Fragments of a German-Jewish Heritage in Four "Americans"

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Over the winter and spring of 1987–88, Carol Ascher, Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan spent time talking together and writing separately about their German-Jewish heritage. Trained as an anthropologist, Carol now divides her time between writing fiction and working in the university as a research analyst on minority education. Renate, Atina, and Marion are all historians with academic appointments; all teach German and women's history in the modern era. Renate specializes in the history of women in Germany; Atina in the history of German population policy and sexual politics; and Marion in the history of German Jews—especially German-Jewish women.

For a time, several years ago, the four of us, all Manhattan dwellers, met regularly for what we called a "German-Jewish CR group." Following the model of feminist consciousness-raising, we discovered many commonalities that we had each once thought peculiar to our own families. As we talked, we saw how our families had woven varied patterns on elements that were both German, though historically specific to the period of their youths, and Jewish, though again showing variations, depending on their distance from religious observances. The request from the editor of this volume to discuss our German-Jewish legacy came on the day we were celebrating our annual Chanukah get-together with the usual latkes, reflection, and banter—an atmosphere of *Gemutlichkeit.* And this time, with an intellectual goal, we attempted to clarify the similarities and differences among us. The following, therefore, represents our separate and collective musings, divided into the topics that emerged over the winter and spring of our most recent discussions.

Our Sense of Loss

Atina: I grew up with an enduring sense of loss, of grief for lost loved ones, but also of sharp nostalgia for the possibilities that Weimar Berlin had represented to my parents—an exciting world where one could be a scholar or professional in the morning, a political activist in the afternoon, and a denizen of nightclubs and cabarets at night. My own sense of loss translated into a hankering for the Bohemian (but not too uncomfortable) life, a fascination with the drama of politics, but also a conviction and anxiety that everything—especially anything good and comfortable—was tenuous, at risk. At the same time, this sense of marginality, always feeling a bit strange, out-of-place, but also on the cutting edge of culture and politics, produced both a longing for the elusive "normal" and a certain sense of superiority to the *spiessige buergerlich Welt* ("lowbrow bourgeois world").

As a child, I lived on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, in a hermetically sealed refugee world. The butcher, baker, shoemaker, dentist, pediatrician, rabbi—all were refugees and spoke German. My father regularly read the *Aufbau "um zu sehen ob ich noch lebe"* ("in order to ascertain whether I'm still alive"—a reference to the obituary section of the *Aufbau*) and because one couldn't trust the American media—with the possible exception of Groucho Marx, whom we listened to on the radio, and *I.F. Stone's Weekly.* My father had his *Stammtisch* at the Eclair and his regular Monday afternoon *Kaffee* with Frau B., who had red hair and was an old girlfriend. My parents shunned all attempts at assimilation, thinking (quite rightly, I decided a decade later) that there was little in 1950s America that they wanted to assimilate into. I vaguely remember the shocks of McCarthyism (my aunt and uncle burning letters from Bertold Brecht), the stories of going South and seeing the Jim Crow signs in buses and lavatories—just like *damals* ("in those times," i.e., in Nazi Germany).

The problem, of course, was that there was never enough money to support the leisurely life of the bourgeois intellectual we all aspired to. We lived in an entirely too small apartment—I remember teasing my parents about how they could expect me to have good table manners if we ate in the dinette. This cramped lifestyle was all the more painful because it was clear that many of my parents' friends—whose elegant parties I would get dragged to, pretending to be annoyed, but intensely

fascinated—had made it to West End Avenue or Riverside Drive and renewed professional success. But they had gotten here in time, before the war; they hadn't lost everything, spent exotic but debilitating years in Persian exile and British internment in India, hadn't had to study all over again. Even the ivory elephants and Persian carpets in my parents' apartment conveyed a sense of loss: that we really deserved something better, but that Hitler had taken it all way—all except for the sarcastic Berlin *Schnauze* (fresh or sarcastic mouth). *"All das haben wir unserem Fuehrer zu verdanken,"* ("For all this we have our Fuehrer to thank"), as my father would remark.

But then the *Wiedergutmachung* money started arriving—a double boon for my father, since he worked as a restitution lawyer. And in true German-Jewish fashion, the money was used for a proper holiday in the Alps, at the Grand Hotel Zermatterhof with breakfast on the terrace and hikes to the Matterhorn. From then on, we led a curiously split existence, frugality at home and bursts of old-style luxury on the annual trips to Europe—as if some of the old magic could be recaptured, but with the recognition that it was only possible on "holiday."

