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THE INTELLECTUAL MIGRATION AND THE "OTHER WEIMAR"

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Emily J. Levine, *Dreamland of Humanists: Warburg, Cassirer, Panofsky, and the Hamburg School* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014)

Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Emigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015)

These two books bring fresh eyes and much-needed energy to the study of the intellectual migration from Weimar Germany to the United States. Research on the scholars, writers, and artists forced to flee Europe because of their Jewish heritage or left-wing politics was once a cottage industry, but interest in this topic has waned in recent years. During the height of fascination with the émigrés, bookstores brimmed with panoramic works such as H. Stuart Hughes's *The Sea Change: The Migration of Social Thought, 1930–1965* (1975), Lewis Coser's *Refugee Scholars in America: Their Impact and Their Experiences* (1984), and Martin Jay's *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (1985). Now, while historians still write monographs about émigré intellectuals, their focus is often narrowed to biographies of individual thinkers. Refreshingly, with Emily Levine's and Udi Greenberg's new publications we are asked to step back and recapture a broader view of their legacy. The displacement of a significant part of Germany's renowned intelligentsia to the US in the mid-twentieth century remains one of the major events in the intellectual history of both countries.

Both *Dreamland of Humanists* and *The Weimar Century* turn our attention back to the émigrés specifically in order to refashion our dominant view of the place where they lived before the rise of Nazism: the Weimar Republic (1918–33), Germany's embattled first liberal democracy. Both Levine and Greenberg bemoan the disproportionate amount of ink historians have spilled on the thinkers who either opposed the republic, undermined its legitimacy, or did little to defend it. Indeed, the relative attention given in the scholarly literature

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to intellectuals such as Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Karl Barth, and the various Marxist scholars within the orbit of the Institute for Social Research has perhaps contributed to the false impression that Weimar was a republic without republicans or republican ideas. To understand this era and its legacy more accurately, Levine and Greenberg contend, one must look to the *other Weimar*—to the intellectuals who worked within the republic and defended it against detractors.

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Levine, who began work on *Dreamland of Humanists* as a student of the Stanford historian of German liberalism James Sheehan, has concentrated on a group of German Jewish scholars who gathered in the metropolis of Hamburg during the Weimar years. As much a study of a city as of the intellectual milieu that developed there, Levine's book narrates the emergence of two privately funded, loosely affiliated educational ventures in this understudied part of Germany. On one hand, it explains the institutional origins of the new University of Hamburg, which students began attending in 1919, the first year of the republic; on the other, it reconstructs the vision of the group surrounding Aby Warburg, a wealthy scholar who opened his massive library collection and research institute—once called one of Weimar's "greatest glories"—to the university community in 1926.[1] With her eye trained on Hamburg, an affluent mercantile enclave on the north Atlantic coast, Levine has consciously shifted focus away from Prussia, where she believes historians of Weimar culture have too often lingered to the neglect of other regions.

In turning from Berlin to Hamburg, Levine has attempted to make a historical as well as a sociological argument about the material and institutional preconditions for the creation of (good) ideas. Hamburg is presented as instructive because it fostered a model of cultural production that differed from the one typical of most German-speaking realms. Unlike the other major German cities, Hamburg remained outside the control of the powerful aristocratic courts ruling the large states of Prussia, Bavaria, Baden, and Saxony. This "free-city" status, Levine convincingly shows, meant that Hamburg's population had no access to the large tax base used to found and sustain expensive cultural institutions such as the museums and universities in Berlin, Munich, Cologne, and Leipzig, as well as in smaller cities such as Heidelberg, Marburg, and Tübingen. But it also meant, she argues, that the institutions that *were* eventually created in Hamburg—funded not primarily through the state, but by the city's ultra-rich banking families—could incubate innovative ideas independent of the political

[1] Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, 1968), 31.

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vagaries of government. These conditions, along with the city's commitment to free trade and the openness that comes with being an international trading port, allowed the Hamburg cultural elite to promote cosmopolitan values and experiment with foreign traditions even when the country's political winds shifted toward authoritarian nationalism. "Hamburg's *economic* world," Levine writes in her introduction, "empowered an *intellectual* world amenable to humanist scholarship and prorepublican politics" (19, emphasis mine).

