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Forum 30 (2021) on **the Importance of the Scholarship of Eric D. Weitz**

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Introduction by A. Dirk Moses, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Eric D. Weitz was a colleague and friend who was taken from us prematurely on July 1, 2021. Fittingly, H-Diplo is hosting a forum to honor his memory. When I approached Taner Akçam, Anne Kornhauser, Norman Naimark, and Mary Nolan to participate, they accepted without hesitation. I selected these scholars in order to cover the various phases and dimensions of Weitz's illustrious career and extensive oeuvre: we have appraisals by a historian of German culture, one of German and Soviet communism, and one of global genocide and human rights. In his eulogy, Taner Akçam adds a personal appreciation of Weitz's assistance in the early phases of his career that enabled him to stay and become the foremost scholar of the Armenian genocide in the United States rather than elsewhere. Such solidarity with a foreign scholar who had a precarious status in the U.S. was characteristic of Eric. Everyone I have come across who knew Weitz has a story to share about gestures that attest to his generosity of spirit. Perhaps his evident delight in shared human company compensated for the darkness of the subjects we research.

Although an academic rather than an activist, Weitz strove to repair a broken world by illuminating the sources of genocide and political tyranny as well as their antidote. As Anne Kornhauser observes in her piece on his later work, especially the magnum opus, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States*, he presented less a linear story of the onward march of human rights to some utopian telos than the irresolvable dilemma of the nation-state's function as both sword and shield, at once the destroyer of some humans and protector of others.[1] In alerting his readers to modernity's ambiguous legacy, he roused us to the challenge of extracting, or retaining, hope from despair. If Eric Weitz left us chastened and humbled, we are also wiser thanks to his historical counsel. We miss him.

Participants:

A. Dirk Moses is Frank Porter Graham Distinguished Professor of Global Human Rights History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His latest book is *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression* (Cambridge University Press, 2021). He edits the *Journal of Genocide Research*.

Taner Akçam, holds the Kaloosdian/Mugar Chair in Armenian History and Genocide at the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Clark University. His latest book is *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha's Telegrams and the Armenian Genocide* (Palgrave Studies in the History of Genocide, 2018)

Anne M. Kornhauser teaches history at the City College of New York (CUNY) and the CUNY Graduate Center. She is the author of *Debating the American State: Liberal Anxieties and the New Leviathan, 1930-1970* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

Norman M. Naimark is Robert and Florence McDonnell Professor of East European Studies and Senior Fellow (by courtesy) at the Hoover Institution and the Freeman-Spogli Institute at Stanford. His most recent books are *Genocide: A World History* (Oxford University Press, 2017), and *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Harvard University Press, 2019).

Mary Nolan is Professor of History emerita, New York University. She works on twentieth-century European-American relations, on German History, and she is the author of *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and America, 1890-2010* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (Oxford University Press, 1995), and *Social Democracy and Society: Working-class Radicalism in Düsseldorf, 1890-1920* (Cambridge University Press, 1981). She is co-editor of *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century* (New

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[1] Eric D. Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

Press, 2002) and *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*, (Routledge, 2018). She is now working on social and economic human rights in the age of neoliberalism and on the gender politics of right radical populist movements in Europe and the United States.

Essay by Taner Akçam, Clark University

Eric Weitz: A Very Personal Eulogy

Berlin, June 28, 2021, midday: I'm looking for a parking space in front of a Turkish market, hoping to go in and shop. My phone rings: Eric Weitz is calling. After a very brief introduction of "How are you?" and "What's up?" he cuts to the chase. "Taner, I am dying."

"What?"

"My cancer is spreading; I don't have much time left"—Confusion. Silence…I don't know what to say next. "I wanted you to hear it from me, not from others; I'm calling to tell you this," he says. I try to soften things, with "But you'll beat it; you'll get better."

It's difficult to relate this brief conversation word for word; he explained that he had endured two really grueling months, but that he felt better now, and he added that he had accepted his condition and was at peace. He was surrounded by his loved ones: his children, his ex-wife, and of course his wife Brigitta were with him. Everyone, and particularly Brigitta, were doing everything they could to make him comfortable. He reiterated that he simply wanted to call in order to tell me "Farewell."

But what can you say to someone who knows they are dying and tells you as much? I had never imagined that such a conversation would be so difficult. Words simply began spilling forth, "Eric, you saved my life. You're my guardian angel; it's only on account of you that I was able to remain in the United States."

"I thought that the things you were doing were important and I admired you," he replied. I interjected: "If it weren't for you, none of things would've come about, Eric!"

"It was one of the best things I have done in my life, and I'm still very glad I did it."

I remember telling him "I'd like to hop over and come see you."

"Don't exert yourself, Taner. It's too late! I simply wanted to let you know. Be well…" And with "Be well" he ended the call with the decisiveness of one who knows what he wants and what he has done….

March 2002: Ann Arbor, Michigan. The second in a series of workshops of Turkish and Armenian academics, "Contextualizing the Armenian Experience in the Ottoman Empire: from the Balkan Wars to the New Turkish Republic," March 7-10, 2002, was being held. That was the first time that I met Eric Weitz. My one-year appointment as visiting professor in Ann Arbor would conclude at the end of April. All of my efforts to extend my appointment and visa for one or two more years had come to naught. I was out of options; my visa would expire in July and at that point I would be forced to leave the United States.

During one of the workshop's meetings we were drinking coffee. Eric was speaking with Professor Vahakn Dadrian. Dadrian pointed me out to Eric and asked: "Is there nothing you can do for this young man? He will have to leave the United States soon; it would be great if you could help him. And I still remember Eric's reply "Let me see what I can do."

At the beginning of April I received a phone call. The Chair of the University of Minnesota's Department of History was calling. He told me that Eric Weitz spoke to him and the chair asked which courses I could and couldn't teach. And with that began my six-year adventure at the University of Minnesota. Even if the record of remaining a "visiting professor" at a major university belongs to me, I owe it to Weitz's intervention on my behalf—and, to be fair, to several other friends and colleagues, such as Stephen Feinstein. After becoming department chair, Eric sat down with Stephen and with a pen and paper and did an accounting. (I was actually present at one of these "budgetary discussions") They jotted down how much money they had, how much they could get from which department, and then they did the math. In the end, the amount always came up short. They would then argue about how and where they could cover the shortfall, about who would need to appeal to which institution, and then they would arrive at some decisions and try to make it balance out.

Because of this uncertainty, every spring was fraught with anxiety for me. Would there be enough for me to stick around another year? But every year, Eric and Stephen managed to make it work. The money was found and the budget was balanced… Before I ultimately accepted the offer from Clark University in 2008, they had begun a campaign to create a permanent position for me at the University of Minnesota. At one point, Eric told me that the campaign could not conclude in the time or manner that was desired, and suggested that I take the offer from Clark University—even insisting on it. At my departure he held a big party at his house in my honor, but Eric and I never really "departed" from one another.

During one of our regular phone conversations, he told me that after Steve Feinstein's death and my departure he felt alone in Minnesota. And once, while in Minnesota, he also asked me to let him know if I heard about any position on the East Coast. CUNY, in particular, was not "just another place" for him. It had been a school where the children of impoverished immigrants—his father among them—had studied. He was eventually offered the position of dean of the Division of Humanities and the Arts along with a distinguished professorship. While his academic research fell behind due to his copious administrative duties, he looked upon his position as a debt he was repaying to his father and his father's generation. As such, he took it upon himself to guard the integrity of the faculty against administrative austerity, eventually resigning when he felt he could no longer work with university management.

