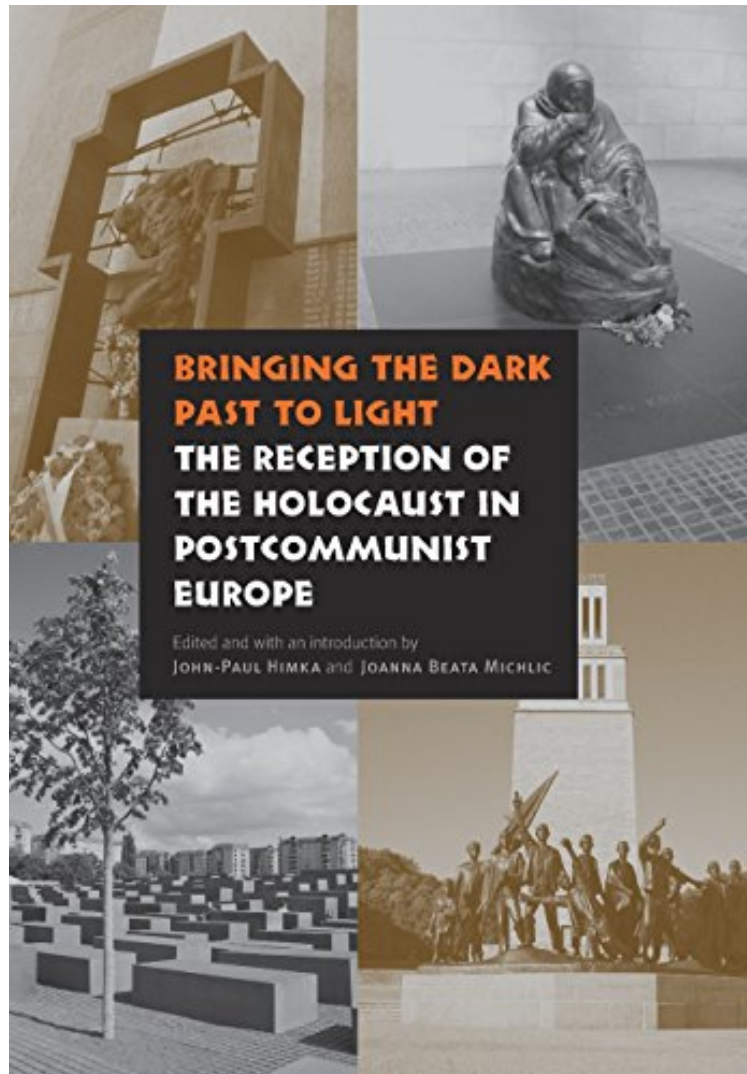


Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe

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From Brand: University of Nebraska Press : Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe:

3 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Loaded-Word Title. The Same Old, Standard Judeocentric Approach to the Holocaust. Attempts to Impose it on Eastern EuropeansBy Jan PeczkisThe only value of this book is the comprehensiveness of its treatment of public reception to the Holocaust throughout Eastern Europe. Otherwise, the

reader who is looking for something new, or particularly enlightening, can stop right here. It does not. It treats the Holocaust as self-evidently supreme over all other genocides, and never stops hammering this point into the heads of the many Eastern European peoples.

JEDWABNE WIELDED AS A CLUBThe editors, John-Paul Himka and Joanna B. Michlic, call on Eastern European nations to have their own "Jedwabne debates". (p. 9). In addition, Michlic (p. 410), and Omer Bartov (p. 691) misrepresent Polish responsibility, for Jedwabne, as proven fact. It is not. For an analysis of what the Polish investigative commission (IPN--INSTYTUT PAMIECI NARODOWEJ) actually concluded about Jedwabne, notably the ambiguity of responsibility for the barn-burning of Jews, see the second part of the first Comment under this review.

WHOSE DARK PAST?The phrase--dark past---used in the title of this book, is used in a transparently tendentious manner in reference to Eastern Europeans. There is no mention of the dark past of Jewish conduct in Eastern Europe, except in backwards-bending attempts by the authors to evade it in a manner that seems to border on intellectual dishonesty. For details, see the first part of the first Comment under this review.

A very thoughtful approach, to the "dark past" construct, is quoted, albeit dismissively, by Omer Bartov, as follows, "The Paris-based Romanian writer Paul Goma believes reconciliation is possible only if the Jews 'come to the same table of mutual admission of responsibility, as every other ethnic community'." (p. 669). That would be the day!

ARE JEWS SPECIAL? INESCAPABLY, YESThe reader may be astonished, as I was, about the numbers of nations throughout Eastern Europe that have already been subject to Holocaust supremacist thinking. In fact, much of this book is, quite frankly, a litany of complaints (and even laments) that Eastern Europeans are not generally buying into the notion that Jewish suffering is special and that their own genocides (at the hands of the Nazis and Communists) are secondary. This is notably said of Estonia (p. 202, 668), Latvia (p. 317), Lithuania (p. 327), Poland (pp. 439-440), Russia (p. 488), Slovenia (p. 687), Ukraine (p. 646), etc. On the other hand, specifically-named Eastern Europeans that are Judeo-compliant are featured and praised.

WARMED-OVER POLONOPHOBIAIn her chapter on Poland, Joanna Beata Michlic dusts off all her mischaracterizations of basic facts, and of scholars not to her liking, that she had presented in her strongly anti-Polish *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*. (For details, please click on this item, and read my detailed review.) Those who control the vocabulary control the discourse: That is why we, according to the likes of Michlic, have historians and nationalist historians. If, however, we are to have Orwellian labelling and polarization, why not do it fairly? We could then have Judeo-compliant historians and Judeo-independent historians.

SOME INTERESTING PERSPECTIVESAuthor Bella Zisere quotes Latvian-American historian Andrew Ezergailis, who speaks of the German and Jewish approaches to the Holocaust as ones that involve, in his words, a Germanless Holocaust in which locals are blamed. (p. 304). [I find this observation quite perceptive. In fact, in my reviews, I have been using the phrase de-Germanization of the Nazis.] Author John-Paul Himka discusses Babi Yar (Babyn Yar) in Ukraine. Some 100,000 locals, mostly Russians and Ukrainians, had been murdered there by the Germans. Among these 100,000 were 33,771 Jews. (p. 645). Recently, an American Jewish group had wanted to build a memorial to only the Jewish victims. In a manner reminiscent to that of Poles regarding Auschwitz, local Ukrainians objected to the privatization (monopolization) of Babi Yar as a site memorializing only the Jewish victims. (p. 646). Bravo!

Despite the Holocaust's profound impact on the history of Eastern Europe, the communist regimes successfully repressed public discourse about and memory of this tragedy. Since the collapse of communism in 1989, however, this has changed. Not only has a wealth of archival sources become available, but there have also been oral history projects and interviews recording the testimonies of eyewitnesses who experienced the Holocaust as children and young adults. Recent political, social, and cultural developments have facilitated a more nuanced and complex understanding of the continuities and discontinuities in representations of the Holocaust. People are beginning to realize the significant role that memory of Holocaust plays in contemporary discussions of national identity in Eastern Europe. This volume of original essays explores the memory of the Holocaust and the Jewish past in postcommunist Eastern Europe. Devoting space to every postcommunist country, the essays in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light* explore how the memory of the dark pasts of Eastern European nations is being recollected and reworked. In addition, it examines how this memory shapes the collective identities and the social identity of ethnic and national minorities. Memory of the Holocaust has practical implications regarding the current development of national cultures and international relationships.

"This pioneering work in the field of Holocaust studies should be a part of any library with even the most modest of holdings about the Shoah." David M. Crowe, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*