The reader of *Dreamland of Humanists* is thus introduced to a world of millionaire philanthropists, and specifically to the Warburgs, a Jewish banking family perhaps second in name recognition only to the Rothschilds. We meet the eldest child of Moritz and Charlotte Warburg, Aby (Abraham), who, growing up in the German Empire, never showed much interest in his family's business or its religious practice but did seem to inherit an acumen for negotiation and an intense love of learning (30–31). His parents and younger siblings were already major donors to a wide array of civic institutions that would perhaps not have existed without private support, such as Hamburg's first art museum, but Aby encouraged them to give more, including monies for a costly project to endow a university. The Warburgs and other cultural philanthropists sought to learn lessons from their counterparts across the Atlantic in Gilded Age America, where, as in Hamburg, the market was strong, the state weak, and "private cultural institutions were the norm" (37). Levine compares these private endeavors favorably with the publicly funded cultural institutions of other German cities. "By the close of the nineteenth century, German universities had entirely lost their fiscal independence," she writes, noting that the state often "exercised authority over administrative and scholarly affairs" and left scholarship "crippled by the political battles played out in the university" (76–7).

Meanwhile, Aby Warburg grew his private library to tens of thousands of volumes (having convinced his younger brothers to support that expensive endeavor as well), eventually turning it into a research institute that helped attract a prestigious group of scholars in the humanities to Hamburg. Levine shows how Warburg, an ambitious if unproductive scholar in his own right, collected books that he felt might help provide an answer to one of the age's most haunting questions: if all cultures, including European culture, were products of their historical context, then did absolute values exist? And if not, was the European quest for universal reason itself not merely a passing, historical phenomenon? This dilemma, known otherwise as the "crisis of historicism," also fascinated the two brilliant German Jewish scholars who came to teach at Hamburg's new university and put the Warburg Institute to use. The renowned philosopher Ernst Cassirer used the library to write his monumental three-volume *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–9), an attempt to explain the hidden common logic

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behind the superficially divergent cultural expressions of different societies. He was soon joined there by Erwin Panofsky, a talented young cultural historian who rejected the dominant ethnographic interpretation of art (as expression of ethnic or national genius) in favor of an "iconological" approach that balanced contextualization in the particular with interpretation of the universal. Levine argues, with Panofsky, that these shared epistemological and methodological concerns constituted the key element in the "Hamburg school" of scholarship (149).

Levine confirms that the Jewishness of these men and their families—even when it was not worn on their sleeves—deeply mattered both for the philanthropy behind Hamburg's academic institutions and for the specific themes of their scholarship. Like many Western European Jewish thinkers, they demonstrated an elective affinity for neo-Kantian philosophy and its dream of harmonizing the private and the public, the particular and the universal, without collapsing them into one another. They resisted totalizing and assimilationist theories and felt at home in Weimar's economically and culturally liberal environment. Levine uses scholars of the Hamburg school to suggest that Hitler essentially got it right when he identified the ideological threat of pluralism these authors and teachers posed to the National Socialist vision. She insists, correctly, that mainstream liberal German Jews in the Weimar Republic such as Warburg, Cassirer, and Panofsky were not "deluded" by a naive underestimation of anti-Semitism, as some émigrés (such as Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*) would later insist, but rather lost a battle that might have gone the other way had the economic depression after 1929 abated (195). She thus presents Cassirer's attempts to defend cosmopolitan German nationalism in his writings and academic lectures at the end of the Republic as tragic–heroic, rather than hopelessly out of touch (226–9).

At times, the core ideas at stake in *Dreamland of Humanists* get short shrift when more explication could have deepened the argument. This is particularly the case with Cassirer, the most central and important thinker in the story. While Levine has provided some background on his neo-Kantian training, there is little close analysis of the foundational *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. The book would also have benefited from attention to the arguments of Cassirer's many critics, who accused him of relativism and attacked his views on myth. In her desire to correct for the arguably excessive attention given to illiberal thinkers in Weimar, such as Heidegger, she has perhaps overcompensated and lost a sense of the dialectic through which Cassirer shaped his ideas. With whom was Cassirer in conversation, and whom was he attempting to refute? Without contrast with the Hamburg school's detractors and rivals, it is also difficult to fully appreciate the force of Levine's sociological argument that scholars of the humanities in that city were more innovative than those in the state-dominated universities.

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Chapter 10, the section on the "export" of the Hamburg school's ideas to America during the emigration years after 1933, points the narrative in a different direction. The thousands of volumes in the Warburg library were miraculously transported to London, where they remain today, while Cassirer and Panofsky eventually settled in the US, employed at Yale and Princeton respectively. (Aby Warburg had died in 1929, on the day of the New York Stock Exchange crash.) Fittingly enough, the German Jewish scholars who briefly flourished in Hamburg, thanks to the privately funded model of intellectual production there, eventually flourished again in cosmopolitan American cities at universities with even larger private endowments supported by cultural philanthropy. The book ends with Panofsky, the youngest of the three figures, turning toward a robust defense of Enlightenment rationality and the teleological superiority of modern perspective.