I have so many memories of him. There are so many moments, like the sumptuous meals we had together. He was an excellent cook; the apron that he put on, the chef's mitts that he was always putting on his hands or over his shoulder were some of the signs of just how serious a cook he was. When I was there, I would observe him making food and shower him with unending questions. And he would answer with great seriousness every inquiry into what he was doing, what the ingredients were, how he was preparing the food and why it was being prepared in a given manner. But the greatest pleasure was always sipping espresso after the meal. I can still see him, brimming with pride, while showing off his new espresso machine.

Each time I called him in Minnesota and informed him "I've got some Armenian cognac," he would tell me to come on by, and each of those many evenings we spent together was with a snifter full of the magical elixir. He was the permanent speaker at the academic events I organized at Clark, and there, too, we continued to observe the tradition of not leaving a bottle of cognac half full. He encouraged me to learn to bake bread, but I wasn't able to make it according to the recipe he provided me. Baking bread isn't cooking, it turns out, it's producing a work of art. And I neither had the ability nor the patience for the craft.

Naturally, there was also a very important professional dimension to our friendship. Princeton University Press published my book, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity*[1] as part of Eric's Human Rights and Crimes Against Humanity series, but not before taking note of some serious points of criticism he raised and making major changes; he had a preternatural ability to view things objectively, his critiques offered a "bird's eye view" of the subject, he could see the "big picture," and it was from him that I eventually learned to also view things in this way. As for the book, it went on to win scholarly prizes. I believe that Eric's critiques and assistance played a major role in its success.

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[1] Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Eric always believed that there was a connection and continuity between the genocides of the Herero in German South-West Africa, the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and the Holocaust in Germany and Eastern Europe, and he wished to advance that thesis. I once asked my Clark colleague Thomas Kuehne to come to Princeton with me in order to introduce him [to Eric] to discuss the subject. He was staying in a very small room. We spent the entire time sitting in the kitchen and discussing/debating. From this emerged our "Little Berlin" project. Kuehne, Weitz, and I worked together in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek for a week. The three of us poured over every single one the military magazines and journals of the 1920s and 1930s—three sets of eyes. Not a single shred of evidence confirmed the thesis that Eric was pursuing. Nevertheless, the information that he gleaned from these works was channeled into another project.

For a long stretch of time, he labored tirelessly, gathering and reading the history of human rights and of mass killings/genocides, exploring the relationship between these two histories during the nation-state building process. His final work, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States*,[2] was the product of these efforts. He had me read over the entire manuscript, but in particular the section on the Ottoman Empire and the Armenian genocide. With his meticulous manner, he didn't want to make a single error. The book is a pioneering work in our field.

I saw Eric for the last time in October 2019. A number of Armenian organizations wanted to give me a "Lifetime Achievement Award," and they asked me whom I would like to invite as a speaker. The choice was simple: it could be no one other than Eric Weitz. I was unsure whether he would agree because he was then undergoing treatment for cancer, but he didn't hesitate and said that he would be delighted to come to the ceremony. When he showed up with Brigitta he appeared to in both good spirits and good health, as if the cancer were in remission. "I'm great," he said. "There's not a trace of it left." In his talk at the event, he reminded the audience that it was he who coined the phrase "Sherlock Holmes of Armenian Genocide" when speaking to a *New York Times* editor about my latest book, *Killing Orders*. The phrase became the headline of the *Times* in April 2017. "I never imagined that it would become so popular," he admitted. This moniker actually stuck and I've been referred to it as such in the following years.

Soon thereafter, the COVID outbreak began…

It was difficult for us to *not* to be constantly talking to one another. It was in July 2020 that he sent me an email reading as follows: "*I feel fine, but am everyday enraged by the politics in this country, the sheer incompetence and stupidity of our leaders. At least the demonstrations since the murder of George Floyd have given me hope that things might change for the better. I'm restless being at home all the time, but Brigitta and I are among the privileged, so I shouldn't complain. We have jobs and salaries, a lovely house and garden and enjoy our time together, just sorry we can't see our sons and friends (like you!). Take care my friend, in these crazy and difficult times, Eric.*"

I entered the world of academia fairly late in my life, and have weathered more than my fair share of storms. Eric saw that and felt for me, and at very crucial moments in my career he has been a branch to cling to in the storm. It is only fair to mention that I am only where I am because of the active support and encouragement of others—*many* others. But it is Eric Weitz, far and above, whose name is at the top of that list of benefactors. In the future, whenever I sip cognac he will be there with me, smiling and savoring.

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[2] Eric Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation States*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

Essay by Anne M. Kornhauser, City College of New York

Eric Weitz on Human Rights

Eric Weitz did not intend *A World Divided* to be the capstone of his career.[1] Yet that is what it has become and it fits that role wonderfully. A large portion of this ambitious global history of human rights is about human rights *avant la lettre.* Much the same might be said of Weitz's earlier scholarship—whether on modern German history or comparative genocide. This is no accident. A careful and empirically grounded historian, Weitz was also a humanist who bemoaned modernity's atrocities and came to champion what he saw as the great potential of human rights to protect against the arbitrary power of the state. Yet Weitz saw in their history not a straightforward expansion of rights across time and space, but rather recurring 'paradoxes,' 'dilemmas,' and 'tensions.' Human rights sat uncomfortably alongside the worst of human brutality.

The biggest paradox of all, and the one to which Weitz devoted *A World Divided*, is the simultaneous emergence of the nation-state and human rights. What made this development a paradox was the nation-state's dual claims to national sovereignty, its authority over who could become a citizen and what their rights would be, on the one hand, and its guarantee of universal human rights, on the other. All political sovereignties exclude, but the nation-state, Weitz argued, does so more than most because it claims sovereignty not only over territory but also over political membership, usually determined on the basis of nationality or race. But political membership also confers rights. As Hannah Arendt argued in the 1950s,[2] only a sovereign political community of citizens can enforce and protect rights. Together, nation-states and human rights formed what Weitz called in *A World Divided* a modern "political model" (8) that would eventually traverse the globe.

Thus we owe the great potential of rights—as well as their worst abuses—to political modernity, another theme that preoccupied Weitz for much of his career.[3] In his earliest writings about human rights, Weitz focused on the dark side of this confluence of modern forms of political sovereignty and human rights, though he had not yet developed the argument about the project of nation-states and human rights. A decade and a second wave of historiography later, Weitz, perhaps surprisingly given all that had transpired in the world, became only more convinced that human rights brought unprecedented freedoms and possibilities for human flourishing. This trajectory had a logic that involved the growing importance of the nation-state in Weitz's work, along with historiographical developments.

Around the time Weitz arrived at the University of Minnesota in 1999, he began to turn his attention to human rights as such. Intellectually, he entered the world of human rights not through the eighteenth-century national revolutions in France and North America, as is so often the case among historians, but through his encounter with the "extreme violence" of forced deportations and genocide. As Taner Akçam points out in this forum, Weitz's interest in human rights grew directly out of his work on German history and the comparative history of genocide. He thought that human rights might not prevent atrocities, but their articulation and enforcement were our best chance for doing so. As Weitz wrote his books on genocide and Weimar Germany, he was surrounded by scholars from other disciplines who were working on human rights in the context of a broader interest in norms that shaped the international order.[4] Historians, as is our wont, were late to human rights party, but we eventually got there in part by reconsidering more established literatures in political science, law, and philosophy. Weitz was a member of the first wave of Anglophone historians to do so, indeed one of the "pioneers in the construction of a new field" that began to take off around the turn of the twenty-first century.[5] While at Minnesota, Weitz sat on the advisory committee for an interdisciplinary Human Rights Program and participated in various panels on the nascent topic. When Weitz arrived at CUNY's City College of New York (CCNY) in 2012 as Dean of the Humanities and the Arts and distinguished professor of history, he sought out a new community of scholars to continue the cross-disciplinary conversations from which he had gained so much.

