

Andrew I. Port, *Never Again: Germans and Genocide after the Holocaust*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2023. Hardcover, \$ 35.00.

Few topics continue to fascinate like Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. Among scholars, media, Hollywood, and the general public alike, the appetite for macro and micro-histories and stories about Hitler's regime appears almost endless. In his most recent book, *Never Again*, historian and professor at Wayne State University, Andrew I. Port, comes at the enduring legacy of the Holocaust in a unique and most creative way. Instead of focusing on the events of the 1930s and 1940s, Port explores the Holocaust in German memory and how post-World War German politicians, journalists, filmmakers, and others have confronted the haunting legacy. His core focus is on how Germans navigated the legacy of their own dark past while attempting to respond to atrocities and genocides in Cambodia in the 1970s as well as Bosnia and, to a lesser extent Rwanda, in the 1990s. In so doing, he effectively illustrates how deeply engrained the Nazi era remains in German vocabulary and national recollection, and from this perspective, the extent to which responses to human rights violations around the world since the 1970s have required, and continue to require, a political, emotional, and cultural, reckoning with the past. The real question for Germans, he insists, has been whether Hitler's actions, and by extension those of Germans during the War, bestow a particular obligation on modern generations to actively intervene to stop crimes akin or whether it, in contrast, creates a special responsibility to stand on the sidelines as a largely non-interventionist nation. "Never Again" is therefore a fitting title even if Germans have never fully agreed on what exactly it is they can never repeat.

It has long been a well-known truism that Germans only began their national confrontation with the Final Solution in the 1970s, and Port's use of other genocides as a lens to engage this issue is uniquely valuable. He may not be the first scholar to link later atrocities to German national memory and culture, but it is doubtful that anyone has done so more with more intensity. Even

so, this is a book that, for all its gory effectiveness and for all the introspective queries it raises in the reader, nonetheless disappoints. Port deserves credit for telling this story, but in the end, this reads like a beginning narrative or a popular history that merely scratches the surface of the continuing legacy of Hitler's actions. This reviewer hopes that this book will inspire a more intellectual volume on this topic that manages more effectively to entrench the question of national memory within the scholarship and theories of human rights, ethnic studies, and diplomatic history.

Never Again is largely chronological and is broken down by genocide. After a lengthy but effective introduction that raises interesting questions about the significance of the Second World War in German memory, Port examines the German political and media response to the rapidly emerging stories about atrocities in Cambodia that accompanied Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge's rise to power in Cambodia in 1975. This part is particularly interesting because, unlike the later genocides, different responses emerged in the Communist German Democratic Republic and the liberal democratic Federal Republic of Germany. East of the Iron Curtain, the story shifted from doubt to opposition to involvement in Pol Pot's trial in absentia. This change was less a result of growing awareness of Cambodian policies and more a consequence of the 1978 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. This war between Cambodian and Vietnamese Communists in Southeast Asia inevitably became tied to the larger conflict between their benefactors in Beijing and Moscow, respectively, and soon meant that East Germans too sought to take Pol Pot to task for his actions.

Except for a few left-leaning groups and individuals, no such split allegiance existed in West Germany, but Port nonetheless effectively illustrates how the language of the Final Solution became integral for any German understanding of events in Cambodia. His reflection on media

stories, documentaries, and public political discussions is authoritative, and many of the commentator's personal struggle comprehending the violent nature of the Khmer Rouge reminds us of the doubts many had about the true nature of the Holocaust as the earliest stories broke about the fate of Europe's Jews. Even so, it is lamentable that this story is told principally through a dizzying array of vignettes from eyewitnesses and victims. These are authoritative for sure, but as Port rapidly quotes one article after the next, the book loses any real foundation. At no time does the reader feel any connection to the politicians, journalists, aid workers, or celebrities whose views he covers. Port introduces one individual's reflections on the Khmer Rouge's horrors as they appeared in media or speeches and then quickly moves on to the next one. He relies on the quantity of voices above all, and while the sum of those voices tells us something about the broad significance of Cambodia in the German mind, to the reader it is unclear why any one character is central to the story in Germany. Regrettably, we are never invited inside the sources and thoughts of German policymakers' private deliberations or reflections. Policy memos and discussions are not part of Port's story. Nor are the plethora of NGOs that emerged in the 1970s on behalf of human rights. Almost everything in this volume takes place on the surface and in the public sphere. This is an important part of any national response, of course, but scholars of international relations and human rights will expect a more efficient historical contextualization and focus. The response to Cambodia happened not only in the context or long shadow of the Second World War, after all, but in the context of a rapidly changing international climate in the 1970s. This deserves more attention.

While some of these problems persist in later chapters on the wars in the Balkans, Port's coverage of Serbian ethnic cleansing is nonetheless considerably more effective. The debates about Serbian camps, authorized mass rapes of Bosnian women, and outright murder *en masse* struck

with more force in Germany just as it presents more forcefully in these pages. The story of Joschka Fischer's transformation from the Green Party's pacifist roots to that of an activist of German intervention and involvement to stop Serbian brutality against civilians is the book's strongest. This is especially so because Fischer is one of the few characters who appears throughout the chapters and the one who as part of his political conversion most forcefully advocated that it was *because* of Germany's past that they could not stand passively by or respond with mere diplomatic means. The cry of "Never Again Auschwitz," Fischer believed, meant that Germans could not allow Europe once again to be soiled by the images of mass graves and the indiscriminate killing of people. As Germans debated involvement in Bosnia independently or as part of a NATO or U.N. role, Port powerfully weaves back and forth between perspectives as Germany finally found its public voice as a European leader, something that would have been unimaginable in the 1970s when much of Europe still remembered Germany as the instigator of two world wars.

As commanding as Port's coverage of Bosnia is, as underwhelming is the attention he devotes to the simultaneously occurring Rwandan genocide that saw close to a million Tutsis murdered by the Hutu majority in East Africa. Even the chapters seemingly dedicated to Rwanda quickly bleed into the Bosnian issue. Perhaps this implies a lack of German interest in Africa or that Rwanda did not inspire the same level of references to the Final Solution, but if so, that is not explained particularly clearly. If Rwanda at least gets some attention, it is harder to explain the book's complete lack of interest in the genocide in East Timor that coincided with Port's chosen time period. It is a critical and concerning oversight.

Finally, it is regrettable that Port never really gets to the heart of the massive debates that shook Germany in the 1980s and 1990s over the Second World War. While he mentions the *Historikerstreit* and references the Goldhagen Debate, these deserve far more attention than he

gives them. Especially given his topic. They were as central to the question of the Second World War in the German mind as the Fischer Controversy was in the 1960s. They are reminders that the War does indeed play a significant and unique role in the creation of German identity and culture, and an effective integration of these two later debates would have added greatly to the reflections, introspection, and discussions about genocide and Germany's past.

All of this criticism aside, it is impossible not to be left with a deep sense of appreciation for the broadside of insights that Port's book presents. It is equally impossible not to sit with a degree of lament over the Western world's paltry response to atrocities in this period. He persuasively shows that Germans feel a heavier responsibility, but one does not have to be German to feel the weight of the Holocaust or to recognize that institutionally, politically, and militarily, the West as a whole has failed people in need. If contemporary and future officials read this book and take away the lesson that more must be done and if it reminds them that peace marches and passive objections never stop genocide or human rights violations, Port will have done us all a great service.

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