Carol: For me, it is difficult to distinguish my mother's romantic nostalgia for what appears to have been a rather magical childhood as the youngest daughter of a large, prosperous Berlin family—*Baumkuchen* at the best cafe on Sundays, with all seven children dressed properly in matching outfits; vacations on the Baltic; the dazzle of being the first to have an automobile and other gadgets—from her bereavement at losing her country, her language, her home, many relatives, etc. (My mother lived in Berlin until in 1937, when at the age of twenty-two, she fled to England; there, two years later, in a refugee camp for children, where they both were counselors, she met my father, a psychoanalyst ten years her senior.) My father, oddly taciturn about anything personal for someone in his profession, was clearly bitter about his own Viennese childhood. It now seems quite in line with the conservative psychoanalytic thinking of the 1950s that what little he said were complaints about his mother. Nevertheless, both my parents had come from property-owning families: both in Berlin and Vienna, their factories and apartment buildings were taken by the Nazis (for which they later received reparations). My father's initial profession had been as a professor of literature, probably a quite common choice for

the son of a bourgeois family; and his change to psychoanalysis, whatever personal needs drove it, was also a creative solution to being banned from the university in Vienna of the early thirties. For us children, living in the midwest in the 1950s, having a father who treated crazy people and messed about with the psyche was still odd enough to leave one uneasy about the impression we would create. (In public school, confessing that I was a Jew and that my father was a psychoanalyst were equally difficult—both made me an absolute outsider.) And, since either the war or his personality gave him a fear of the entrepreneurial risks of private practice, his choice to work in clinics and hospitals meant that our family income could generate nothing like the expansive lifestyle that either he or my mother had been used to in Europe. The war had stripped them of the entitlement and luxuries of the propertied class.

Yet I always felt that lost property as a quiet source of pride and even security. It was part of the background of my family's elaborate ethics of consumerism, that mystified how much we really had available to spend—one didn't eat oatmeal or baked beans, which had their obvious enough European parallels to make them clearly lower-class; but it was vulgar and ostentatious to be constantly buying new clothes, as Americans seemed to do. Though my father had carted several shelves of leather-bound books (Freud, Marx, etc.) all through his serpentine trail to safety, and though as I was growing up his forefinger was invariably holding open his place in a book, he now considered book purchases a silly luxury and taught me to use the library by taking me with him on his weekly trips to replenish his loaded reading table.

As for what they found here, in Kansas in the 1950s, it was clear to me that they saw almost nothing as an improvement over what they had left behind. True, this country had taken them in and was giving us all opportunities of a sort; but they were shocked by the shoddiness (even nonexistence) of intellectual and cultural life and by the instinctive, virulent prejudice against blacks and communists—against any and all who deviated from a very narrow and confining white Protestant norm. I remember being afraid to bring home any school chums because of the disapproval my parents would be keeping in check. Yet, in a paradox they must not have thought out, they also wanted my sisters and me to assimilate—to do well in school and with the very schoolmates for whom they felt contempt. While my solution, like my

father's, was to bury myself in books, my second sister ignored all the unspoken elitism of our home and became a cheerleader, class president, most popular, most likely to succeed.

Marion: For my family, I think there was a feeling of a lost homeland—something stolen by the Nazis, of lost potential in that homeland, of a lost comfort, of lost family, but not of downward mobility. It was similar to Steve Lowenstein's findings for Washington Heights (*Frankfurt on the Hudson: The German Jews of Washington Heights*) and Anthony Heilbut's descriptions in *Exiled in Paradise*: that is, the experience of a temporary slide, but with the capacity to pick up where they had been before. None of the people I knew/know would have expressed their situation as one of downward mobility; on the contrary, they wholeheartedly bought into "America, the land of opportunity." My parents were the children of cattle and horse dealers—small-town folks. Also, my mother was very young, twenty-one, when she arrived here; she was just beginning her life. Trained as a *Kindergaertnerin* in Noerdlingen (Bavaria), she worked in an orphanage and day care centers here. She actually picked up almost where she had left off. My dad, who came from the town of Rheda in Westphalia, and then worked as a manager in a small department store in Bielefeld, became a small businessman here in Newark, New Jersey. Neither experienced a downward slide, and they managed to send both children to college—more than they had ever done themselves.