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[1] Eric D. Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

[2] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973 [1951]), 267ff.

[3] For more on Weitz and modernity, see Molly Nolan's contribution to this forum.

At CCNY Weitz, along with his closest colleague, Rajan Menon, a prominent political scientist, introduced an interdisciplinary seminar on human rights at which scholars from across the country shared their work and of which I was member. Among the legacies of Weitz's intellectual community-building is an interdisciplinary minor in human rights to which two divisions and multiple departments contribute.[6] In 2006, with the field of human rights history slowly starting to grow in response to the war on terror, Weitz launched a book series at Princeton University Press on "Human Rights and Crimes Against Humanity," to which *A World Divided* contributes.

In 2008 came Weitz's first major publication on the subject, an article in the *American Historical Review*, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions."[7] The thesis of this article built on his book on comparative genocide, as Norman Naimark points out in this forum. In the article, Weitz took the notion of "population politics," (1314) which he saw a necessary precursor to genocide, and sought to explain how such "extreme violence" (1313) as that entailed in forced deportations could have co-existed with the flowering of human rights and humanitarianism. Unlike the "dynastic legitimacy and state sovereignty" (1314) that characterized the nineteenth-century "Vienna System," (1314) population politics were the basis of the "Paris System" (1314) following World War I. Such a politics involved the state's management and rearrangement populations in the name of nationhood and colonial rule.

Many scholars have described the post-World War I settlement as obsessed with the nation-state and nationality. Weitz did not reject this idea but rather saw it as one element in a larger scheme of population politics. Human rights figured in this scheme as well. In fact, it was the "Paris System," with its focus on national, religious, and linguistic minorities, oversight of the less "civilized" and its attempts at international enforcement of both, that set the stage for the contemporary history of international human rights: "The Paris system has partitioned territories along supposedly ethnic, national, and religious lines; legitimized forced deportations; consecrated civilization and humanitarianism as express political goals; and moved the protection of rights from the purely national to the international level."[8]

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[4] For example, see Kathryn Sikkink, *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions Are Changing World Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), and Michael Barnett, *The International Humanitarian Order* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

[5] Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 323.

[6] Weitz was dean for four years before returning to the Department of History at CCNY and the CUNY Graduate Center, where he held consortial appointment.

[7] Eric D. Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *American Historical Review* 113:5 (2008): 1313-1343.

[8] Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System," 1314.

With the adoption of the exclusionary nation-state necessarily emerged the questions about minorities—whether they needed protection through international enforcement and whether minority rights should be a part of that protective arsenal. Sources as varied as Soviet Communists and U.S. President Woodrow Wilson answered both questions in the affirmative. This was the birth of self-determination of peoples (based on nationality or race), grounded in the rights of groups rather than individuals. Weitz concluded, "A major part of their [human rights] history lies in a way of thinking about populations—group protection and group rights—that entailed the very same thought patterns that enabled and promoted forced deportations, one of the most egregious violations of both individual and collective rights."[9]

"From the Vienna to the Paris System" was not primarily a historiographical intervention but it did push back against a too-sanguine history of human rights that originated in the French and American revolutions, in which universal rights for individuals first took political form and subsequently expanded over time and space. In contrast to historians who saw the proliferation of human rights as a progressive triumph of enlightened rationality, for Weitz that history was much "messier."[10] Two themes in this first *AHR* piece return in *A World Divided*: that the history of human rights involves struggles over collective rights—usually of peoples seeking political recognition as their own nation-state or as part of an existing one; and that the story of human rights is neither linear nor unerringly progressive. At its most disturbing, this second theme tied the history of human rights to the emerging nation-state system in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and all the atrocities that entailed.

After his 2008 article, Weitz found himself confronted with a second wave of historical scholarship that dismissed the entire project of human rights as fanciful, apolitical, and hypocritical—and very much a product of the second half of the twentieth century. Much of this more "cynical" literature severed the ties binding post-World War II human rights instruments to eighteenth-century natural rights claims by insisting that to find human rights one had to look internationally, the only arena in which human beings as such could be taken as the object of rights (as opposed to citizens or subjects).[11] In light of this historiographical turn, Weitz adopted a *via media*, a history of human rights rooted firmly in both nation-state politics and the resistance of the oppressed. Even though rights conferred by the nation-state are by definition citizenship rights, that does not mean, he suggested, that they could not be also be human rights. Rejecting the definitional battles of intellectual historians, philosophers, and theologians, Weitz insisted that historically, nation-states aspired, if often rhetorically, to endow their citizens with fundamental universal rights. No matter that national citizenship rights seemed definitionally and conceptually to preclude a universalist understanding of rights as emanating from human beings. That is not how *history* had played out.

In another *AHR* article on the history of "self-determination," Weitz focused more intently on the binary of individual and collective rights.[12] According to Weitz, this duality had dogged human rights since the eighteenth century, and historians did not confront it until the second wave of human rights historiography more than 200 years later. Weitz unpacked the concept of 'self-determination,' which, he argued, transmogrified from the German Enlightenment notion of individual autonomy to a nationalist doctrine signifying the collective liberation of peoples. This happened not seamlessly but in reaction to political developments, chief among them the Great Powers' idealization of the nation-state as an antidote to the imperial decline that preceded World War I. Second, he sought to demonstrate that while self-determination of peoples became an internationally sanctioned human right after World War II, that status did not erase the inherent contradiction of asserting the collective rights of a people and the individual rights of persons.

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[9] Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System," 1316.

[10] Weitz pointed to Lynn Hunt and Paul Gordon Lauren as exemplary of the Whiggish account of human rights history. Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007). Paul Gordon Lauren, *International Evolution of Human Rights: Visions Seen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylania Press, 1998).

[11] Prime examples of this second, more "cynical" wave of human rights historiography include Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010) and Stephen Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013). For other works in this vein, see *A World Divided*, 431.

[12] Eric D. Weitz, "Self Determination: How a German Enlightenment Idea Became the Slogan of National Liberation and a Human Right," *American Historical Review* 120:2 (2015): 462–496.

That article addressed the less sympathetic wave of human rights historiography directly. Samuel Moyn's *The Last Utopia* (2010) contended that there was no politics of human rights until the 1970s and that even then, they were narrowly drawn. In addition, movements for self-determination after World War II neither understood themselves as fighting for human rights, nor used the term 'human rights,' with rare exceptions. Instead, they heralded a revolutionary politics of collective liberation. Weitz argued that there is nothing necessarily individualistic about human rights, either definitionally or historically. In the postwar period, self-determination was seen as a collective human right both by the authors of international human rights documents and many anticolonial activists.

Along with historiographical developments, Weitz's interest in modern German history and the history of comparative genocide informed the structure of his culminating work on human rights, *A World Divided*, which focused as much on the denial of human rights as it did on their propagation. To what extent could human rights serve as a ballast against human barbarity? Weitz's pragmatic approach to this question is resonant of Richard Rorty's writing on human rights.[13] Unlike Rorty, however, Weitz did not see the history of human rights as a strictly liberal Western project: "The intellectual origins of human rights are multifaceted…. They are liberal, socialist, and conservative; secular and religious; Western and Eastern, North and South."[14] Nor was Weitz interested in the definitional problems that have long dogged the scholarship on human rights. Weitz believed the meaning of human rights changed frequently and that to fix a definition of human rights is to circumscribe their often-self-contradictory history.

