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**Shlomo Shafir, *Ambiguous Relations: the American Jewish Community and Germany Since 1945* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 508 pp.**

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The centrality of the Holocaust in postwar American Jewish life has spurred an array of scholarly inquiries in recent years. From studies of American Jewish leaders' shifting perceptions of the destruction of European Jewry to more focused analyses of Jewish representations of the Holocaust in film, art, and literature, these works explore the imprint left by the Holocaust on generations of American Jews and the manner in which the destruction of European Jewry has become more "present" the further it recedes into history.

Intertwined in many of these scholarly explorations is the complex and often anguished history of postwar German-Jewish relations. In discussing the broader issue of American Jewish responses to the Holocaust, these works highlight seminal moments in American Jews' efforts to come to terms with the German past and present. They point, for instance, to the Nuremberg trials, the Eichmann affair, and the Bitburg controversy as critical moments in which American Jews articulated their views about post-Nazi Germany. But the subject of German-Jewish relations in these works is but one part of a broader story. Similarly, while several controversies have inspired studies of their own (for instance, there are two books in English on the Bitburg affair), the scope of such works is narrow, addressing only one moment in the history of American Jews and Germany.

For these reasons, Shlomo Shafir's *Ambiguous Relations: the American Jewish Community and Germany Since 1945* makes a unique contribution to the literature. Through exhaustive research, Shafir presents a detailed political history of postwar German-Jewish relations, focusing on diplomacy between representatives of American Jewry and the governments of the United States and Germany. Shafir's data, culled from archival collections, periodicals, newspapers, and interviews in Germany and the United States, covers the period from 1945 to the end of the 1990s (although it is weighted far more heavily toward the period up through 1970 due to restrictions in German archives on later materials). The book addresses myriad incidents and events in postwar German-Jewish relations, such as treatment of Jewish displaced persons, denazification, the Nuremberg

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trials, the Claims Conference, the Eichmann trial, the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars, and the Bitburg affair.

Shafir's study begins with World War II's end and division among American Jewish leaders over the proper way to punish Germany. From the start, Shafir demonstrates, American Jews did not speak with one voice, but rather produced a range of responses reflecting diverse political, religious, and intellectual agendas. Representatives of the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith, and the major Jewish movements figure prominently in Shafir's discussion, although he also addresses several other Jewish perspectives, from those of newspaper editors to Jewish leftist leaders.

Shafir establishes the tension between American Jews, eager to see Germany punished for its wartime crimes, and the United States government, eager to quickly rehabilitate Germany and welcome at least its western portion (the Federal Republic) into the community of non-Communist nations. "Most American Jews… saw Germany as the enemy much longer, and as a nation that needed more corrective treatment" (71), Shafir writes, illuminating a view that would characterize American Jewry through much of the postwar period. Indeed, American Jews were not able to "move on" past the Holocaust as quickly as non-Jews around them; this differential led to decades of division between Jewish leaders and United States government officials. A major question dividing Jewish organizations among themselves was how Jews should negotiate seeking justice for the destruction of European Jewry while at the same time supporting American geopolitical interests. This question was especially important during the Cold War era, Shafir points out, when Jews were under particular pressure to demonstrate their "Americanness," but it would also be relevant in subsequent decades when Jews had to work through the U.S. government in order to affect German policy. Even by the 1980s, when American Jewry was far more self-confident and willing to assert its voice loudly on foreign affairs, it continued to encounter the "limits of ethnic pressures." (300) The Bitburg affair was a case in point; despite vocal and relatively unified Jewish opposition to President Ronald Reagan's 1985 visit to a German military cemetery in which Waffen SS soldiers were buried, "in the last stages of the Cold War, Washington rightly or wrongly regarded this visit as a matter of crucial national interest" (300) and disregarded Jewish pleas to cancel the event. Shafir ends his study in the 1990s on a relatively sober note,

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pointing on the one hand to great strides made in promoting reconciliation and understanding between Germans and Jews (symbolically represented, for instance, by several well-established exchange programs and dialogues between the two communities) but on the other hand, by continued ambivalence if not downright "negative attitudes" by American Jews toward Germany. (359)

While Shafir has certainly done a service through his detailed study, this book is most suited for the dedicated and patient reader. Indeed, one of the most admirable features of Shafir's work—its comprehensiveness and attention to detail—is also one of its weaknesses. The reader is often overwhelmed by the minutiae of interactions between powerbrokers and incidents small and large, left unsure as to the relative significance of these various events. Shafir provides a wealth of data regarding fifty years of diplomatic maneuvering and negotiations, but does not offer the reader enough of an interpretive framework nor periodization through which to make sense of this history. Embedded within the data are certainly important findings about American Jewish politics, and the place of the Holocaust in postwar American Jewish life, but Shafir does not sufficiently tease these conclusions out of his wealth of materials.

Furthermore, while Shafir is clearly an expert on the political dynamics between Germany and American Jewry, his discussion of the American Jewish context begs expansion. Shafir points out, for instance, that the Cold War climate of the 1950s and 1960s discouraged American Jews from harping on Germany's wartime wrongdoings, but the reader does not get a sense of what it really meant to see the world—and the former Nazi Germany—through American Jewish eyes. Nor does the reader Shafir's needs to delve deeper into what exactly informed the mindset of American Jewish leaders over the second half of the twentieth century and how this group's priorities, concerns, and worldview affected their relations to Germany. Such information would complete the important story that Shafir sets out to tell.

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