Renate: I was raised with a strong feeling of loss. It wasn't only material, though that certainly was a big part of it. My father, with my mother's active help, had built a successful fur business, which only improved after 1933 and the end of the Depression. It was one reason he didn't want to leave until the signs were unmistakable—that is, the Gestapo came twice to examine his books. He came from Warsaw and was less shocked at the level of anti-Semitism than my mother, who had grown up in Leipzig and was less inured to it. My brother once told me that shortly before the emigration he saw my mother kneeling before her furniture, stroking it and crying. She had never had a beautiful home before. Indeed, she avoided having one again until her last years; she was afraid to get attached to it. I grew up in a furnished apartment in a poor neighborhood, with the agenda of going back "home" as soon as feasible.

But, as I said, "things" were only part of it: the sense of loss was about having been in a familiar place and then being plunged into someplace strange and frightening. The trip alone did that, fleeing into Czechoslovakia and then, just in time, to France, and then, just in time again, to Panama. Panama was tropical, too hot for the European refugees. Some of the men who worked physically dropped with strokes and heart attacks. My parents subdivided a large apartment with curtains to set up transient lodgings for other refugees. My father brought people from the boat, my mother cooked for them. My father and brother also sold perfumes door to door, getting doors slammed in their faces. After the first day out selling, my brother told our mother, "A whole world died for me today." That's loss.

I lost something, too (though I was only four), and my photos show it. From a cheerful, confident, bouncy toddler, I became a skinny, fearful, sad child. I lost a sense of security as my grownups freaked out. My mother had a nervous breakdown in Panama and disappeared for a few days, which I remember with terror, because she wasn't there to tuck me in at night. Then my father committed suicide just a few months after our arrival in New York City. He simply couldn't adjust here and it drove a wedge between my parents so that in the end he felt totally abandoned.

My mother didn't see this country as a land of opportunity, mainly because after my father's death she went back to being a fur finisher and worked long and hard for the rest of her life. She kept hoping to get back what she had lost. In 1951, right after my high school graduation, we went back to Germany. There she finally saw that "you can't go home again," and I saw that I wasn't as culturally German as I had been raised to believe. Back in the United States again, it was something of an opportunity for me to go to a free urban college, though I had to attend at night while working fulltime. It was only when the Soviet Sputnik went up and the U.S. government decided for a short time to sponsor its local talent that I got fellowships all through graduate school. So I'm less sanguine than Marion about the golden land.

Bei Uns Tut Man das Nicht. *("One Doesn't Do That Among Our Kind")*

Carol: I could make a list of things we did and didn't do "*bei uns*," though the profusion of rules that made us superior comes more from

my Berliner mother than my Viennese father. In fact, the one way in which my mother tried to balance the inequities of power between her and my father was through being a Berliner, who knew instinctively what was aesthetically and morally correct in all spheres. My father's mother, who lived with us for a time, sang little Viennese songs my mother thought unbearably cheap. *Bei uns* there were no comic books, chewing gum, soda pop, or spongy white bread; we did not come to the table in pajamas or with uncombed hair; frilly dresses that wore out in one season and patent leather shoes were beneath us (though longed for by all three of us sisters); leaving the family radio on a rock 'n roll station took a unified political siege by us when we reached our teens. *Bei uns* one got good grades in school, even though my father could not be impressed by seeing them and inevitably upped the ante by insisting that he preferred a good moral character to merely smarts. Perhaps *bei uns* one always upped the ante, even on oneself.

Bei uns there was a sense of responsibility to make the world better. Gradually, I came to believe that this was also a way of showing that we were not victims—that we had sufficient resources to watch out for others, worse off than we. In every neighborhood where we lived, a tree in our yard was invariably chopped down by some neighbor enraged at my mother's activities for racial integration. I remember being taunted by neighborhood children for not believing in a Christian heaven and hell. They couldn't accept that, relieved of the fear of hell, I wouldn't be a liar and a thief. My certainty that I lived by a secular morality that was every bit as demanding as any of their religious morality—that was, in fact, not merely driven by the self-interest of going to heaven or not going to hell—gave me a secret pride.

Atina: Bei uns anything too *Amerikanisch* was viewed with bemused contempt. Much to my dismay, this included some of the same things Carol mentioned: comic books, chewing gum, cartoons on TV, and shoes with pointy toes. As a result, a whole world of 1950s and early 1960s American popular culture remains foreign to me. It also included McCarthyism and sexual philistinism—which instilled in me an enduring skepticism about the American democratic system.

But by the time I reached my teens, the mid-sixties had (finally!) arrived. There were Godard movies, Friday evening SNCC meetings,

intense afternoon study dates at the Donnell Public Library, marches on Washington to protest the war in Vietnam, and good smooth marijuana to smoke. All this seemed entirely in the tradition of Weimar, not all that different from my father's Berlin youth. I was happy: America had finally caught up with me and my upbringing. And this time, our memory of what came after, our determination never to let gross injustice go by, our collective strength in demonstrations and organizations, our willingness to take risks (to sit-in, to be arrested) would assure that this time the magical world would not topple in the horror that had replaced Weimar.