A World Divided is an intellectually courageous work. It continues to challenge the simplistic binaries that characterize much of the literature on human rights and to emphasize instead the history's complexity. This Weitz does mainly by showing the *relational* quality of human rights: when some people gain human rights, others often lose them. Unlike his articles, however, the book specifies the causal mechanisms for the emergence and transformations in human rights over a period of 250 years, from the eighteenth century to the present. The coupling of population-based violence and human rights became, in the book, an even more sweeping argument about the confluence of the nation-state (the quintessential institutional embodiment of population politics) and human rights.

Why the nation-state gained prominence only now in Weitz's scholarship as the modern political formation that gave us human rights is not obvious. Overcoming Arendt's theoretical claim that putatively universal human rights could not emerge from a national setting was certainly one challenge, and one that Weitz meets in this book. Moreover, a newer round of historiographical interventions focused on the imperial side of Weitz's "Vienna System" story—the so-called civilizing missions that legitimated colonial rule, while maintaining a perverse connection to human rights with promises of rights to come when the less-civilized were ready.

The story of human rights had become too dark, seemingly foreclosing the possibility for the spread of human rights, which for Weitz was an indisputable historical fact. Precisely by taking a *global* perspective, the centrality of the *nation*-state only became clearer: "This history of nation-states *is* the history of human rights and vice versa" (5), Weitz asserted.[15] The paradoxical entanglement of the exclusionary nation-state and expansionary human rights stood at the heart of the book. Besides this paradox, the book shows convincingly how nation-states also provided institutional backing and a newfound legitimacy for human rights.

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[13] Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality in *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993*, ed. Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 111-134.

[14] Eric D. Weitz, "Writing the History of Human Rights," *Journal of Genocide Research* 23:1 (2021): 150-153, here, 152.

[15] Emphasis in the original.

Yet nation-states do not act alone. The oppressed play an important role as well. Human rights are found not only in documents and institutions; they also play out in struggles across the world as people assert their rights in an emerging world of nation-states. At the same time, modern global technologies enabled the political project of nation-states and human rights to spread around the world. Weitz postulated that human rights require the mutual and reciprocal recognition of human beings as human beings. Nation-states elevated recognition to a political norm: we recognize our compatriots as fellow nationals but also through shared rights.

In introducing human struggle into the story, Weitz tackled another binary in the human rights literature: that of oppressed (good) and oppressors (evil). There are few heroes in the real world, Weitz noted, even among those who are pursuing a just cause. Many abolitionists were racists (40, 138-9) and some Brazilian slaves fought for emancipation only to be able to enslave others (135, 150), to name just two examples. Nor did human rights activists effect change on their own. In an impressively wide range of case studies of "nation-state foundings and reformations"—from Greeks in the Ottoman Empire and Native Americans in the United States to Palestine and Israel and Rwanda and Burundi (among others), Weitz showed that "popular struggles, state interests, and the international system" together forged nation states and human rights. (6).

Among other revelations, what emerge from these studies are concrete examples of the juxtaposition of human rights as a nationalizing project with all manner of barbarous acts. One of the most striking involves the Soviet Union, a "federation of nationalities" (2). "Yes," Weitz asserted, "we can talk, in one and the same breath about rights in the Soviet Union while also recognizing the deeply repressive and murderous character of the system" (283). Human rights for Soviet citizens were embedded in the 1936 constitution, which was promulgated during Stain's most vicious reign of terror. According to Weitz, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's atrocities did not negate the Soviet leadership's belief in the rights of the Soviet peoples, including national rights that privileged certain nationalities while maintaining a diverse federation of republics These constitutional rights could be traced conceptually to the French revolution of 1789, but had been retrofitted by socialist and Communist ideology to include more social rights. Not simply parchment rights, they proved materially beneficial to millions of Soviet citizens, Weitz contended (284). Abroad, the Soviet Union championed self-determination, or the human rights of colonized peoples, women's rights, and social rights generally.

The case of human rights under a dictatorship highlighted a central theme of the book: that the language and law of human rights were frequently used as an immanent critique against the state. If some can have rights, why not others? In the 1960s, Soviet activists sought to enforce the Soviet constitution not to fundamentally alter the political system. This chapter and other sections of the book aim to demonstrate that even the most authoritarian of states must develop some form of legitimacy and hence leave spaces, however small, for human striving. That was the function of human rights within the Soviet Union, but human rights rhetoric also attracted the loyalty of numerous countries of the Global South. Most important, even in the Soviet Union human rights were not merely an instrument of oppression or an exercise in state power. Rather, they were also one of the reasons for the Soviet state's demise, as activists of various stripes helped weaken the state from within.

At times, *A World Divided* appears to romanticize the nation-state. The rights-determining function is unique to nation states, as opposed to "premodern empires," Weitz argued. But he distinguished these empires from the modern (settler) colonialism that figures prominently in the book, for example in chapters on the United States, Namibia, and Palestine.[16] If there is any hint of romanticization in this book, it is in the realm of the international. Weitz hoped for greater internationalization of human rights. He argued that international institutions cannot replace the nation-state, but they can constrain it. They can also provide a safety net of sorts for those outside of its protection.

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[16] Weitz, "Writing the History of Human Rights," 151.

Some might argue Weitz was also overly optimistic about human rights themselves. Despite his inductive approach to the history of human rights, Weitz made clear that he was very much a supporter of human rights, as they are described today—international, universalistic, and broadly conceived. "They [human rights] require the people be respected and afforded recognition no matter what their specific gender, nationality, or race. They demand that all people have access to the basic necessities of life, and have the freedom to express themselves, to work and build and create as they wish, to join with others as they desire, and to be free of the scourge of violence and forced displacement. Those *are* our fundamental human rights. We should demand nothing less from the world we inhabit" (430).[17] For Weitz, human rights were not a chimera, and we should celebrate this fact: "I hope that *A World Divided*, for all its attention to the dilemmas and complexities of human rights, will also be read as an affirmation of the struggles of millions of people around the globe."[18]

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[17] Emphasis in the original. Given his aversion to definitions, perhaps Weitz mean that these "are" the human rights that exist at the moment he was writing and as defined by international institutions.

[18] Weitz, "Writing the History of Human Rights," 152.

Essay by Norman M. Naimark, Stanford University

Eric Weitz, A Century of Genocide, and the Soviet Question

Eric Weitz was an active and highly respected member of the historical profession and the genocide studies community before his untimely passing on July 1, 2021. By the end of his life, he had written and spoken widely on the history of genocide and human rights for over two decades and edited a highly successful book series at Princeton University Press, "Human Rights and Crimes against Humanity," that set a gold standard for work in the field. Weitz was trained as a German historian at Boston University, where his advisors were two distinguished scholars, Dietrich Orlow, a specialist on the Nazi party and fascism, and Fritz Ringer, a well-known German intellectual historian. As a young assistant professor, I was Weitz's teacher and mentor in Russian and Soviet history. I taught intermittently in the night school at BU (Metropolitan College) when I first encountered him in my classes. He had to attend lectures in the evening because he earned his living as a baker during the late nights and mornings. We became lifelong friends and close colleagues. I cannot write a commentary on his contributions to the genocide field without remembering his wonderful personal qualities – warmth, a terrific sense of humor, a great laugh, and endless decency – as well as his stellar academic achievements as a scholar, teacher, and administrator.

