

Ustasha intellectuals and planners drew predated any Yugoslav state, for instance those of Josip Frank, founder of the virulently anti-Serb Pure Party of Right. It is surprising to see him identified here as a proponent of “civic Croatian nationhood” (p. 138).

The argument that Ustasha racial ideology was driven more by anti-Yugoslavism than by anti-Serbianism highlights another potential problem: the book’s tendency to accept uncritically too much of what radical nationalist and Ustasha intellectuals wrote rather than considering why they were writing it and what it might mean. This can be confusing. For example, the author writes that the creation of an independent Croatian state required the “destruction of the state of Yugoslavia . . . in which Croatia’s distinct political and cultural identity had been threatened with extinction by the assimilationist policies of the Serbian dominated royal government.” Is he reporting this trope of Ustasha propaganda or endorsing it?

Finally, some readers may feel short-changed both by the title and some of the claims set out in the introduction. The title implies a study of racial ideology in the Independent State of Croatia, which, as the author himself explains, the book really is not. In fact, of the 239 pages only fourteen pages discuss racial ideas about the Serbs in the Ustasha state, and only three antisemitism. While Bartulin criticizes fellow scholars’ reliance on “outdated historiographical models” and the “severely limited number of [their] historiographical perspectives” (pp. 2–3), his book will disappoint readers expecting an interdisciplinary study. Never really progressing beyond intellectual history, its dense narrative and highly-complex discussion of esoteric theories can be heavy going. The absence of any sustained discussion of the relationship between these ideas and state policy or everyday life may limit its usefulness as a comparative text for scholars of racial science and the radical right, where indisciplinary is the norm. Still, Bartulin does bring new insights, a welcome focus, and original arguments to the study of the racial ideas of extreme Croatian nationalism. Despite its limitations, this is an important contribution on which other scholars can build.

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Vanished History: The Holocaust in Czech and Slovak Historical Culture, Tomas Sniegon (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 248 pp., hardcover \$95.00, £60.00, electronic edition available.

At the 2000 Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, Czech president Václav Havel noted, “awareness . . . that the Holocaust . . . still affects society today was the starting point for the project Holocaust Phenomenon under my patronage. The objective of this undertaking is to fill the considerable gaps in our knowledge

about the tragic moments in our own past, especially about the Holocaust of Jews and of the Roma [Genocide]; to establish a discussion across society concerning these events; and, to help the younger generation to understand the Holocaust as a part of our history.”¹ Tomas Sniegon’s study explores whether Havel, other Czech opinion-shapers, and their Slovak counterparts have succeeded in these goals.

At a 2014 Holocaust Memorial Day event Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico apologized for his country’s anti-Jewish persecutions under the wartime government of Jozef Tiso, proclaiming, “the Holocaust that victimized so many people in the name of the mad ideals of fascism brings an everlasting shame on those who participated.”² The Holocaust remains at the heart of public discourse in Europe; high-ranking officials often refer to it as a watershed event. Fico’s apology, however, bordered on obfuscation: the identity of the Holocaust’s victims and that of their persecutors alike are blurred, and the role of the Slovak people as bystanders to the deportation of their Jewish neighbors goes unaddressed.

The title’s “vanished history” implies “faded away.” However “to vanish” may also suggest an intentional effort to make something disappear: word choice is significant. Clearly, history does not vanish: human beings select their “relationship with the past[,] . . . a presentation of how selected, mutually dependent events follow upon one another” (p. 10). Sniegon’s book presents examples of how various Czech and Slovak policy makers and historians have failed to grapple with their respective national histories vis-à-vis the Holocaust; the author extends this analysis to explore the European Union’s “aspiration to utilize the Holocaust as the core of a primary narrative about the new Europe” (p. 17). The author spotlights the lack of discourse at the grassroots, concluding “that the initiative to steer the memory of the Holocaust in a desired ‘European’ direction usually came from . . . politicians and . . . not . . . ‘ordinary citizens’” (p. 208). Sniegon contends that “neither the Czechs nor the Slovaks found a need to radically change their historical consciousness [to] make new sense of the Holocaust within their respective historical cultures” (p. 215).

The volume highlights “the Jew-free” Czech victim and the “Jew-free Slovak heroization” narratives (pp. 202–207). The author points out that “the number of Czechoslovak citizens who lost their lives during the Second World War is estimated at 360,000. Even though the . . . numbers . . . have been re-examined and partly modified since 1989, all kinds of evidence show that. About 270,000 Czechoslovak Jews were murdered, which means that as many as three out of four Czechoslovak victims of the Second World War . . . were killed in the Holocaust” (p. 4). A historical consciousness relating to World War II that is “Jew-free” risks Holocaust distortion.