Marion: In my family there was a clear middle-class attitude: we weren't to be rowdy "street" children, we were to dress and act properly, to be respectful. That is a German-Jewish *class* legacy. At home, I didn't hear *bei uns* at all—in fact, America was the model, Germany old hat, ugly, poor. Only my grandmother might remark, "*Bei uns*, we stayed for coffee for half an hour; here they visit forever." But we found that amusing. It wasn't a statement of superiority. Small-town Jews may not have been as arrogant as Berliners. In fact, they reached out, had many friends, both refugees and what my mother called "Americans" (mostly American Jews). My mother became very integrated into her community and passed that feeling of "belonging" onto us. *Bei uns* was the *defensive* opposite of belonging.

Since I lived in a non-Jewish area, I had non-Jewish friends. When I went to high school, my friends were Jews and non-Jews and I never thought of whether the Jews had a German background. When I married an *Ostjude,* his parents and mine became close friends, without major cultural differences. By that time, my parents had become as "Americanized" as they could/would be.

Renate: Yes, I admit we felt superior. Like many assimilated Jews, my mother thought the German-Jewish combination was dynamite. Too bad Hitler spoiled it, she said. We combined the best of both worlds: hardworking, disciplined, introspective (*innerlich*), thorough, even pedantic, which was not a derogatory word. *Ostjuden* were considered not quite up to snuff. Americans certainly weren't, with their lack of manners, chewing gum "like cows chewing cud." I was warned not to become too Americanized. But then, we were going back "home". . .

Our Continuing Interest in Germany, and Our Feeling of "Unfinished Business"

Carol: I suppose my interest in Germany and Austria remains almost entirely personal. When I was twenty-eight, I took a six-week summer trip alone to Europe with the express purpose of seeing my mother's and father's houses. They themselves had never gone back, and my father was now dead. My mother's home was easy to find; it still stood as she had described it, the sunny *Musikzimmer* facing the tree-lined Wilmersdorf street. Whether because of my own ambivalence or objective alterations wrought by the war, I spent a week in Vienna without ever discovering either my father's family's factory or the apartment building where they had lived. In both cities, I was filled with confusion and dread; every aging couple eating their *kuchen mit schlag* was a Nazi normalized. I trusted no one, felt isolated in the extreme. The trip seemed a prolonged exercise in enduring an abnormal state of mind.

Ten years later, when my mother was invited to Berlin as part of Willy Brandt's *Wiedergutmachung*, I went along. With her as my guide, I could picture her charming childhood in the interstices of changes brought by the war, modernization, and even Turkish *Gastarbeiters*. I started to sense Berlin as a complicated city with a continuing and difficult history.

I have never again returned to Vienna, although two years ago, entering Austria by train when my husband and I were traveling from Yugoslavia to Germany, I burst into uncontainable tears—for the loss of my father, for his exile from a mountainous country, which he loved, to far less beautiful landscapes.

On this same trip, we spent ten days in West Berlin. This time it was a city of museums, luxury shops, parks, and cafes—though with that surreal wall so often in view. But I was no longer paranoid, and I could feel the western city as lively, often pleasant, a place where, despite the political strains, real people lived much as we do in New York. I even felt that in some odd way I had earned for myself a rightful connection with my mother's city.

Marion: My interest in Germany came from the ambivalence, as well as silence, about Germany I experienced from both my parents: my father, who grew up in Wilhemine Germany, thought everything Ger-

man exhibited quality, and that life had been good *unter den Kaiser*; my mother, who was born in 1914 and had more negative experiences than he, would not purchase anything German. This mixture of ambivalence and silence sparked my interest more than any one-dimensionally negative anti-Germanism would have done. When I was twenty, I decided to spend my junior year in Hamburg. My parents agreed, for my "education," but felt very defensive about my decision vis-à-vis their friends.

I visit Germany often, as part of my research and to see relatives and friends. I'm fascinated by the "negative symbiosis" I find shared by Germans and Jews: for both, Auschwitz is at the kernel of their being, though they often draw very different meanings from this. I've written several book reviews on the topic of Jews in Germany and Germans coming—or not coming—to terms with this past. And, in part, I'm involved in their past. German-Jewish history, as a result of the Nazis, now transcends German territory. The German-Jewish "symbiosis" continues in the form of a dialogue between historians and scholars—often refugees or children of refugees and survivors—and today's Germans. (I was going to say West Germans, but Macmillan will soon be publishing Robin Ostow's book interviewing Jews in East Germany, and then that dialogue will begin too.)

