses from time to time that he does not wish to return to the simplistic early interpretations with their emphasis on the role and sole responsibility of the Fuhrer. Such assurances make sense in the context of academic polemics in order to secure one's flanks in academic battle, but I am not sure whether they are really necessary. For even the most primitive intentionalist is infinitely closer to historical truth than the functionalists, preoccupied with their outlandish constructions.

If Hitler had been assassinated in 1936, chances are that World War II

Social Science Books of the Month

In every issue the editors of **Society** present a sampling of the best new books received. They are selected on the basis of significant coverage of social science problems and concerns as well as writing style and presentation that appeal to a broad reading public.

James Tunstead Burtchaell. **The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches.** Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998. \$45.00.

Sanford Lakoff. **Max Lerner: Pilgrim in the Promised Land.** Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998. \$25.00.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan. **Secrecy: The American Experience.** New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. \$22.50.

Louis A. Pérez, Jr. **The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography.** Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998. \$16.95.

Frederic C. Schaffer. **Democracy in Translation.** Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998. \$39.95.

Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff. **Revolutionary Demands: A Content Analysis of the "Cahiers de Doléances" of 1798.** Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998. \$75.00.