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American Fuehrer: George Lincoln Rockwell and the American
Nazi Party, and: Troubled Memory: Anne Levy, the Holocaust,
and David Duke's Louisiana (review)

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tion today—whether by Jews or by Christians. Greenberg’s thought is in the final analysis much broader in scope.

In his treatment of Fackenheim, Morgan once again provides an admirable synthesis of the development of his thought. He argues that Fackenheim has understood better than Greenberg and other major theologians the need to ground the argument for the continued significance of Auschwitz in the very process of philosophical thought—a process that leads from an initial recoiling from Auschwitz to a life lived (through concrete actions) in opposition to it but that does not automatically move to a higher plane, as with Hegel. Here lies the basis for Morgan’s preference for Fackenheim. Fackenheim, Morgan believes, can move us through the challenge of the Holocaust to a reaffirmation of a divine role in human history. This point has some validity, but I find it too narrow a basis for preferring Fackenheim over Greenberg. While both have made substantial contributions, in the end Greenberg’s writings remain a richer and more comprehensive resource for post-Holocaust theology and ethics.

Morgan’s book makes a solid addition to the body of Holocaust religious interpretation. *Beyond Auschwitz* will serve as a useful companion for reading the authors he has examined, and it has a strong potential for classroom use. Yet it does not tell us very much about Morgan’s personal perspective other than to say that he favors Fackenheim. This is particularly the case with respect to the concluding chapter, in which Morgan does not clearly articulate his understanding of how the Fackenheim perspective can be brought to bear on postmodern consciousness. I am glad he introduced the postmodern dimension, because it has been largely missing from post-Holocaust theological discussion. But I am disappointed with the incomplete way in which he discusses it. Certainly there are points of connection to Greenberg’s writings.

Note

1. Richard Rubenstein, conversation with author, Aspen, CO, June 2002.

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American Fuehrer: George Lincoln Rockwell and the American Nazi Party, Frederick J. Simonelli (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), xi + 280 pp., \$29.95.

Troubled Memory: Anne Levy, the Holocaust, and David Duke’s Louisiana, Lawrence N. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 616 pp., cloth \$37.50, pbk. \$18.95.

America is a complex nation; its promise of freedom and opportunity offers a beacon in a troubled world. But it is also a land with deep currents of nativism that are often expressed in antisemitic, neo-Nazi, and neofascist rhetoric and actions. Demagogues have long recognized the utility of Jew-hatred in building a political base. Conse-

quently, thinking and writing about American apostles of antisemitism and racial hatred in the aftermath of the Holocaust is a moral as well as a political imperative. After Auschwitz, antisemitism is an endorsement of the gas chamber, and racism means slave labor and deportation. When dealing with those who advocate hatred and violence toward the “other,” many questions arise, such as, What are the dynamics and strategies of the haters? And how is this hatred best combated?

The books under review examine, respectively, the career and legacy of American Nazi Party (ANP) founder George Lincoln Rockwell, and the story of Holocaust survivor Anne Levy and her successful battle to unmask David Duke. Although Duke has camouflaged Rockwell’s message of hate, his political career underscores the continuing assault on historical truth conducted by antisemites. Each study provides at least a partial response to the two questions posed above. Further, both authors issue an implicit challenge to educate and mobilize society to combat hatred. Neither Rockwell nor Duke sprang from whole cloth; each fed upon a nativistic vein in American culture, and each leaves a highly troubling legacy.

Frederick J. Simonelli’s biography of Rockwell, the self-styled “American Fuehrer,” is informative, superbly researched, and well written. Far from being the “half-penny Hitler,” as New York Mayor Robert F. Wagner characterized him, Rockwell had a large and continuing impact on radical right-wing politics in America and abroad. A disciple of earlier antisemites such as Father Charles E. Coughlin, Rockwell was viewed as a role model by those who followed him, especially Duke. Simonelli paints a chilling canvas of Rockwell’s legacy. For example, by advocating a “race-and-blood” Christianity for “besieged Aryans,” Rockwell profoundly influenced the Christian Identity Movement. “Striking against their race enemies, the Jews and the blacks,” writes Simonelli, “became a ‘redemptive act.’” Rockwell was one of the earliest members of the far right to deny the Holocaust.

