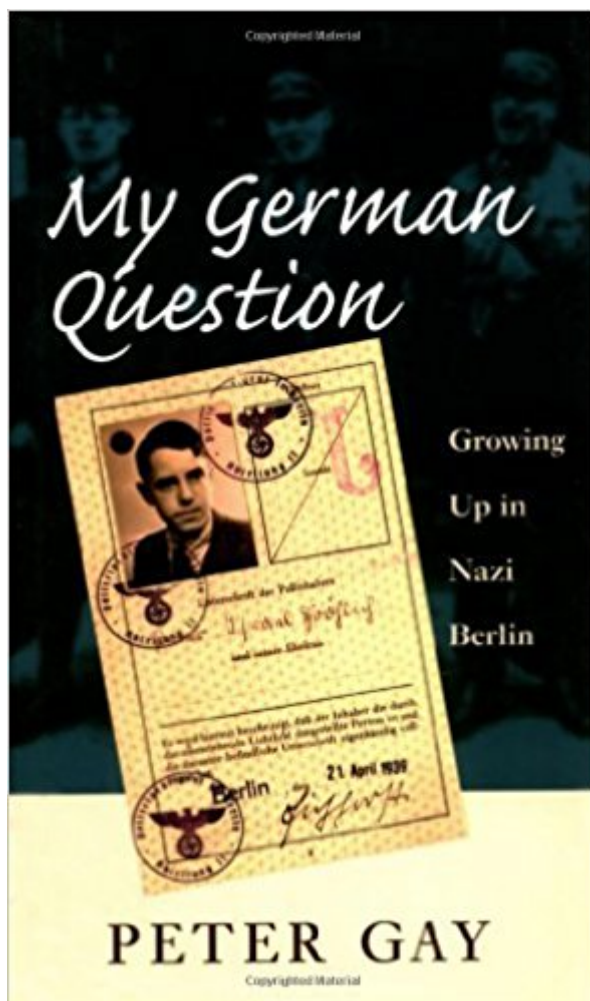


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My German Question: Growing Up In Nazi Berlin



Synopsis

In this book, an historian tells of his youth as an assimilated, antireligious Jew in Nazi Germany from 1933-1939 - "the story" says Peter Gay, "of a poisoning and how I dealt with it". Gay describes his family, the life they led, and the reasons they did not emigrate sooner, and he explores his own ambivalent feelings - then and now - toward Germany and the Germans. Gay relates that the early years of the Nazi regime were relatively benign for his family: as a schoolboy at the Goethe Gymnasium he experienced no ridicule or attacks, his father's business prospered, and most of the family's non-Jewish friends remained supportive. He devised survival strategies - stamp collecting, watching soccer, and the like - that served as screens to block out the increasingly oppressive world around him. Even before the events of 1938-39, culminating in Kristallnacht, the family was convinced that they must leave the country. Gay describes the bravery and ingenuity of his father in working out this difficult emigration process, the courage of the non-Jewish friends who helped his family during their last bitter months in Germany, and the family's mounting panic as they witnessed the indifference of other countries to their plight and that of others like themselves. Gay's account adds a further perspective to the history of German Jewry.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

My daughter and I have been reading together since the day of her birth. She is a Sophomore at U of Miami in Coral Gables. Dad and I have been reading since I was born. She suggested this book to me. I to Dad. I have read alot of Halocaust books in my 60 years, but did as I was asked as did my Father. At first I was not impressed. But now, a month after closing the cover, I'd really like to meet this man. I have a few questions. What a childhood! The book was a very good teaching tool for my daughter AND myself. My dad, a jewish man in America who served in the Asian Theater, loved it, too. He has a whole different set of questions. So, three generations would love to have Peter and Ruth for a dinner!

It was another Holocaust book but with a different twist. Liked it. It arrived on time, etc.

This book is full HISTORY!!! I enjoyed this very much!!!

Mostly very good-perceptive, insightful, even profound at times.

This is a personal history of the what it was like when the Nazis took over Germany, told by a master History teacher.

Thanks

I quite disagree with the negative comments being given. Of course, this book does not tend to be a historical study. This is meant to be a book about the author's psyche. It is also a statement about the Jewry in Pre-War German Society, an attack on those people that accuse the jews of being to slow in recognizing Hitler's monstrous 'Solution'. It concentrates on that. It is also a very thin book: 170 pages. It is not the type of sensitive study Peter Gay is known for, but that is inherent to the character of this personal memoir. That he did not serve in World War II is not at all important, in this study. It is a brilliant and thrilling ego-document. For Freud-haters it is a little bit dissapointing, the book is a product of an psycho-historian, and therefore contains a lot Freud theory, (which is very readable, though). But I am an Freud-addict too. Read it.

American scholar Peter Gay, until the age of ten or 12, considered himself to be just another German schoolboy from Berlin. The problem was that Gay's family was Jewish, in the eyes of the

Nazi regime that rose to power in 1933. And still, for years, the assimilated family clung to their conviction that it was themselves who represented the 'real Germany' -- cultured, broad-minded, etc. -- and the thuggish Nazis who were the anomaly. But the Nazis had the power, and Gay was forced to deal with the way they proposed to solve their "Jewish Question". Decades after his family finally fled, he responds by addressing his own "German Question" in this thoughtful memoir. Gay's book goes well beyond the navel-gazing and self-indulgent whimperings of many of the current memoirists. He is writing both for himself and for an outside audience, and addressing different questions for both. Why didn't the family leave earlier? Why should they have been forced to leave, to recognize that something like Auschwitz could be created by the very nation to which they considered themselves to belong? he responds, indignantly. Indeed, that raises a provocative question in a society that still grapples with the question of how to deal equitably with refugees. One otherwise intelligent person I know wondered aloud, during the days of attempted ethnic cleansing of Bosnia and later Kosovo, why people just didn't all leave when they saw the writing on the wall. My response was -- and remains -- why should they have? It was their home. Gay tells us what made Berlin home for him for his earliest years -- the chocolate desserts, the movies, flying a kite -- and how, very gradually, the city that once was his home became an alien land. Ultimately, he ends up taking refuge in his stamp collection (dominated by tropical islands), cheering for British football teams over their German rivals, and navigating the paperwork that will be necessary to help his family reach safety. The most gripping pages are undoubtedly those in which their departure is recounted, particularly the implications of Gay's father's decision to leave two weeks earlier than planned on a different ship. The real story underlying the events that Gay recounts is one of a different kind of survival than the more classic Holocaust narrative. Gay didn't have to go into hiding, dart from one refuge to another, embark on any heroic battles or join a Resistance group. But his story, while much more mundane in some ways, is just as powerful because it is the story of so many European Jews during this period: he had to find a way to live with himself, both during the 1930s and in the decades that followed. He had to survive, psychologically and emotionally, or the Nazis would have triumphed even if they hadn't managed to force him into a gas chamber. It's the story of how Gay overcame the trauma of his ordinary life become distorted beyond recognition during the Berlin of 1933 and 1939 that is ultimately the most moving part of the book -- in particular, how he was able to bring himself toward a partial reconciliation with postwar Germany. Highly recommended as a compelling and highly personal memoir. It would be interesting to read this in conjunction with memoirs or fiction by those who grew up in Germany as heirs to the Nazi era, such as

• What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?: Growing Up in Germany

• The Reader

(Oprah's Book Club) (now a movie that I also highly recommend, having seen a preview last week.)

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