In a book that focuses more on the sociology of knowledge and the means of intellectual production than on the history of ideas per se, it is surprising that *Dreamland of Humanists* is not attentive to the deeper geopolitical structures that enabled the philanthropy behind public–private cultural partnerships in Germany and America. Max Warburg—who funded the bulk of his brother Aby's library collection and helped found the precursors to the University of Hamburg, the Scientific Foundation and the Colonial Institute—brought his family's bank into its worldwide power and fame in no small sum from his work with the German state. Indeed, he once bragged that M. M. Warburg & Co. was the most ardent supporter of German colonial expansion.[2] One learns little from Levine about how the money that supported her protagonists was made. In this sense, the study could have used some of the post-exilic insights of the Frankfurt school (which the author dismisses without further explanation as having "unsavory political implications" (13)), in its call to critique the social conditions through which knowledge emerges.

These omissions, however, do not detract from the book's substantial contributions. One learns much about the history of the city of Hamburg, the conditions under which its institutions of high culture were built, and the means with which its top thinkers produced their ideas. With this narrative, Levine has also given scholars interested in the intellectual migration a valuable prehistory of the reception of these liberal German Jewish thinkers in America.

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Greenberg's *The Weimar Century* is far more critical of the role and long-term influence of his émigré protagonists. The title of this provocative book is

[2] Cited in Ron Chernow, *The Warburgs: The Twentieth-Century Odyssey of a Remarkable Jewish Family* (New York, 1993), 142.

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a play on the famous essay of 1941 by *Time* publisher Henry Luce, who called on US politicians to reject isolationism, join World War II, and "create the first great American Century" by projecting power abroad and promoting US-style democracy around the world. The phrase served as a battle cry for certain Cold Warriors before it was catapulted back into use with the ascendancy of George W. Bush and the Project for a New American Century, the neoconservative think tank that helped marshal support for the occupation of Iraq in 2003. Greenberg, who began researching his project during the post-invasion years as a student of the intellectual historian Steven Aschheim, claims to have uncovered the "ideological foundations" of democratic exceptionalism and interventionism. He finds them in the lives of a handful of émigrés and the ideas they brought with them to America from Germany. In so doing, he has extended the work of Jeremy Suri, who contended in his *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (2007) that "the American Century began with the collapse of Weimar democracy."[3]

This is a trans-war history that spans the period from the fall of the German Empire in 1918 to the height of the Cold War in the 1960s. Greenberg's goal is to show that democratic ideas originating in the Weimar Republic did not die with the rise of Nazi dictatorship, but rather grew continuously in prominence in America and, later, in postwar Germany. Each chapter of *The Weimar Century* thus introduces the reader to a different "agent" or carrier of these ideas: in total, five men (four of Jewish heritage) who began their promising careers in the 1920s, later migrated to the US, and, once their potential value to national interests became apparent, were eventually hired as advisers or consultants to American agencies dedicated to the promotion of democracy abroad, especially in their native country. Greenberg's carefully curated list of figures includes political thinkers from self-consciously Protestant, Catholic, socialist, and liberal traditions, chosen, presumably, to reflect the main political constituencies of postwar Germany. These men came from diverse backgrounds, but they all shared something in common since the interwar years, Greenberg insists: "They ambitiously argued that democracy was the sole legitimate regime, one that had the right to violently crush its enemies. Decades later, as they participated in Germany's rebuilding, they reached back to these ideas and plans" (4).

Stressing continuity, Greenberg makes three main arguments using the stories of these thinkers. First and foremost, he argues that democratic ideas developed in the Weimar period and nurtured in American exile underpinned Germany's surprisingly quick transition from total defeat under Hitler to stable liberal democracy in the Bonn Republic founded in 1949 (8). Second, he posits that many of the basic elements of the ideology and institutional infrastructure of the

[3] Jeremy Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 7.

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US-led Cold War originated with these selfsame émigrés and their theories (18). And third, Greenberg attempts to demonstrate that these men served as crucial cultural mediators in the creation of a transnational alliance between the US and the new West Germany (11, 24). These are large claims that should be examined carefully.