American Fuehrer is the first scholarly biography of Rockwell. The author had access to a wealth of archival documents, some of which had not previously been examined, and conducted extensive interviews. The result is a careful analysis that integrates political, historical, and psychosocial insights, revealing in the process how Rockwell—a master strategist of extremism—garbed mid-twentieth-century neo-Nazism in American dress. Simonelli cites Umberto Eco’s notion of “Ur-Fascism” as a “recurring authoritarian impulse within the body politic” in explaining the Rockwell phenomenon. But economic and social factors also played a significant role. Fascism and Nazism are far from monocausal phenomena.

Rockwell was the oldest child of “Doc” Rockwell, a comedian who starred in vaudeville, and Claire Schade Rockwell, a dancer. After his parents divorced, the six-year-old Rockwell found himself in the house of an authoritarian aunt who frequently beat him. Yet the author notes that nothing in Rockwell’s childhood indicated that he would emerge as a paranoid antisemite. At Brown University, however, Rockwell detested his professors’ liberalism and claimed the institution had been overrun by com-

munists. Leaving before graduation, he enlisted in the Navy, where he became an aviator. Following his discharge, he formed the American Nazi Party. Because of the public expression of his obsessive Jew-hatred, he was dismissed from the Naval Reserves.

Although antisemitism and racism pervaded American life during Rockwell's youth, his father knew and entertained many Jewish performers. For example Jack Benny, George Burns, and Groucho Marx attended Lincoln Rockwell's christening. Rockwell's Jew-hatred far exceeded what his family considered "acceptable." In a 1958 letter, his brother Bobby suggested that Rockwell seek psychiatric care; this episode led to the dissolution of their relationship. By mid-1961, three years into Rockwell's public career, his mother was the only family member who remained in contact with him. Rockwell was assassinated in 1967 by one of his own followers.

It is not surprising that Rockwell, a proponent of authoritarian leadership, had an aversion to authority. His inability to control his temper cost him many positions. He failed in advertising, illustration (Norman Rockwell was his uncle), and public relations. Moreover, during his nine-year public career, his "storm troopers," hard-core followers, numbered fewer than thirty. Yet his experience in public relations was clearly of use. From "hatemonger hill," his Virginia headquarters, he relentlessly organized antisemitic activities. For instance, in a parody of the Freedom Riders' fight to integrate public transportation, Rockwell sent his followers on a "Hate Bus" to New Orleans to picket the opening of the movie *Exodus*. He also encouraged racist singers and musicians to perform in concerts he dubbed "Hate-o-nannies."

Rockwell's primary contribution was, however, far more dangerous than conducting public relations stunts. His call to disaffected whites was couched in terms of "White Power" and "pan-white" inclusion. Simonelli notes that White Power—Rockwell's response to Stokely Carmichael's call for "Black Power"—was adopted by whites, "both the fearful and the hateful." Pan-white inclusion, for its part, redefined the white race in a way that differed from Hitler's exclusive "Nordic-Germanic" version and from "most previous and contemporary American white supremacists, who are nativist and Protestant." For Rockwell, "dark people," led by the Jews, and "white people" were locked in a struggle for survival.

Simonelli notes the twofold consequences of Rockwell's definition of "white people." He "created a valuable strategic legacy for future white racists," but also, by including "Catholics, Slavs, Greeks, and other foreign-born whites, sowed the seeds of dissension among his hard-core Nazi following." Two factions emerged. Rockwell's chief deputy, a Germanophile named Matt Koehl, advocated the "Aryan Unity" faction, which demanded adherence to Hitlerian racial theory. The more inclusive "White Power" faction, led by Rockwell and the party's propaganda chief, John Patler, eventually prevailed, although Patler was later found guilty of Rockwell's murder.