Eric Weitz came to the study of genocide from his inevitable engagement with the horrors of the Holocaust and its meaning for German history. But, like many German historians of his generation, he quickly concluded that one could not understand this "rupture in civilization," to use Dan Diner's impactful phrase, without thinking about the Holocaust in the broader context of twentieth-century history.[1] Even reconstructing the "German story" was not enough to explain the Holocaust. Weitz was unhappy with the approach of Daniel J. Goldhagen to the *longue durée* of German antisemitism that ostensibly culminated in the atrocities committed by Hitler and the Nazis.[2] Weitz recognized the importance of the German colonial experience for understanding the genocide of the Herero and Nama in German Southwest Africa (today Namibia). But he was unwilling to go along with historians, including some of the most erudite, Jürgen Zimmerer among them, who traced a direct line linking the violence of German colonialism, German occupation violence in Belgium during World War I, German military involvement in the Armenian genocide, and the mass murder of the Jews during World War II.[3] There is "precious little evidence," Weitz argued, that Nazi policies were predicated on earlier German involvement in the colonies or the Ottoman Empire. The key to understanding the initiation of the Holocaust, Weitz maintained, lay in the eight-month period between Hitler's assault on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and the Wannsee Conference, January 20, 1942.[4]

Weitz was deeply affected by the *Historikerstreit* (historians' quarrel), which, as he stated at the very beginning of the 2015 paperback edition of his classic 2003 contribution to genocide studies, *A Century of Genocide*, was fresh in his memory and whose reverberations continued to be felt in the German field.[5] Leading German intellectuals and historians – Hans Ulrich Wehler and Jürgen Habermas among them – had taken the historian Ernst Nolte to task for seemingly equating the crimes of the Nazis and Soviets and suggesting that, in fact, the Nazis learned their violent and repressive behavior from the Soviets. This weakly disguised apology for Nazism roused the hackles of German academia and scholars of Germany everywhere, making it much more difficult to compare Nazi and Soviet systems in any serious context.

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[1] Dan Diner, "Epistemics of the Holocaust Considered the Question of 'Why?' And of 'How?'," *Naharaim-Zeitschrift für Deutsch-Jüdische Literatur und Kulturgeschichte* 1:2 (2008): 195-213.

[2] Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996)

[3] Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, eds. *Genocide in German South-West Africa: The Colonial War of 1904-1908 and Its Aftermath* (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2008).

[4] Eric D. Weitz on Langbehn and Salama, "German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust and Postwar Germany," H-TGS, networks h-net.org, published July 2012, accessed August 27, 2021.

Knowledgeable about both the German and Soviet pasts, Weitz resisted that unwarranted part of the backlash against Nolte and increasingly began to think comparatively about the Holocaust. He was not alone. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, historians and social scientists from a variety of fields began to work on the problem of genocide in a comparative framework that sometimes included the Soviet Union.[6]

Weitz's *A Century of Genocide* is an exemplary representative of the genre. He examined four major cases of twentieth-century genocide: the Holocaust, the Soviet repressions of the 1930s, the Cambodian Genocide, and the genocides in former Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s. He noted that he would not write about Rwanda because of his lack of expertise in the African field. He also provided a brief "Armenian Prelude," which is not at all incidental to the rest of the book, since he frequently cross-referenced comparisons between other genocides and the Armenian case, about which he knew a great deal. (He had been involved in the Turkish-Armenian Workshop, WATS, that explored various aspects of late Ottoman History and the Armenian Genocide).

In the book, Weitz set up a systematic analytical structure of four stages to genocide in each of the cases, making the comparisons (and contrasts) more transparent. First, each chapter begins with an examination of the ideological backdrop to the respective cases that reflected his view that all four genocides were motivated by revolutionary Utopian thinking. This part of his analysis owed a lot to the thinking of Hannah Arendt, especially in her foundational *Origins of Totalitarianism*.[7] The power of the state played a central role in his analyses and the second stage in the development of genocide is the state's endeavors to categorize, rank, and make more transparent groups within the polity. Here he followed in the path of James C. Scott in his important study of "high modernism," *Seeing Like a State*, by focusing on the critical importance of population politics in the making of genocide.[8]

The third stage of genocide comprises the beginnings of discrimination, hate propaganda, and inculcating the nation-defining ethnicity with ideas of superiority and solidarity versus the minorities. Here, he focused sharply on the development of "race thinking" as it influences each of the genocides he examines. The fourth stage, characterized by

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[5] Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015 [2003]), ix. For the *Historikerstreit*, see Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[6] See, for example, Benjamin Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[7] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1967).

[8] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

"moments of extreme social crisis – often self-generated – of immense internal upheaval and war, of great opportunities but also dread dangers," initiates what he called the "ultimate purge," that is, genocide.[9]

Weitz's book is subtitled *Utopias of Race and Nation*, emphasizing his view that revolutionary thinking, combined with racial and national extremism, formed the ideational background to these genocides and others. This swirling vortex of ideas in his schema is intrinsically modern, reflecting the late nineteenth-century development of the "science" of anthropology, the emergence of Social Darwinism, and the widespread acceptance of eugenics. This combined with the powerful impact of the new "race thinking" in the work of Arthur de Gobineau, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and Alfred Ploetz, among others, turned nation and ethnicity into a matter of blood and "social biology." The traumas surrounding World War I played a role in the development of ideas about the supremacy of one nation over another and deepened the attachment of individual nation states to population politics, which included forced deportation, the separation of minority peoples, and population exchange. This was all in the name of promoting homogeneous nation-states, which were deemed by nationalists to be morally and spiritually superior to multi-ethnic ones.[10]

In this connection, then, Weitz defended the proposition that genocide is particularly characteristic of the twentieth century.[11] There may have been instances of genocidal mass killing earlier in history, but the combination of the growing power of the state, the technologies of elimination, the development of mass politics, the ideologies of race and nation, and the reverberations of World War I created the kind of social and political explosiveness that brought genocide in the Soviet Union and Germany to the fore, which in turn served as icebreakers for the genocides that emerged at the end of the twentieth century in Cambodia, Yugoslavia, and Rwanda, among others.

With this said, Weitz was very much aware of the importance of settler and colonial genocide of earlier centuries, and devoted a substantial section of his newest book, *A World Divided*, to the attacks on Native Americans in the upper Middle West of the United States. In his murderous rhetoric, the first governor of Minnesota, General Henry Hastings Sibley, shares the spotlight in Weitz's final book with other genocidal figures from Generals Lothar von Trotha to Ratko Mladic who figure prominently in *A Century of Genocide*. In 1862, Sibley promised to eliminate the Dakota tribes as "devils in human shape.... I will sweep them with the besom of death."[12]

Eric Weitz did not shy away from controversy in his scholarship; in fact, he seemed to welcome the kind of engagement and argument that makes the study of genocide such a lively and important interdisciplinary field. His forays into Soviet history, both in the chapter on "Soviet Union Under Lenin and Stalin" in *A Century of Genocide* and in a provocative 2002 *Slavic Review* article raised some hackles in the Soviet field.[13] The bottom line of his intervention in the Soviet case is that Moscow's repressive, sometimes genocidal, actions against selected Soviet nationalities in the period of Stalin's rule, 1928-1953, frequently had a racial content, if not an explicit racial ideology behind it. This is relevant in particular to the war-time deportations of the "punished peoples," the Crimean Tatars, Chechens and Ingush, Balkars, and other nationalities from the Northern Caucasus region. In addition to the deportations (arrests and shooting) of Soviet Germans and Poles in the 1930s, Weitz also focused on the fate of Soviet Koreans, who were deported *en masse* in 1937 from their homes in Eastern Siberia to Kazakhstan and other destinations in Central Asia. Just as the Crimean Tatars and peoples of the Northern Caucasus were accused of collaborating with the Germans, the Koreans were viewed as potential Japanese collaborators.

