

Niewyk, D: Jews in Weimar Germany

The first comprehensive history of the German Jews on the eve of Hitler's seizure of power, this book examines both their internal debates and their relations with larger German society. It shows that, far from being united, German Jewry was deeply divided along religious, political, and ideological fault lines. Above all, the liberal majority of patriotic and assimilationist Jews was forced to sharpen its self-definition by the onslaught of Zionist zealots who denied the "Germanness" of the Jews. This struggle for the heart and soul of German Jewry was fought at every level, affecting families, synagogues, and community institutions. Although the Jewish role in Germany's economy and culture was exaggerated, they were certainly prominent in many fields, giving rise to charges of privilege and domination. This volume probes the texture of German anti-Semitism, distinguishing between traditional and radical Judeophobia and reaching conclusions that will give no comfort to those who assume that Germans were predisposed to become "willing executioners" under Hitler. It also assesses the quality of Jewish responses to racist attacks. The self-defense campaigns of the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith included publishing counter-propaganda, supporting sympathetic political parties, and taking anti-Semitic demagogues to court. Although these measures could only slow the rise of Nazism after 1930, they demonstrate that German Jewry was anything but passive in its responses to the fascist challenge. The German Jews' faith in liberalism is sometimes attributed to self-delusion and wishful thinking. This volume argues that, in fact, German Jewry pursued a clear-sighted perception of Jewish self-interest, apprehended the dangers confronting it, and found allies in socialist and democratic elements that constituted the "other Germany." Sadly, this profound and genuine commitment to liberalism left the German Jews increasingly isolated as the majority of Germans turned to political radicalism in the last years of the Republic. This full-scale history of Weimar Jewry will be of interest to professors, students, and general readers interested in the Holocaust and Jewish History.



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