Most important for me is how the German-Jewish relationship reflects upon other minority/majority relationships, especially minorities in the United States; how it illuminates the tension between assimilation and identity in minority cultures. Especially because of the Holocaust, I feel it is traitorous not to identify as a Jew, and I think it's wise to remember, "We are all German Jews." They called it *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, "community of fate," then. To a large extent, any political, ethnic, or religious minority can find itself in that position.

Atina: I will always have unfinished business in Germany. There is the concrete legacy of the six children of my father's younger brother, a Catholic convert, who survived Auschwitz and reestablished a medical practice in Germany. My father's legal business was there. The contact with Germany was never broken; there was never any question of moving back, but neither was there a question of cutting ties. Now my son's grandparents and cousins live there, my research is there. I lived in Berlin for the better part of three years, felt very much

at home, fell in love with my husband, and at a certain point was desperate to come home to New York, where I could approach German history with more distance, and where being a Jew wasn't such a constant preoccupation and responsibility. Though my professional interest stops with the collapse of the Third Reich, I think that my fascination with Jews living in Germany today derives from a very real sense that I could have grown up there. I remember that in my early teens, I often told people on our European travels that I was a German, and was pleased to get away with this tale. It represented various aspects of my German-Jewish legacy: the reassurance that I could "pass" for German if need be, at the same time as a delight in being rootless and cosmopolitan, the European traveler. Indeed, the very condition of having international ties, of being skeptical of national identity, of speaking more than one language, of feeling comfortable in more than one metropolis, of seeking adventure in travel, is one I associate with being German-Jewish.

Renate: Actually, my interest is mainly historical. My contemporary interest is much weaker. Such as it is, it is directed more to the GDR (German Democratic Republic), for which I have some hope. Also, my visits there make me feel more familiar; it is, as critics have said, more in the past. The people are less Americanized, for better or worse. They are also simpler, less superficially charming, more direct. This may be an effect of their isolation and provincialism, too.

Over the years of several return visits, I have finally "worked out" my attachment to Germany and put it behind me. I have lost the need to go back constantly to hear my "mother tongue." I've separated out enough from that heritage and attained enough detachment that visits there are less impassioned now.

Political Legacy—"We Are All Refugees"

Renate: The experience of being a refugee is a lasting one. I permanently identify with other refugees and with persecuted peoples, which makes me particularly sensitive to racism. My own understanding of fascism and its link to capitalism in crisis contributes to my socialist consciousness, though I really got it originally at my mother's knee. She was radicalized in her teen years by students in "Red Leipzig"

during the revolution of 1918 and then had her own worker's experience to fortify it.

The direct personal experience of flight from fascism colors all my political vision, so much so that I must factor it out sometimes. When I read that the FBI has been surveilling groups to which I give regular contributions, like the Southern Poverty Law Center, then I hear the midnight knock at the door. Still, I try to do what seems to me to be "the right thing"—in spite of the past, *because* of the past.

Carol: I remember right after the American troops pulled out of Saigon and Vietnamese refugees were pouring into this country, my mother, who now lives in California near Camp Pendleton, became enormously active. "Whoever is a refugee, I have to help," she said, in her still awkward English. But I had fought against the war in Vietnam, and I wanted to distinguish among refugees. Many of those people who were fleeing had collaborated with the Americans. I recall hard words between me and my mother. In fact, given the refugees this country takes in, one is left rather too often in the position of helping the educated and propertied classes fleeing left-wing regimes (while ignoring victims of poverty and right-wing death squads). Still, like Renate, I have a visceral empathy for all stories of the midnight knock on the door and the quick exit with everything squeezed into a single suitcase.

Each year, more of the world is uprooted, reduced to wandering in search of temporary or permanent new homes. In this, our heritage becomes increasingly universal.

Atina: At the recent reunion of Columbia '68 strikers, Mark Rudd spoke of how important relatives with tattoos on their arms had been to his political socialization, to his conviction that the most important thing in life was "not to be a good German." It was a conviction that led to some grandiose posturing and some bad politics, but it is a sentiment that I can very much identify with. Indeed, what strikes me most strongly in retrospect is how we saw the Vietnamese and the blacks as the "Jews" and ourselves as the potential "Germans" who would go along and not resist oppression.