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[9] Weitz, *A Century of Genocide*, 15.

[10] Weitz developed some of these ideas further in his seminal article: "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *The American Historical Review* 113:5 (December 2008): 1313-1343.

[11] He makes this argument in *A Century of Genocide*, 8, and in a more focused fashion, in a Holocaust Memorial Lecture at Oregon State University on April 13, 2010, posted on YouTube.com, December 31, 2014, accessed August 25, 2021.

[12] Eric D. Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 101.

[13] Eric D. Weitz, "Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges," 61:1 (Spring 2002): 30-34. For the responses of Soviet specialists, see, in the same number, Francine Hirsch, "Race without the Practice of Racial Politics," 30-43; Amir Weiner, "Nothing but Certainty," 44-53, and Alaina Lemon, "Without a 'Concept'? Race as Discursive Practice,"

In all of these cases, as Weitz pointed out, whole nations without individual exceptions were seized in their towns and villages and deported in "Nacht und Nebel" NKVD operations, trucked and sent by rail to their destinations, usually in Central Asia, and frequently left without provisions, housing, or medical care to survive in hostile territory. Given the very large numbers who died in the process of transfer and upon arrival, many of the peoples involved claim that they were victims of genocide. Weitz agreed, though he was careful to distinguish the Soviet system from the Nazi, writing, "The Soviet Union under Stalin did not become a 'genocidal regime,' one in which the actual physical annihilation of defined population groups moves to the very core of state policies, to such an extent that the entire system revolves around human destruction."[14] The "absence of an explicit racial ideology," he explained in the *Slavic Review* article, helped to serve as a "brake" on ethnic cleansing and genocide in the Soviet Union.[15]

Weitz also had little sympathy for an approach to Soviet mass killing that applied the concept of "class genocide," which he believed, reflecting the anti-Nolte arguments in the *Historikerstreit* literature in Germany, was too politicized to be of use to scholarly analysis.[16] Stalin's war against the alleged *kulaks* and his attack on the Soviet countryside in collectivization, like the Ukrainian famine, should not be considered genocide, but as egregious "violations of basic democratic and human rights and a vast expansion of the power of the state."[17] He had a similar view of the Great Terror or Great Purge of the late 1930s. Though in no way naive about the suffering imposed by Stalin on the Soviet population, Weitz emphasized the fact that prisoners sometimes served short terms after ostensibly being "reformed" through hard labor in the Gulag. Unlike the Nazi case, transportation to the Soviet concentration camps was not a one-way ticket to death. Still, he maintained, "the Terror" established dangerous precedents of how supposedly suspect populations could and should be handled in moments of extreme instability."[18] In sum, Weitz treated genocide in the Soviet case as a product of the racialist thinking about minority peoples which lurked behind the mythology of the "friendship of peoples." By the end of Stalin's life, this racial animosity included the Jews, which makes the comparison with Nazi Germany even more telling.

The most comprehensive response to Weitz's intervention in the historiography of race thinking in the Soviet Union came from Francine Hirsh, the University of Wisconsin Soviet historian and specialist on Soviet national questions. What Hirsch made clear in her critique of Weitz's approach was that the Soviets had an elaborate ideological position on

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54-61. Weitz respond in, "On Certainties and Ambivalences: Reply to my Critics," on 62-65. See also Anton Weiss-Wendt's Review of *A Century of Genocide*, in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 19:1 (Spring 2005): 140-143.

[14] Weitz, *A Century of Genocide*, 100.

[15] Weitz, "Racial Politics Without the Concept of Race," 23.

[16] Weitz, "Racial Politics Without the Concept of Race," 24.

[17] Weitz, *A Century of Genocide*, 74.

[18] Weitz, A Century of Genocide, 74

race that rejected racial definitions of nations, which were considered "sociohistorical groups," in no way biologically determined, which was the essence of the Nazi thinking. As Hirsch aptly wrote: "If anything, the Soviet case has demonstrated that politics based on a sociological imperative can show as little concern for the sanctity of human life as politics based on the category of race."[19] She argued, as well, that the Soviets did not elevate the Russians as a superior race, as Weitz suggested, but as the most "advanced" Soviet nation. Sovietization and Russification were not the same things; the imposition of the Russian language on the rest of the Soviet Union was seen as an act of centralization and modernization, not one of racial or national superiority.[20] In short, in Hirsch's view, one could and should not examine Soviet nationality policies during the Stalin period, as brutal as they were to some peoples, through the lenses of racial ideology, the core concept of Weitz's *A Century of Genocide*.

Weitz's responses to Hirsch's and others' critiques of his use of racial politics to understand genocide in the Soviet context were, typically, measured, open-minded, and reasonable. The Soviets may have had a Marxist-Leninist view of race that rejected biology as an explanation of nationhood and they may have dismissed racial categorizations, but race mattered in real nationality politics. "Race is present," Weitz argued, "when a defined group of people is seen to have traits that are indelible, immutable, and transgenerational," which was apparent, in his view, in the Soviet cases he examined. Moreover, race thinking does not always result in elimination. Its effects can range from "informal discrimination to legal segregation to extermination."[21] Weitz had a broad and flexible way of thinking about race. He did not see the Ukrainian famine as genocide and is concerned that it is exploited for politicized purposes.[22] But he did believe that the "punished peoples" who were "deemed too recalcitrant, too threatening to the Soviet system," even if not identified as racially inferior in official rhetoric, were "racialized" in Stalinist practice.[23]

In Weitz's work, race is a historical concept that opens vistas for understanding the sources of genocide. It is hard to conceive of genocide in the modern period absent the forceful and intimidating power of racism, even when it is amalgamated into cultural clashes between dominant and minority peoples. Turks against Armenians and Syriac Christians, Germans against Jews and Gypsies, Cambodians against Vietnamese and Cham, Hutu against Tutsi, Serbs against Bosnian Muslims and Kosovar Albanians, and, in Weitz's schema, Soviets against Chechens and Koreans – all these attacks contained powerful racial and racialized elements. The great service of Eric Weitz's work on genocide is to emphasize both the force of racial thinking in the modern world, but also its diversity of sources and of outcomes.

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[19] Hirsch, "Race Without the Practice of Racial Politics," 30.

[20] Hirsch, "Race Without the Practice of Racial Politics," 37, fn. 30.

[21] Weitz, "On Certainties and Ambivalences," 63-65.

[22] Weitz, "Racial Politics without the Concept of Race," 24

[23] Weitz, "On Certainties and Ambivalences," 63.

Essay by Mary Nolan, New York University

Eric D. Weitz: Historian of the German Left and Culture

Eric Weitz was a historian of wide-ranging interests and expertise, whose books and articles were theoretically informed, richly researched, and accessible to a general as well as a scholarly audience. He challenged prevailing interpretations, explored new territory, and tackled ambitious comparative projects on genocide and on human rights. He began his career, however, as a scholar of the twentieth-century German left. After a series of path-breaking articles, he published his innovative and provocative *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From Popular Protests to Socialist State*, which is now the central work against which other scholarship in the field must position itself.[1]

Central questions of German history informed his next major work, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation*, with Nazi Germany as a central case study.[2] He returned to Germany proper with *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy,* which was widely reviewed and translated into four languages.[3] In his final major work, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States*, while Germany's troubled history was not discussed explicitly it implicitly informed his exploration of the contradictory relationship of nationalism and human rights.[4] German history was thus central to Weitz's intellectual formation and to the questions he regarded as central to twentieth-century history there and globally. My remarks will focus on his many contributions to that field.

