



## RADCLIFFE MAGAZINE

### The Preservation of History

#### FROM FAILED DENAZIFICATION TO SAVING SURVIVORS' STORIES



*Irmtrud Wojak with student Research Partners Adela Heera Kim (center) and Eunice Park Lee (at right). Photo courtesy of Irmtrud Wojak*

#### Radcliffe Magazine

By Pat Harrison

Historian Irmtrud Wojak RI '15 came from Germany to the Radcliffe Institute to focus on the realities and implications of denazification—the effort the Allies and then Germany undertook after World War II to remove all traces of Nazism from Germany and to rebuild democracy. In Wojak's view, denazification is not a single event that occurred within a self-contained time period more than half a century ago but rather a persistent, ongoing process for the German nation and society.

In other words, she believes that contemporary

Germany continues to face challenges from its Nazi past.

The Nuremberg trials, held in 1945 and 1946 and formally known as the International Military Tribunal, were the highest-profile manifestation of denazification, the first step in addressing large-scale genocide carried out by the Nazis. The Allies tried 22 major war criminals at Nuremberg—the

city where the most elaborate rallies of Hitler's regime had been staged—and 12 of those criminals were sentenced to death.

But denazification was intended to reach Germans at all levels of power, and thousands of citizens were required to complete detailed questionnaires about their activities during the Third Reich. After a year of the program, more than 40 percent of public officials had been dismissed for Nazi involvement. It was widely known, however, that most major offenders lied about their participation in Nazi activities.

In March 1946, the Allies turned the denazification program over to the Germans, for a variety of reasons, including Germany's need to find citizens to run the country. After that, only major offenders faced serious sanctions, and more than 90 percent of cases were judged not to be serious. The program lost credibility, and it officially ended in 1951.

Many former Nazis held public office in the new postwar government and leadership positions in German industry. "At the swift end of denazification, Nazis returned to their former offices and positions—even to higher posts," says Wojak, the 2014–2015 Frieda L. Miller Fellow at Radcliffe. "It is as if in 1945 millions of loyal Nazis became millions of democrats overnight." She is dismayed that the end of denazification is "no longer seen as a troublesome development in Germany."

When Wojak discusses denazification, she talks about the staggering failure of the criminal justice system to address wartime crimes. "All trials for Nazi crimes inevitably provoke the question of why more people didn't fight the Nazis and help the persecuted," she says. Most important of all, she adds, is understanding "the sources of strength that enabled some people to help, to not cower and conform."

In her work as an author and historian, Wojak has focused on Fritz Bauer (1903–1968), a Jewish social democrat who was born in Stuttgart and became the youngest person in Germany to be appointed a district judge. "If anyone worked for denazification, it was Fritz Bauer," she says, referring to his time as the prosecutor who initiated the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials of the 1960s.



*Sergeant George A. Kaufman of the 9th Army, from Fort Smith, Arkansas, replaces an "Adolf-Hitler-Str." street sign with a hand-made one, "Roosevelt Boulevard," in Krefeld, Germany, March 9, 1945. Photo source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park*



*Fritz Bauer, the German attorney who initiated and prosecuted the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, held from 1963 to 1965, worked hard for denazification.*

As a young man, Bauer was sent to a concentration camp in 1933 for his resistance against the Nazis. Released after some months, he fled to Denmark and then to Sweden, where he lived in exile until 1949, when he returned to West Germany to help establish the new postwar government and a humane legal system. After assisting with the apprehension of Adolf Eichmann in Argentina in 1957, Bauer led the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, from 1963 until 1965, where 20 defendants were tried for their crimes under German criminal law. Six received life sentences, and several others received shorter prison sentences. More than half were charged only with aiding and abetting crimes committed at the concentration camp.

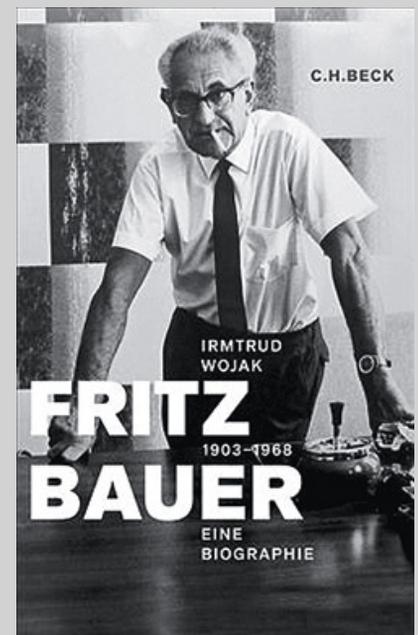
The Frankfurt Auschwitz trials are widely recognized as

marking a turning point in Nazi trials. "It was not the first criminal procedure against Nazi criminals in Germany," writes historian Rebecca Wittman in *Beyond Justice: The Auschwitz Trial* (Harvard University Press, 2005), "but it was by far the largest, most public, and most important ever to take place in West Germany using West German judges and West German law."