And one must, of course, speak of Israel, Palestine, and Zionism. It is, I always thought, precisely the German-Jewish legacy that made me

suspicious of Zionism, unenthusiastic about a Jewish state, long before I had any political analysis to defend my arguments or historical knowledge to relativize them. To live in a Jewish nation simply seemed so unlike the urban, cosmopolitan, intellectual, critical stance that I identified with being Jewish. I had, after all, learned that nationalism and a sense of racial superiority had led to the undoing of Jews in Europe. Indeed, I sense in myself once again the stirrings of "not being a good German" when I protest current Israeli government policy.

Bildung

Renate: This may be idiosyncratic. My mother had all of four years of schooling—she had been in the countryside in Slovakia with her grandmother and only got to school in Leipzig at the age of ten, when she compressed the whole eight years of elementary education into four to graduate with her peers. She transmitted to me a mixed message about this, as about so many things! The one was the importance of education, and her wish that I be "better" than she; the other was her working-class fear of snobbishness.

But what won me was the marvel of the escape that books offered. Somewhere along the line in my reading, I adopted the model of the (male) hero in the *Bildungsroman* (novel), whose life is a quest for character formation. This, I may add with an ironic smile, has not yet died in me, though I can recognize its narcissism.

Perhaps *Bildung* was (is) an unconscious quest for assimilation, though it also blends nicely into the scholarly tradition of Judaism. The objective fact is that my dedication to *Bildung* has netted me a secure, well-paid academic job, so it has served a material goal too. And the intellectual life is about as assimilated to the great universal enterprise of knowledge as one can get.

Marion: My parents didn't have higher educations, yet they adored classical music, opera. My dad was politically interested and aware, my mom introduced me to all of New York's art museums. I was one of the few teenagers I knew who regularly took the long trip from New Jersey to New York to visit a museum. What they both shared was a respect for education. This was probably a comfortable marriage between the idea of *Bildung* and the American belief that education is the way to "make it." We children did not have to do our chores or help

out if we had long homework assignments: homework came first. George Mosse has argued that *Bildung*—combining the English word "education" with character formation and moral education—became central to "Jewishness" for many Jews. I think that here it also showed Americanness, so it was easily adaptable and made our transition easier.

Carol: When I think of *Bildung* in my family, its positive qualities of character formation, moral education, and a belief in the potential of humanity are tempered by the fact that my parents had three daughters. For my father, who was a strong believer in *Bildung*, the fact that he had only females to work with tore him apart. I see this particularly in the way he treated me, his eldest daughter. He wanted to give me every intellectual and artistic opportunity, both for my own development and to provide himself with a companion and heir. Yet when I grew sufficiently confident to argue my own points of view, he became afraid that I would alienate men and never find a mate. I was given lessons in painting, piano, violin, and ballet; but as I began to take each in turn seriously, I was warned of the precariousness of an artistic life—and in one case the lessons were withdrawn. I was to be cultivated, but not ambitious for myself; clever, but not passionate about any pursuit or subject—in short, ornamental, a salon woman, perhaps, who could stimulate and bring together men. Unfortunately, as my mother optimistically points out, my father died before this last historical wave of feminism; for she (who herself was encouraged by him to complete both high school and college in the United States, at the same time as regularly humiliated by his sardonic tongue) feels sure that he would have seen the logic of women as equals.

Atina: I can't remember being imbued with any exaggerated respect for formal education. I don't recall any pressure for good grades or success in school, but perhaps that was because I was always a good if somewhat erratic and idiosyncratic student (that too seemed appropriately Berlin). In our family, intellectual and political passion, rather than *Bildung*, was important. My father's generation, after all, rebelled against the *gute Elternhaus* (stifling middle-class environment) of the German-Jewish bourgeoisie—seeking contacts with artists and

writers, political activists, even as they dutifully became doctors and lawyers. I identified with that dual legacy.

This remains perhaps the paradox of the German-Jewish legacy: the memory both of belonging to a cosmopolitan culture that seemed on the verge of creating a more socially responsible and culturally interesting world, and of ostracism, victimization, total entrapment, senseless death. In my own private version, it has meant an openness to adventure, a commitment to left political activism, and a sense of possibility for myself as a woman who need not be constrained by traditional roles (whence grows my interest in the topic of new women between the wars), but also an insecurity and sense of marginality, of never feeling quite at home in the world and only pretending that everything is OK.