I first met Weitz when, at the request of his advisor at Boston University, Norman Naimark, he came to talk to me about his dissertation "Conflict in the Ruhr: Workers and Socialist Politics in Essen, 1910-1925." As a student of Social Democracy in the same period, I eagerly awaited the publication of his project. In the late 1980s, Weitz did publish a few articles on radical politics in Essen and on comparisons between miners in the Ruhr and in the U.S.[5] Rather than rushing the dissertation into print, however, he chose to rethink his project conceptually and comparatively, refocus it on German Communism, and expand it geographically to include Saxony and chronologically to carry the story into the postwar German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Three articles published in the early and mid-1990s indicated the directions in which the larger project was moving. "State Power, Class Fragmentation, and the Shaping of German Communist Politics, 1890-1933," situated the development of the socialist and later Communist movements in the context of both Germany's political economy, which increasingly fragmented the working class, and of German labor's singular focus on the state as an institution that both oppressed workers and intervened on their behalf through social policy. In the 1920s, he argued, the now divided workers' movement retained its statist focus. The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) viewed and tried to use the state as an instrument of reform within capitalism, while the German Communist Party (KPD) sought to overthrow the republic and replace it with a dictatorship of the proletariat.[6]

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[1] Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990: From Popular Protest to Socialist State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[2] Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[3] Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[4] Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[5] Weitz, "Social Continuity and Political Radicalization: Essen in the World War I Era," *Social Science History* 9:1 (1985): 49-69. "Class Formation and Labor Protest in the Mining Communities of Southern Illinois and the Ruhr, 1890-1925, *Labor History* 27:1 (1986): 85-105.

Weitz's second article, "'Rosa Luxemburg Belongs to Us!': German Communism and the Luxemburg Legacy," offered a revisionist interpretation of Luxemburg's political thought. She has usually been seen as a democratic alternative to Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin but Weitz insisted that her democratic understanding was limited and accompanied by rhetoric that endorsed violence, mass activism, disdain for reformism, and intense hostility to the SPD. She contributed to the KPD's politics of totality, to a Lenin-Luxemburg synthesis that was celebrated in the yearly Lenin-Liebknecht-Luxemburg festivals across Germany in the 1920s and again from 1949-1989 in the GDR. To be sure, dissident Communists in Weimar and in the GDR did look to Luxemburg but her ambiguous commitment to democracy meant that her ideas could be deployed by orthodox Communists as well. They helped legitimate the GDR, which was anything but democratic.[7]

"The Heroic Man and the Ever-Changing Woman: Gender and Politics in German Communism, 1917-1950," which appeared in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe,* traces representations of gender in the iconography of the interwar Communist parties of Germany, France, and Italy. Weitz argued that the masculinist bias and ambivalence about women as equal political actors was shared across these parties. Yet, because of the Popular Front and wartime resistance experience, the French and Italian Communist Parties did carve out activist roles for women, at least temporarily.[8]

In 1997, Weitz's magisterial *Creating German Communism* offered an analytically provocative, theoretically complex, and richly detailed study of German Communism that moved ambitiously form its inception during World War I to its demise after 1989. Rigorously and rightly, he insisted that both the strengths and weaknesses of this movement must be understood primarily in the context of Germany's domestic economic and political developments and that society and culture were as important, if not more important, than ideology in shaping the strategies, activism and self-understandings of the leadership and rank and file. Contrary to the then dominant interpretations of the KPD, Weitz argued that neither Bolshevization nor Stalinization provide adequate explanatory models. Focusing on the traumatic first years of the movement's existence from 1919 to 1933, he argued that in a singularly hostile domestic economic and political environment, the KPD stressed selected aspects of its socialist heritage and of German labor's repertoires of resistance and jettisoned others, thereby creating a movement that was at once militant and intransigent. It stressed voluntarism and discipline, valorized productive labor even as it recruited increasingly from the unemployed. While it proclaimed women's equality, it was singularly masculine in terms of its membership and activism. The Weimar experience shaped communist political attitudes and behavior patterns both under National Socialism and after World War II, for German Communism did not undergo the modernization and transformations that its French and Italian counterparts did during the Popular front and wartime resistance.

Rather than dissecting arcane ideological dispute among party leaders, Weitz innovatively concentrated on the spaces in which activism and politics could and did take place and on the lived experiences of being a communist. The KPD's first focus was on productive paid labor, above all in the mines and heavy industries where men predominated, yet it viewed workplace conflicts as important only as a means to mobilize workers for struggles to seize the state. After 1924, however, economic rationalization fragmented the working class into an employed and more skilled sector that was loyal to the SPD, and an unemployed sector that was attracted to the KPD's calls for militancy and revolution. The streets became the new locus of Communist activism and the site of often violent confrontation with both Social Democrats and the paramilitary organizations of the Nazis and other rightwing parties.

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[6] Weitz, "State Power, Class Fragmentation, and the Shaping of German Communist Politics, 1890-1933," *Journal of Modern History* 62:2 (1990): 253-97.

[7] Weitz, "'Rosa Luxemburg 'Belongs to Us!': German Communism and the Luxemburg Legacy," *Central European History* 27:1 (994): 27-64.

[8] Weitz, "The Heroic Man and the Ever-Changing Woman: Gender and Politics in German Communism, 1917-1950," in Laura Levine Frader and Sonya O. Rose, eds., *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 311-52

Unlike most historians of the KPD, Weitz made gender a central category of analysis. He argued that both the cult of productive labor and the prominence of the unemployed and street activism after 1925 meant that the movement valorized masculine strength and violent confrontation. To be sure, the party officially endorsed gender equality and did fight to legalize abortion. But appeals to women were limited, their assigned roles largely limited to supporting activist husbands and politically educating children. As revealed by the abundant illustrations from Communist publications, which the book includes, women were usually depicted as victims of capitalist exploitation or as long-suffering mothers rather than as activists or proud workers. No wonder only 15% of the membership was female.

Creating German Communism reconstructed the distinctive party culture, which evolved in 1920s. Its core commitments—class struggle, belief in the cause, solidarity with comrades and loyalty to the Soviet Union—were shared across factional divisions and defined party life not only in Weimar but during the years of exile under National Socialism and throughout the GDR. So too were a long list of enemies, ranging from capitalists, Junkers, and bourgeois politicians to priests and the Entente powers and including prominent Social Democrats. Weitz stressed these continuities yet argued that for a brief moment after 1945 there was the possibility of a less authoritarian German road to socialism in the Soviet zone. The KPD's subsequent refusal to compromise with non-Communist forces or modify its militant rhetoric and confrontational tactics was not, he suggested, predetermined. Rather, pressures from Moscow, the 1947 two camps speech by Soviet Communist Party official and Cominfom founder Andrei Zhdanov and the solidifying Cold War quickly foreclosed that possibility. His determination not to read history backward is admirable but in this case is not terribly persuasive. The very strength of his book lies in showing that the authoritarianism and intransigence of the KPD and the resultant mistaken policies were constructed in particular historical situations rather than being ideologically inevitable or imposed from outside. Those particular historical situations and the legacy of Communism's Weimar evolution made a third way highly unlikely.

After *Creating German Communism*, Weitz continued to write on communism but in an explicitly comparative manner. In *Popular* Communism, he examined the distinctive ways in which Germany, France, and Italy developed mass Communist movements in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, respectively.[9] Using political space as his key analytical category, he shows that the German Communists were located in and operated from the margins of the factory and the political system, becoming militant, intransigent, and masculine. The French Communists, by contrast, built on their participation in the national Popular Front government and on their prominence in local governments, leading them to and engage in more reformist and coalitional politics. The post-1945 Italian Communists launched their rise to prominence from their participation in the resistance and the diverse forms of political activism and cooperation with non-Communist forces.