Attempting to broaden ANP appeal, Rockwell changed its name to the National Socialist White People's Party. Moreover, in his interview with Alex Haley in *Playboy* he gave widespread publicity to Holocaust denial long before Bradley R. Smith and

others did so. Rockwell internationalized his movement with the founding of the World Union of National Socialists (WUNS), whose goal was to destroy “International Jewish Communism and Zionism.” WUNS envisioned a world order based on race and “a final settlement of the Jewish problem.” Two years prior to Rockwell’s assassination, WUNS had chapters in nineteen countries.

Several factors combined to defeat Rockwell and his movement. First was the “repulsiveness of the ANP’s assumptions.” Even after Rockwell had determined that “racial hatred was pragmatically better than antisemitism,” his 1965 gubernatorial run in Virginia ended disastrously. Despite the fact that he had clean-shaven “campaign workers” instead of storm troopers and that in campaign speeches he referred to George Wallace and Orville Faubus more than to Adolf Hitler, Rockwell garnered only about 6,500 votes. The second factor was Rockwell’s poor leadership abilities. According to Simonelli he was perpetually without funds, paranoid, and had no commitment to the democratic process.

The third factor was the policy of “quarantine” as a strategic response to anti-semites. Devised in the 1940s by Dr. Solomon Andhil Fineberg of the American Jewish Committee and specifically targeted against Gerald L. K. Smith, quarantine rested on denying publicity to Jew-haters. This entailed a two-step process: coordinating the response of major Jewish community organizations and carrying out a type of “pre-emptive strike” in the media. The latter involved telling the press about the anti-semites’ background and tactics, thus rendering their pronouncements unworthy of news coverage. Although not without critics even within the Jewish community, quarantine proved an effective response. The picture changed, however, when Holocaust survivors confronted Holocaust denier David Duke.

Troubled Memory is an exquisitely written and searing book. Winner of the 2000 Lillian Smith Book Award, Lawrence N. Powell’s thoughtful narrative tells two tales. On the one hand, he relates the story of the Skorecki family, caught in Poland during the Holocaust. Mark and Ruth Skorecki and their two young daughters, Anne and Lila, were ordinary people trapped in a situation of extraordinary evil. The Skoreckis were one of the few Jewish families to survive the Warsaw ghetto intact. The second tale concerns Anne Skorecki Levy’s encounter with David Duke during his foray into Louisiana politics.

Survivor narratives tend to emphasize two factors: the resourcefulness of the survivors and the randomness of their survival. The Skoreckis’ story is no exception. Mark and Ruth had remarkable coping skills, and they were fortunate. Their daughters, however, had to remain locked in a vegetable bin twelve hours a day. Moreover, they had to be absolutely quiet lest they be discovered by German soldiers or their accomplices. Spontaneity, laughter, weeping, exuberance—all hallmarks of a normal childhood had to be suppressed. The hidden children had to “leapfrog adolescence and jump directly to adulthood.”

Following the war the Skorecki family fled their native land, first going to Bavaria,

then in 1949 to New Orleans. There they joined the “New Americans,” a group of survivors bound by common memory and by their marked difference in experience, political persuasion, and culture from the largely assimilationist Jewish community. Powell describes several major issues of post-Shoah life in America: the survivors’ adjustment problems, the internecine struggles of the Jewish community, the threat antisemitism posed to democracy, and the role of Holocaust memory in defeating this menace.

Powell links the horror of European Nazism to the emergent threat of American neo-Nazism. Duke’s hatred of Jews is based on Nazi race theory; it is ideological rather than economically or historically determined. More media-savvy than Rockwell, Duke appeared on various television shows, had a facelift, and changed wardrobes—from a KKK sheet to a three-piece suit. Duke faced internal dissent not because of his ideas but rather owing to his reported persistent womanizing. This led to his being charged by a dissident member of his Knights of the KKK with “conduct unbecoming a racist.” The strategy of quarantine, successfully employed against Rockwell, was embraced by the largely Reform Jewish community in New Orleans. Possessing wartime memories different from their American-born co-religionists, the New Americans rejected this strategy, and urged instead physical confrontation to prevent neo-Nazi demonstrations.

