

Review

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ian relief, it gave a morale-boosting assurance to Polish oppositionists that they were not alone. Polish émigré communities also had significant impact on Polish communism's demise.

Davis invited Solidarity leaders to regular dinners at his ambassadorial residence. Though largely social occasions, they also expressed solidarity with Solidarity. As a prominent interviewee in this monograph, he helps humanize the story and supply the wider social and political contexts in which declassified U.S. government papers can be read. *Empowering Revolution* makes a timely appearance before the 2015 Harvard Cold War Studies trilogy *The Fate of Communist Regimes, 1989–1991*, edited by Mark Kramer.

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Vanished History: The Holocaust in Czech and Slovak Historical Culture. By Tomas Sniegon. Making Sense of History: Studies in Historical Culture, vol. 18. New York: Berghahn Books, 2014. ix, 236 pp. Notes. Appendix. Bibliography. Glossary. Illustrations. Photographs. \$95.00, hard bound.

This is an ambitious but problematic book on a highly important question: why does the Holocaust play a relatively small role in Czech and Slovak historical culture, even twenty-five years after the end of communist dictatorship? Following the introductory chapters, which tackle the theoretical framework and the 1945–89 prehistory of (the lack of) Holocaust commemoration in Czechoslovakia, Tomas Sniegon presents four case studies: the opening of public historical discourse in the first years of democracy after 1989; the ambivalent reception of the movie *Schindler's List* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1993) in the mid-1990s Czech Republic; the highly problematic place of the Roma Holocaust, the Porrajamos, in Czech political discourse and historical memory; and, finally, the ambiguous place of the Holocaust in Slovak historical memory, based on the example of the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising. These are interesting case studies, and each chapter presents intriguing findings. The book's focal points are thus social and political developments that brought the issue of the Holocaust into the public eye in one way or another. Sniegon does not explore the respective historical cultures in total, however. He omits, for instance, the vast research that has been done on history education and history textbooks. It was in this area, in fact, that the first criticisms about the omission of the Holocaust and of genocide in the construction of Czech and Slovak national history appeared in the postcommunist era, usually from authors dealing with Jewish history such as Leo Pavlát and Michal Frankl.

What makes the book highly problematic is its conceptual framework. The theoretical introduction presents a number of concepts such as historical culture, historical consciousness, the uses of history, historical narratives, and the Europeanization and Americanization of the Holocaust. It is not clear to the reader, though, how they match up, what the stronger and weaker sides of the individual concepts are, or how they fit the main purpose of the book. In the end, Sniegon sticks to four supposedly major Czech and Slovak historical narratives after 1989: the Czechoslovak communist, the Czech national-liberal, the Slovak national Catholic and the Slovak national European ones. Instead of presenting a general national historical master-narrative within which all cultural-political streams relate and on which they each elaborate in their own particular ways, Sniegon claims that these four narratives were dominant in the 1990s.

In order to cover the mainstream Czech and Slovak historical imagination, how-

ever, he must keep these narratives abstract and indeterminate. One example shows the inaccuracy of such an analytical construction. The Czech liberal-national narrative that allegedly dominated the transitional years and had its origins in the first, interwar Czechoslovak republic has been upheld by the Masarykian myth and was revived in the anticommunist opposition's discussions in the 1970s and 1980s. Its main representatives in Sniegon's account are Charter 77 and Václav Havel, as the first democratically elected president after 1989. Such gross abstraction disregards critical facts, such as the internal ideological rifts between chartists, including their often completely incompatible historical interpretations; the harsh criticism of Czech Masarykian nationalism and the First Republic by an important number of the chartists (e.g., P. Pithart, M. Otáhal, B. Doležal); and the fact that the "traumatic historical point," which in other contexts, such as the Slovak and the Polish—not to speak of the German—is played by the Holocaust and its implications, is in the Czech case the expulsion of the Sudeten-German population from Czechoslovakia after 1945.

Sniegon has good intuition and, indeed, "Czech liberal nationalism" has become a matrix of many, though not all, mainstream Czech political currents since 1989 (liberal conservatives, left liberals, social democrats) that appropriated it, each in their different way. Yet with his vague construction of the Czech national-liberal narrative, Sniegon does not show its internal dynamism, its many tensions, or its obsessions. Thus, he also fails to provide a credible answer for why it did not raise the Holocaust to the position it has held in other European historical cultures. Blamed instead are mostly nationalist stereotypes and historical continuities. Yet these are commonplaces we already know. Similar criticisms could be made of the other three "dominating narratives." This vague and schematic conceptual framework does not allow the author to utilize the rich empirical material and to answer to the main question raised.

Finally, the publisher should have taken greater care with the quality of the language. Sniegon strives to do his best, but non-native English speakers' work ought to be copyedited thoroughly in order to produce the best possible English-language books.

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Jewish Life in Belarus: The Final Decade of the Stalin Regime (1944–1953). By Leonid Smilovitsky. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014. xviii, 327 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Tables. \$60.00, hard bound.

If Belarus had been an independent country at the end of World War II, its death rate of more than 25 percent would have made it the biggest national victim of any place in the world. The Holocaust in Belarus killed nearly all Jews originally from the region, so its postwar Jewish population was made up of Jews primarily from other places. The archives give detailed statistics on the tiny numbers of Jews remaining after the war: in Polotsk, 2,500 Jews; Mogilev, 12,000; and the capital, Minsk, 15,000 (compared to 71,000 in 1939). It is in this world of utter ruin that Jews have attempted to re-establish some semblance of Jewish life. Leonid Smilovitsky, in his deeply researched book *Jewish Life in Belarus*, searches for evidence of how Jewish religious institutions and rituals reemerge in such a war-torn place. And he finds it.

In May 1944, almost simultaneously with the Soviet Union gaining full control of the new Belarusian borders (which by then included territory from interwar Poland