Religion

Renate: I was raised with a minimum of ritual. My mother up to the age of two or three was in foster care with a Catholic woman. The highpoint of her childhood was playing Baby Jesus in a Catholic procession. She was somewhat eclectic in her religious views, but never denied being Jewish. In my early years, I remember some agnosticism, but later on she got increasingly religious, and by the time I was in my teens, she was having an intensely personal relationship with what she called "*mein Gottele.*" I must add that she was also increasingly paranoid and really needed to believe in that personal hot-line.

She did inculcate some sense of Jewishness in me: I was enrolled for a few months in a Hebrew school, but she soon quarreled with the congregation and pulled me out. She went to various synagogues at various times, but objected to their charging for seats. We observed the High Holidays, though I'm not sure she fasted on Yom Kippur; I couldn't hold out, still can't.

She also imparted a sense of mission as "the chosen people," which translated into doing good, and she did so by giving to charities out of her earnings, helping poorer people in our immediate vicinity, and educating me to work for a more just society. She disapproved of Israel's founding, mainly on practical grounds that it was "walking into the lion's mouth" and could lead to no good. I continue that anti-Zionism. The Jewish tradition I got was universal and messianic, and translated into socialism. The idea was—and I have lived by it—never

to deny my Jewishness, to be proud of its heritage, but also not to stand out in speech, gesture, clothing; that is, to place a value on assimilation. It is probably no accident that my two marriages (both ending in divorce) were to non-Jews.

Marion: My parents, with my mother as initiator, went to synagogue regularly, and sent me to Hebrew school and had me Bat Mitzvahed. They observed the holidays, fasting on Yom Kippur. My grandparents, who were very close to us, fasted on other days as well. My grandparents went to a German-Jewish synagogue where they spoke German. My parents, in New Jersey, went to an "American" synagogue—always distinguishing between "other" Germans (meaning Jews) and "Americans." Part of the German-Jewish stereotype among American Jews was that German Jews were clannish. The ones I knew were because they shared experiences, language, and culture, not because—as they were so often accused—they felt superior. Their children (my brother and I) "intermarried" with American Jews, as did most of the German-Jewish offspring.

Our religious legacy, as I see it, is that, like in Germany, religion remained most alive in the family. Whereas in most cases, synagogue attendance fell off (surely the case for my brother and me), celebrations of holidays and lifecycle events occur in the family, and the feeling of being Jewish is often connected with the family (the Jewish mother, the close family, and other cliches already prevalent in Germany).

Yet, for me, the German-Jewish legacy has a strong secular component. It remains alive in my intellectual world as a frame of reference for both non-Jewish and Jewish issues. I read *Tikkun* both for its intellectual and its Jewish concerns. I also subscribe to *Jewish Currents* and *Jewish Book World* for the same reasons. But I worry that this kind of "Jewishness"—*Bildung* as a substitute for synagogue—can't last beyond our generation. The next generation will need something more. As a secular Jew, I want to pass on to my child my feeling of belonging to the history and heritage of the Jewish people. My German-Jewish heritage, which gave so much to the religious currents of Judaism today, doesn't help do this in a secular way. Translated as *Bildung*, it means that my daughter could be educated and cultivated—go to the opera and read Shakespeare—and really not feel very Jewish.

Having "intermarried" with the son of Eastern European Jews, I can send our daughter to a Yiddish school. There, she can learn about the holidays, customs, folktales, music, and history of Jews. We participate in Seders, Chanukah parties, and Purim celebrations. The school is not religious but celebrates Judaism in the secular tradition known as "Yiddishkeit"—a far cry from the German-Jewish tradition, as my mother always reminds me. There my daughter is developing an approach to her background that is cognizant of the Holocaust, but doesn't reach *only* to that issue; that takes seriously the importance of learning and of giving; that supports other minorities as well as her own; and that views her religious/ethnic heritage positively and hopefully, avoiding national chauvinism. And there we have a community of similarly-minded Jews to give us a sense of solidarity and kinship.

Carol: Like Renate, my religious education was pretty much limited to not denying my being Jewish, at the same time as being rather ashamed of those who were conspicuously Jews. I'm not sure what my father's household was like in Vienna, though I assume they kept kosher. I know that my mother's family observed all the holidays (they were times when my grandfather could show off his large, prosperous family in synagogue) and that her family had two sets of silverware, much of which is still being passed among the dwindling number of living siblings. I also recall her telling me as a child that, if all Jews had been assimilated like her family (in contrast, I suppose, to the Hasidim), Hitler would have had little to complain about.