Unlike Rockwell, who depended on shock, Duke relied on surprise. His anti-semitism and racism were cloaked in the mantle of the mainstream. For example, he preached nonviolence and invited women to join his newly formed Knights of the KKK in 1973. Furthermore, Duke, whom Powell terms “the thinking man’s racist,” appealed to college-educated neo-Nazis. Founding the National Association for the Advancement of White People in 1979, Duke garnered sufficient support to be elected to the Louisiana State Legislature in 1989; two years later he ran for governor.

Resistance to Duke’s politics came from two primary sources. On the institutional level, the Louisiana Coalition against Racism and Nazism, of which Powell is a member, led the anti-Duke drive. The Coalition focused on Duke’s espousal of hatred and the fact that he earned his living from a Nazi bookstore. In addition, economics played a significant role. If Duke were to win, the state would likely be boycotted by conventioners and investors. Duke was soundly defeated.

On the personal level, Anne Levy emerged as a one-person advocate for memory and justice. She reacted viscerally to Duke’s Holocaust denial. While Powell speaks of the “personal made political,” I believe it more accurate to view Levy’s response in terms of what psychohistorian Robert Jay Lifton calls “the Survivor Mission.” One of the characteristics of this mission is the search for justice, an attempt to reassert a moral order in a post-Holocaust world. Levy first confronted Duke in 1989 during a Holocaust exhibition at the state capital, where she told him that if he thought the Holocaust was exaggerated she would be glad to tell him about it. Levy worked in the Louisiana Coalition phone bank and spoke in various public venues. She participated in a television call-in program, during which she asked Duke specifically about his antisemitism, and she spoke about her Holocaust experience to students in Powell’s history course at Tulane University.

Troubled Memory offers important insights about the psychosocial impact of trauma. For instance, the author observes that sharing traumatic experiences with others “enables victims to reconstruct repressed memory, mourn loss, and master helplessness.” Further, there must be a community willing to listen and be transformed by hearing the survivor bear witness. As Elie Wiesel observes, “To listen to a witness is to become a witness.” Powell cites Primo Levi’s dictum that survivors have the “awful privilege” of acquainting the world with radical evil. Yet for all the author’s wisdom and subtlety, he appears to have overlooked the normative dimension of memory in the Jewish tradition. Biblically based, memory defines the Jewish people. “If we stop remembering,” attests Wiesel, “we stop being.” Memory and bearing witness transcend the pre-Holocaust distinction between the religious and the secular.

American Fuehrer and *Troubled Memory* help readers understand a dark but persistent undercurrent in American political life. Moreover, these works constitute an important midrash on contemporary events as antisemitism re-emerges as a global phenomenon. Now as in the early 1930s disquieting signs indicate that this phenomenon is based upon ideology rather than economics. Victories over this millennial pathology appear temporary at best. Rockwell’s assassination did not cut short the development of the American ultra-right, nor did Duke’s loss at the polls. Many Americans believe that the potential for antisemitism is limited in their country, but the rise of the Christian identity movement and the continued activity of Holocaust deniers demonstrate that it remains a permanent fringe. Adherents of the far right have condemned Simonelli’s work as unfair to Rockwell. There will, of course, always be a lunatic fringe in politics. Mendacity is tenacious.

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America, Its Jews, and the Rise of Nazism, Gulie Ne’eman Arad (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 327 pp., notes, bibl, index, \$35.00.

Gulie Arad addresses the sometimes provocative question of how American Jews reacted to the rise of Nazism. Rather than examining that response within the time frame of the twentieth century, her monograph begins at the time of the Damascus Blood Libel of 1840, an international scandal that the author believes brought American Jewry, with a population of 15,000, “to constitute, however loosely, a community” (p. 4). The study ends in 1942, when the U.S. confirmed the genocide (minus the word), and when the possibility of rescue, and even the influence to get policy-makers to consider it, were minimal. Her conclusion accords with William Rubenstein’s thesis that after 1942 nothing could be done because of the German prohibition against emigration and because of the interference of the war. Arad focuses on the role of American Jewish bystanders to the Shoah, whom she sees as impotent.

Arad does not discuss “what might have been,” a theme in discussions of on-lookers, especially from the secure shores of the United States. She asserts that condi-