Though the mediating role of former exiles in Germany's reorientation toward the West has been studied before, *The Weimar Century* is unique in showing precisely how US officials deployed these men in their quest to win hearts and minds during the global fight against communism. With the onset of hostilities with the Soviet Union after 1947, American elites "did not hesitate to co-opt German émigrés into their institutions of knowledge and power," Greenberg notes (260). As he shows convincingly, these cultural mediators became more than mere agents of American interests. Leveraging their indispensability as area experts, they also attempted to promote their own plans for the future of democratic Germany, some of which they had begun to develop before Hitler's rise. The five German-born professors of political science studied here—Carl J. Friedrich, Ernst Fraenkel, Waldemar Gurian, Karl Loewenstein, and Hans J. Morgenthau—used their newfound access to power to pursue their own pet projects. By showing that process in detail, Greenberg has provided keen insight into how American cultural diplomacy actually worked during the Cold War: when American governmental and affiliated nongovernmental agencies identified émigrés as effective assets for the promotion of US interests abroad, they also "opened space for, and even promoted, foreign ideas, as long as those ideas contributed to their overall Cold War efforts to mitigate global communism and secure a domestic American 'way of life'" (119).

Greenberg moves into more problematic terrain when he leaves the realm of diplomatic history and makes claims about the decisive impact of German émigrés' ideas on US intellectual and political life more broadly. The influence of these new arrivals on what is known now as Cold War ideology, including the theories of "totalitarianism" and "realism" in international relations, is unquestionable and well known. But it is highly debatable whether the Cold War university, for example, would have looked much different lacking Carl J. Friedrich's concept of "responsible elites" (55), whether US intellectuals would not have regarded Fascism and Bolshevism as twin evils without Waldemar Gurian's specifically Catholic iteration of totalitarianism theory (144), or whether the US policy of wartime and postwar suppression of allegedly antidemocratic elements in South America needed Karl Loewenstein's advocacy of "militant democracy" to undergird it (187).

Considering the book's high estimation of the émigrés' impact, it is striking that Greenberg did not address the work of Joachim Radkau, who made a very similar case about the anticommunist thrust of the émigrés and their influence

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on US policy in his book *Die deutsche Emigration in die USA* (1971). (Greenberg refers to the book only in passing in a short footnote (19).) Engagement with that foundational text, which surveyed a wide array of documents—nearly two thousand footnotes!—would have been particularly apt because Greenberg seems to disagree with a central part of its explanation. Unlike Radkau, who held that the émigrés changed in American exile and became increasingly conservative in the lead-up to the Cold War, *The Weimar Century* holds that the projects these five former Germans began as young men were the same ones they pursued for the rest of their lives. Until Radkau's more encompassing work is addressed head on, his thesis stands.

Greenberg's thesis on continuity does not hold up in the face of evidence when the book's narrative turns to the influence of Weimar-era ideas in the postwar reconstruction of Germany. The various developments in West German politics that *The Weimar Century* attempts to explain—the Federal Republic's treaty with the Western powers to join NATO, the Constitutional Court's decision to ban the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party's renunciation of Marxism and its acquiescence to the US-led Western alliance, and, in general, the overall stabilization of the Federal Republic—were all the results of deep, painful, and complex negotiations among the 99 percent of Germans who did not emigrate like the five men examined here. Far from the intellectual continuity Greenberg claims existed in the work of these five figures, an in-depth study of the political, social, economic, and religious life of Germany over this period reveals a story of large-scale ideological transformations. But since Greenberg has focused almost exclusively on documents produced by the five émigrés instead of on local actors, institutions, political parties, and religious movements, we are given no sense of the dramatic shifts necessary to explain the reconstruction.

Most importantly, the big story of trans-war Germany, and of trans-war democratic nation building in Europe more generally, is not the fact of occasional continuity, but of deep-seated compromises and change. Large groups of people fundamentally altered their stances toward one another. In the all-important realm of class politics, socialists and leaders of the country's liberal bureaucracy commenced a protracted rapprochement on the issue of law and the limits of the legislature. Protestants and Catholics began reaching toward an unprecedented partnership—and a common political-economic vision—with the planning of a new national party, the Christian Democratic Union. Yesterday's nationalists became today's architects of a supranational Europe. Slowly and painfully, the churches attempted to integrate cultural minorities such as the Jews into a newly pluralistic, and yet still decidedly Christian, world view. These are the types of tectonic shift that began after the collapse of the republic. Together they created the social and ideological foundations of the new Germany.