Weitz also co-edited two important collections. The first, *Between Reform and Revolution* featured essays on German socialism and Communism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[10] Drawing on work done in both the U.S. and Germany, these essays offer students a rich and broad introduction to the best recent work in German labor history. In one of his contributions, Weitz explored the public spheres and spaces in which Weimar Communists operated, summarizing key findings of *Creating German Communism.* A second essay traced the demise of the GDR and its Socialist Unity Party the crises-ridden era of what Detlev Peukert called "classical modernity"[11] drew to a close.

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[9] Weitz, *Popular Communism: Political Strategies and Social Histories in the Formation of the German, French and Italian Communist Parties, 1918-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Institute for European Studies, 1992).

[10] David E. Barclay and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Between Reform and Revolutions: Studies in German Socialism and Communism from 1840-1990,* ed. (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998).

His second co-edited collection, *Fascism and Neofascism: Critical Writings on the Radical Right in Europe*, moved to the other end of the political spectrum, bringing together scholars of both the 1930s and the post 1989 period.[12] It marked one of the first explorations of the new rightwing movements that began proliferating across Europe after the collapse of Communism. The introduction, coauthored with Angelica Fenner, offered a nuanced analysis of similarities and differences between far-right movements in the period of classical fascism and those of the 1990s, while remaining agnostic about whether the term fascism was still useful or how to define it precisely. He concluded that the far right was likely to retain a presence, as it had through much of the twentieth century; while it was unlikely to seize state power, its racism (and one should add, its misogyny) could still do much harm.

A decade after *Creating German Communism*, Weitz published *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, a wide-ranging, evocative study of the Weimar Republic that was both an overview for those knowing little about the subject and a new and subtle interpretation of the accomplishments, promises, and problems of that fascinating and fraught period.

This study offered a succinct summary of Weimar politics, reminding readers of just how democratic its constitution was, how freely ideologies and policies were debated even as it traced the ongoing lack of consensus and political polarization. It also traced the problematic phases of the economy from wartime recovery and inflation (1919-24) through the relative stabilization of the rationalization period (1925-29) to the devastating depression that contributed so significantly to the Republic's downfall. The central concern and strength of the work, however, lies in its multifaceted discussion of culture broadly defined.

Weimar culture and politics, Weitz argued, was centrally concerned with the meaning of modernity, an elusive phenomenon that many Weimar Germans viewed positively and optimistically while others regarded it with anxiety and hostility. Like Peukert, Weitz argued that the emergence of new modern art, literature, mass culture, media, body politics, and ways of living were not unique to Germany, but they were experienced in more intense, concentrated, and polarizing forms there. Weimar culture was "the restless questioning of what it means to live in modern times, the search for new forms of expression suitable to the cacophony of modern life, and the belief in the possibilities of the future" (253). Weimar culture was also shaped by the legacy of the mass violence of World War I and the incomplete revolution of 1918. Weimar culture displayed a "hyperactive vitality" (26) in innumerable spheres ranging from public housing to film, from painting to sex reform. It was a culture that Weitz viewed with fascination and admiration.

The discussion of Weimar culture opened with an evocative tour of Berlin, for Weitz, like many other contemporaries and later observers, saw Berlin as the essential embodiment of Weimar and its engagement with the problems of modernity. The reader is taken from bustling Potsdamer Platz to new housing projects like Onkel Tom's Hütte, from jazz clubs to workers' slums, gaining a feel for the daily life of people of all classes, and not just the avant garde on whom much of the book focused. Weitz drew on the writings of various *flaneurs* who wrote extensively on Berlin street life and bourgeois culture and was inspired by a film he greatly admired, Walther Ruttmann's 1927 *Berlin, Symphony of a City.*

Subsequent chapters on architecture and art, high and mass cultures, the new woman and sexuality focused on seminal thinkers and artists who either contributed to a particular field or commented extensively on one or another aspect of modernity. The fascinating discussion of modern architecture looked in depth not only at Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus, but also at the visions and public housing projects of Erich Mendelsohn and Bruno Taut. Arguing that

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[11] Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987.

[12] Angelica Fenner and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Fascism and Neofascism: Critical Writings on the Radical Right in Europe,* ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

Weimar witnessed "the greatest transformation of media culture since Johannes Gutenberg" (247), Weitz explored photography, film and radio. For the first Lázló Moholy-Nagy and August Sander were singled out, even as the popular spread of photography with the Leica camera is mentioned briefly.

For film, *Berlin, Symphony of a City* is discussed along with classics like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and iconic American and Russian films that were shown in Berlin. Thomas Mann and Martin Heidegger are the emblematic high-culture figures while Berthold Brecht, Kurt Weill, and Hannah Höch are featured in the visual and performing arts. The Weimar movement from and mixtures of dada, expressionism and the new objectivity are traced there as elsewhere. Weitz was interested as well in the mass culture that many Weimar Germans found so seductive and others superficial or subversive. He looked in depth at the cultural criticism of Siegfried Kracauer and the pessimistic ruminations of Oswald Spengler. He explored debates about the New Woman and the real or imagined sexual revolution, using Theodor Hendrik van de Velde, Stefan Zweig, and Hans Suren as his central thinkers. In tracing the legacy of Weimar via its intellectual refugees, the focus is on Hans Morgenthau and Herbert Marcuse. The discussion of particular thinkers and artists as well as of mass society and culture are accompanied by exquisite illustrations of buildings and paintings, political posters, new advertising, and photographs of Berlin and of symbols of the new mass culture, such as the Tiller Girls.

The focus on a select group of very prominent figures was, on the one hand, a very effective way of capturing central developments across a range of cultural fields and providing in depth assessments of the life trajectories and major works of those who produced famous buildings, books, plays and cultural criticism. On the other hand, the result was a focus almost exclusively on men. To be sure, these men discussed gender, admired or condemned the New Woman, and problematized sexuality, but so too was the case in the 1929 *The Woman of Tomorrow: How We Wish Her to Be*, whose essays were written exclusively by male literary figures.[13] Women were the objects of male analyses; nowhere did their views of the promises, problems and pathologies of Weimar modernity appear.

By drawing on much new scholarship on both Weimar culture and politics and on issues of gender and sexuality, Weitz both went beyond Peter Gay's *Weimar Culture*, especially in its attention to mass culture and new media, and treats some of the same cultural movements and individuals in new ways.[14] Like Peukert in *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, Weitz focused on the modern aspects of Berlin. But Peukert paid primary attention to the contradictions within modernity, to the anxieties about and opposition to it in the areas of economics, social policy, youth, gender, and foreign, above all American, influences.
Weitz was concerned above all with the stunning accomplishments of Weimar artists and writers, with the achievements of modernism in many areas. His analysis of life in modern times was less critical than Peukert's and he saw a sharper break between Weimar and what followed.

Unlike so many authors, Weitz insisted that one cannot read Weimar's demise as inevitable. Rather it was the result of both the devastating economic depression with its mass unemployment and of the concerted attacks of resource-rich conservative forces and the new Nazi right. Much as he admired Weimar culture, he recognized that Weimar also showed the fragility of democracy. Weitz's final paragraph warned that "when virtually every debate become a live-or-die question about the essential features of human existence, from the intimacy of the bedroom to the structure of the business world, when every issue is seen to carry earth-shattering significance, when there is no overarching system of belief to which most people give their loyalty, a democracy cannot long endure" (408).

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[13] Friedrich M. Huebner, ed., *Die Frau von Morgan: Wie wir sie wünschen* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1929).

[14] Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).