Sniegon does not reprise the history of the Jews in this region or that of the Holocaust per se. However, he does review the gist of prewar antisemitism in both of the countries discussed. Notably, Sniegon observes that

Although the Jews never comprised a homogeneous group, a significant number . . . identified with what was perceived as a higher culture which in Bohemia and Moravia meant German culture—or . . . in the Slovak case . . . Hungarian culture. The Jews had difficulties being accepted as real Germans among Germans in Bohemia and Moravia, but were, even so, perceived by the Czech nationalists as belonging to the other side. Consequently, Czech antisemitism was coupled with anti-German sentiments.

In essence, “Jews became double strangers” (p. 34). Sniegon writes:

The fact that Czechoslovakia was given to Hitler in Munich in front of the whole world and without resistance, and that this occurred before the industrial genocide of Jews commenced, only strengthened the Czechs’ conviction of their role as victims. It influenced the Czech and Czechoslovak writing of history during the whole post-war period, particularly as the communist interpretation [proposed that] Germany [had] planned to exterminate the whole Slavic population in Europe. According to this interpretation, the Nazis would have been successful in this had not Hitler been confronted by heroic Soviet resistance. The Jews were, by this account, neither the first nor unique victims of the Nazi aggression (p. 203).

Therefore, Sniegon continues, “Czech self-reflection in relation to the Holocaust was not generally regarded as necessary; during the Second World War the Jews were not the victims of the Czechs, but of . . . ‘the fascists’ ” (p. 204). On the other hand, as the author adds, “Slovak historical culture could not ignore the Holocaust as easily as its Czech counterpart. . . . Because of its specific character in Tiso’s Slovakia, the Holocaust had a more central role in the Slovak historical consciousness” (p. 206).

Sniegon devotes a full chapter to the Roma genocide as study of discourse in the Czech Republic. He cites the indifference to preservation of memory at Lety, a concentration camp for Roma guarded by Czechs during the war, and where a pig farm was built afterward: “the Roma’s history had once again become unimportant to the Czech majority population. This was confirmed when the government’s decision [not to close the farm] met no . . . visible protests from the Czech public” (p. 161).

Given the issues raised, the author does not adequately credit the educational initiatives in both republics in the twenty-first century. For example, at the above-mentioned Stockholm Conference, Dr. Jan Munk, Director of the Terezín Memorial, met with experts in Holocaust education to discuss teacher-training. The models designed in Stockholm in 2000 have provided professional development opportunities for thousands of Czech educators over the past fifteen years.³ In Bratislava, a Holocaust Documentation Center was founded, undertaking various educational and research projects.⁴

Moreover, the author does not address the issue of Holocaust-related assets. The Czech and Slovak governments both participated in an important 1999 inter-governmental conference held in Washington, DC, on Holocaust-era assets. The Slovak delegation was headed by Dr. Peter Burian, general director of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Burian stated there that “one of the critical duties

resulting from political changes in 1989 for the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and since 1993 for the Slovak Republic as one of successors of Czechoslovakia was the mitigation of injustices of the past. It was necessary to compensate the victims of Nazi persecution during World War II The rehabilitation and restitution proceedings [are] vitally important for the emerging democracy.”⁵ A decade later, a large follow-up conference on Holocaust assets was convened in Prague, resulting in the foundation of the European Shoah Legacy Institute.⁶ The connection between the compensation of Holocaust victims and the building of historical narratives might have received attention in *Vanished History*.

Overall, this is an informative book. In some places the English is a bit awkward. In light of the Prague Declaration (2008)⁷ and contemporary trends in commemorating the victims of Stalinism and Nazism, especially as promoted by the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity,⁸ Sniegon’s book may be especially useful for readers interested in the ongoing development of historical narratives in Europe generally, and in the Czech and Slovak Republics in particular. Sniegon correctly stresses that “historical consciousness is, to a great extent, connected to different social and cultural developments in a society . . . but it can also be triggered by various political interest groups which have the capacity and will to create meaning from the past” (p. 8). These trends clearly indicate, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, that historical consciousness of the Holocaust remains history in the making—far from a thing of the past.

Notes

1. *Proceedings of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust: A Conference on Education, Remembrance and Research, Stockholm, Sweden, 26–28 January 2000*, p. 43.
2. <http://new.praguepost.com/the-big-story/41465-fico-apologizes-for-slovakia-s-actions-during-holocaust>, accessed September 4, 2015.
3. <http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/node/111>, accessed September 4, 2015.
4. <http://www.uzzno.sk/dsh/>, accessed September 4, 2015.
5. *Proceedings of the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets, November 30–December 3, 1998*, p. 321.
6. <http://shoahlegacy.org/>, accessed September 4, 2015.
7. <http://www.praguedeclaration.eu/>, accessed September 4, 2015.
8. <http://www.enrs.eu/>, accessed September 4, 2015.

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