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Like all works, Greenberg's suffers from the occasional mistranslation and misreading, mostly minor. One example that touches on the thesis of *The Weimar Century*, however, must be noted. The second chapter uses the career of the lawyer and political theorist Ernst Fraenkel (a figure about whom I have written) to excavate the ideological foundations of the 1959 Bad Godesberg Convention, where the leaders of the German Social Democrats struck references to Marxism from their platform and officially opened this historically working-class party to partnerships with the middle class and the churches (76–8). In order to reveal this development's Weimar-era origins, Greenberg states that as early as the 1920s, the young Fraenkel and his associates were waging a "campaign to forge an alliance between the SPD and the middle class," telling the German proletariat that "both workers and the bourgeoisie were heirs to the tradition of a rational 'natural law'" (83). However, the sources Greenberg has used to substantiate that claim—two articles from 1925 and 1932—do not justify such conclusions. The only thing the articles say that workers shared in common with their "contemporaries from the bourgeois world" was "an insufficient knowledge of the law"; in fact, Fraenkel referred to the bourgeoisie in general as "reactionary."[4] Nor did Fraenkel's Weimar-era work constitute a "provocative critique of Socialist materialist ideas" or of Marxism (84). In an effort to trace a clean line of continuity between Weimar and Bonn, Greenberg seems to have retrojected statements that Fraenkel made after the Nazis came to power, most famously in his book *The Dual State* (1941), into his interwar work. Similarly, Greenberg's insistence that all five figures featured in *The Weimar Century* supported democracy as the "sole legitimate regime" in their younger days (4) seems questionable, given that at least two of the men—Gurian and Morgenthau—seemed far more concerned with the protection of the traditional values and rights threatened by Nazism and communism than with democracy per se.[5]

4 Ernst Fraenkel, "Die Stellung des jungen Proletariers zum Recht," in Fraenkel, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Hubertus Buchstein et al., vol. 1 (Baden-Baden, 1999), 135–8, at 135; Fraenkel, "Die politische Bedeutung des Arbeitsrechts," in ibid., 469–80, at 480. In neither essay was there a call to seek common cause with the middle class.

5 Gurian argued passionately in the final years of the Republic against the dissolution of political parties, but his vision for the future role of parliament was so weak and fuzzy (and his openness to dictatorial measures so strong) as to throw into question whether most Americans or Britons at the time would have regarded his call for *autoritäre Demokratie* in *Um des Reiches Zukunft* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1932) as "democratic." A young Morgenthau noted in his diary that democracy was "nothing more than a specific technique of selection" and was of "no use" if it could not "create a new aristocracy" of leadership in the state. Quoted in Christoph Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography* (Baton Rouge, 2001), 157.

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While this discrepancy in chronology might seem quibbling, it makes a profound difference in how we explain both the development of twentieth-century European thought and Germany's remarkable and still insufficiently understood postwar reconstruction. As important and necessary as the reimportation of certain older ideas was to the development of Cold War discourse, the crucial developments that enabled the stabilization of postwar German society took place after 1933. In order to properly appreciate those developments, one must look to the emergence of partnerships between historically hostile groups and consider a much wider range of sources on the ground, including from the realms of law, political economy, education, and the churches. For these reasons, *The Weimar Century* does not explain the domestic transformation of Germany.

In demonstrating how its figures aided the US Cold War establishment and facilitated the new German–American alliance, Greenberg's work stands on firmer ground as diplomatic history. Indeed, future scholars of international relations will be unable to ignore its argument, supported by painstaking research in private papers and institutional archives, about the role of émigrés as mediating agents in the global exercise of US soft power. In this sense, it is a signal contribution to our understanding of the history and dynamics of cultural diplomacy—not only in the early Cold War era, but also in our own post-9/11 world.

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More broadly speaking, the close attention that both Greenberg and Levine pay to liberal-democratic ideas among the German refugees can tell us something useful about the current state of the study of the intellectual migration. With the waning popularity of Marxist and Freudian countercultural ideas rediscovered in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars seem to be turning (back) to those of Hitler's exiles who offered a full-throated defense of private property, equality before the law, and institutional religion. In a decidedly post-secular world shaped by public–private partnerships and the War on Terror, their lives and ideas seem, perhaps, more operative now than the liberation psychology of a Wilhelm Reich or an Erich Fromm, or the emancipatory-socialist politics of a Harold Marcuse or a Bertolt Brecht. Having been prematurely declared dead twice, this "other," more defensive, but also more resilient, Weimar lives.

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