Following a decade of research, Wojak wrote Bauer's biography, which was published in Germany in 2009 and widely reviewed there but has yet to be translated into English. She quotes him saying, "Human beings are always able to change their behavior. We should be our brother's keeper."

Wojak continued her dedication to preserving and sharing historical truths by initiating the non-profit Buxus Foundation in 2013 to keep the voices of survivors alive. "Museums and memorial sites about the history of National Socialism are plentiful in Germany," she says. "But where is the history of survivors?"

After her fellowship, Wojak will return to Munich to lead the Buxus Foundation. "I am more convinced than ever," she says, "that we should not only focus on the traces of blood and guilt in our history. but also dare to see ourselves as actors in history rather than as mere cogs in the wheel."



## STUDENTS FIND SURVIVORS AND RESISTERS

In conjunction with her work on denazification, Wojak collaborated with three Radcliffe Research Partners to write stories about survivors and resisters in a variety of geographical and historical contexts. The stories will be featured on a new interactive website called House of Humanity, funded by the Buxus Foundation.



*Photos courtesy of Eunice Park Lee, Briana Elise Goodlin, and Adela Heera Kim*

**Eunice Park Lee '17**, a history concentrator, depicted Gustav Schroeder, who sailed the ocean liner MS St. Louis in 1939, trying to find homes for more than 900 Jewish refugees. The ship was denied entry to Canada, Cuba, and the United States. Schroeder, a German, refused to return the ship to Germany until all the passengers had been given entry to another country. The United Kingdom accepted almost 300 refugees, and the rest were allowed to enter Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. The ship returned to Hamburg with no passengers.

“Over the course of the project,” Lee says, “I was constantly pushed to reconsider many of my preconceived notions about justice and social responsibility. This was a transformative challenge that renewed my fascination with the intersection of history and human rights, and will no doubt continue to shape the future of my academic pursuits.”

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**Briana Elise Goodlin '15**, a social studies concentrator with a focus on genocide and ethnic conflict in the 20th century, portrayed another resister.

The historian Iris Origo lived with her mother at the Villa Medici, a spectacular villa in Fiesole, above Florence.

During the war, Origo and her husband lived in a new estate at La Foce, in the province of Siena, where they cared for refugee children who were housed there. Following Italy's surrender, Origo assisted many escaped Allied prisoners of war.

“The more I learned about Iris,” Goodlin says, “the more convinced I became that her courage and

dedication should be seen as an example to be followed rather than an anomaly to be admired. Sharing her story through the House of Humanity is one step in an important mission to preserve the courage and perseverance of those who shone in one of our darkest moments.”

**Adela Heera Kim '16**, a history of art and architecture concentrator with a secondary field in Germanic languages and literatures, conducted research on Franz L. Neumann, a German-Jewish political activist and labor lawyer. Neumann fled Germany's National Socialists in 1933 and eventually immigrated to the United States.

He is renowned for his book *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 1944), and for his work for the Office of Strategic Services on denazification.

“Working on this project has given me a renewed understanding of resilience,” says Kim. “Studying the many historical forms of resistance has helped me realize that a certain universality exists in the innate desire to persist, even after a traumatic event.”

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## Irmtrud Wojak >

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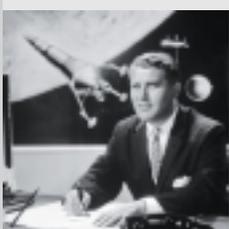
The literary critic Harold Bloom has called Henri Cole RI '15 "the central poet of his generation." Others have compared him to Walt Whitman and Elizabeth Bishop. In his essay on a day in the mind of a fellow, Cole ponders: What is fellowship?

## Finding Truth in Fiction: The Story of Varian Fry >



Novelist Julie Orringer depicts the life of Varian Fry, who saved thousands of artists from the Nazis.

## American Might: Where "the Good and the Bad Are All Mixed Up" >



Diane McWhorter RI '12 is renowned for the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, the Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*. But its scope is narrow, when compared with her new project, which follows the engineers of Hitler's unprecedented V-2 ballistic missile from the Third Reich to post-World War

Il Alabama, where they built the rocket that put the first man on the moon.

## Translating Diversity >



Harvard College student Ashford King '15 is working on a project called MuralSpeaks! with Radcliffe fellow Ben Miller to locate translations of the poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" in 142 languages.

## Big Thinkers, Big Projects >



The Radcliffe Institute announces the more than 50 scholars, scientists, and artists who will be Radcliffe fellows during the 2015–2016 year, each one pursuing an ambitious individual project within the Institute's multidisciplinary community. Only 3 percent of applicants were accepted.

## RELATED PUBLICATION



*Radcliffe Magazine, Summer 2015* >

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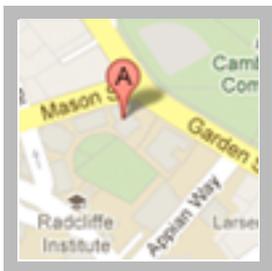
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