Once in the United States, in part as a result of bitterness from the Nazi experience, my father took a staunchly atheistic position; and my mother, who was always his intellectual protege, fell into silent embarrassment about her religious yearnings. I remember a couple of Yom Kippurs when my mother went with me to temple, but we did not have the conviction to fast: and perhaps there was a Chanukah or two in which she lit the lights for us. On the other hand, shortly before he died, I recall my father reading Simone Weil and other modern mystics, at the same time as my mother was becoming comfortable with a naturalist explanation for all questions. In any case, we were only sporadically, and then at one of the children's insistence (why couldn't we be like other children?), taken to the Sunday school of a Reform

congregation; and by then our intellectual training was sufficient to make a mockery out of the "fairy tales" we were told there, so that we soon tired of the exercise in belief.

Not surprisingly, both my married sister and I are with non-Jews. My sister and her family celebrate the Christian holidays, although recently, with the aid of my mother, there has been a certain preparation of potato pancakes on Chanukah. On the other hand, my marriage to a non-Jew has somehow heightened my Jewish feelings, and given me the awareness that the responsibility for Judaism in the family is mine. Thus, over the past decade, I have studied a great deal about Judaism. Though I find it hard to worship (the God of any religion), I feel deeply connected to our rich and complicated religious and cultural tradition. With my Jewish friends, I find ways to celebrate most holidays, which at a minimum means celebrating a common heritage.

Atina: As elsewhere, I think I have a particular "liberal" German-Jewish relationship to the religious aspects of Judaism. I derive no comfort from any kind of faith in God, but I do derive comfort and some sense of historical meaning and continuity from (very) occasional religious rituals, at home and in the synagogue. I love to host a Passover Seder for my extended family of friends and their children. The fact that I have any religious education at all is a direct result not of my parents' religious conviction, but of their obligation to the dead: their feeling that, whatever it was that their families were put into the gas chambers for, their child should know something about. And I enjoyed Hebrew school, although I drew the line at Bat Mitzvah.

I would also very much like my child to have some sort of Jewish religious education, so that he too can recognize prayers and know the stories of the holidays, and feel himself part of several heritages, only one of which is American. I do not know how I feel about formal ritual for my half-Jewish child: it is hard for me to imagine him having a proper Bar Mitzvah, but I want some sort of ceremony marking a kind of historical continuity. The notion that the Jewish diaspora survives is very important to me.

Our Work

Marion: I see myself as continuing a legacy of hard work, discipline, thoroughness, and even pedanticism. (I'll never forget that my Ameri-

can publisher of *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany* wanted me to cut my footnotes in half, while my German publisher wanted every last footnote and more.) One reason why German Jews fit in well in America is that hard work and discipline are American virtues as well. Jews in Germany were also deeply independent, leaning to the free professions, to business and commerce, and to academia. When they came to the United States, most remained independent, and my family, including my brother and I, chose independent careers as well. Although I now have an academic appointment, for the last ten years I thought of myself as an independent historian, who worked on grants or in offices for a living—much like Carol, who supports her writing by working at Teachers College.

Carol: I've been surprised by how deeply the stream of my German-Jewish refugee background runs through my writing. It was the need to tap this stream, in fact, that prompted me to give up anthropology for writing. *The Flood* expresses fictionally many of the themes of identity, assimilation, and responsibility in the new land that we've talked about here. Looking for my father's house in Vienna became a short story, while my trip to Berlin with my mother is a long memoir, and I have many short stories and essays that explore the quirks of being a first-generation Jewish woman. Sometimes I think I've said all I have to say about all this and can go on, but then I notice how a new story or a new idea for a novel carries some of the same seeds re-worked.

Atina: My work on sexual reform and the "New Woman" in Weimar Germany reflects my wish to come to terms with a Weimar legacy that is not specifically Jewish, but in its urban, leftist, modern orientation was certainly very much imbued with a European Jewish spirit. I also carry my understanding of the collapse of that culture, and the ways in which it was both destroyed and transformed by National Socialism, into how I think and act politically today, whether it be in regard to reproductive rights or Israeli government policies.

Renate: All my research relates to my unfinished business with Germany. For a long time, it was a kind of search for roots. Probably it is a mark of the assimilationist mentality that I sought roots in German,

rather than in Jewish or German-Jewish, history. Both my master's thesis and Ph.D. dissertation at Columbia pertained to German intellectual history. The women's movement inspired me to search for women first in European history and then, more closely, in German history. These projects required me to visit both German states again and again, and each time I worked through another level of my conflicted feelings. Currently, I am writing a book on two housewives' organizations between the two world wars that could be described as proto-fascist, so my work is part of the "how did it happen?" quest. With many of my generation, I feel some urgency about "telling the signs" in order to help prevent a repeat performance.