Reuband, Karl-Heinz; Johnson, Eric A.: *What We Knew. Terror, Mass Murder, and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany*. New York: Basic Books, A Member of Perseus Books Group 2005. ISBN: 0-465-08571-7; 434 S.

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Sixty years after the demise of National Socialist Germany, the number of people who experienced this era first-hand has dwindled to a very small sum indeed. It must, therefore, have been with the awareness that this could be the last available opportunity to carry out such a study that the American historian Eric A. Johnson and the German sociologist Karl-Heinz Reuband embarked on this painstaking project. More than three thousand German Jews and non-Jewish Germans completed written surveys and the two authors and their assistants conducted in-depth interviews with nearly two hundred people. The questions focused on three main issues: everyday life in Nazi Germany; experiences with Nazi terror; and what the respondents 'had come to know, if anything, before the end of the war about the mass murder of Jews' (p. xxi). In terms of the range of topics covered and the sheer scale, the Johnson/Reuband survey is unique.

The book is divided into four parts, followed by a conclusion summarizing the authors' major findings and arguments. Part one contains twenty narratives from interviews with Jewish survivors, whilst part two is made up of twenty narratives from interviews with 'ordinary Germans'. Johnson and Reuband claim that the forty interviews selected for inclusion are 'reasonably representative of the entire body of interviews [...] conducted' (p. xxi). The texts are indeed testament to the varying experiences of inhabitants of Nazi Germany. Ultimately, however, one major dividing line becomes unmistakable: that between Jews and non-Jews. In order to grasp the true extent of this divergence, the reader must wait for parts three and four and the authors' analysis of their research results.

In part three, which analyzes the Jewish questionnaires, the reader learns that the answers provided 'do not point toward a German society full of anti-Semitic prejudice before Hitler came to power' (p. 269). Instead, the figures paint 'a mostly positive relationship between Jews and non-Jews that only soured after Hitler came to power' (p. 272). Thus, whereas sixty-nine per cent of Jews surveyed described the treatment of their family by non-Jews prior to 1933 as 'friendly or mostly friendly', this shrunk to only ten per cent when they were asked the same about the period *after* the Nazis came to power (p. 270, table 8.1). Although a considerable number of Jewish survivors (thirty-eight per cent) received significant help or support from Germans during the years of persecution, this nevertheless means that 'about two-thirds could not find a single German willing to help them, and one can only wonder about the Jews who did not survive' (pp. 282-283). Johnson and Reuband reveal that most Jews became aware of the Holocaust before the end of the war, and not only when they became physically swept up in it. They learnt it from many sources, including radio broadcasts and information received from family, friends and acquaintances. These conclusions, however, as the authors themselves point out, are based on a survey of Jews who survived the Holocaust, whereas 'most Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe did not' (p. 315). Indeed, it was not until 1943 that a significant number of the survivors in the authors' sample knew about the mass murder *before* deportation and not before 1944 'that a clear majority who were deported in that year knew in advance about what was transpiring' (p. 315). Hence, 'since most German Jews were deported before 1943, this means that most who were deported during the Holocaust probably were not aware that they were to be killed' (p. 316).

Part four presents some very revealing conclusions drawn from the material provided by the non-Jewish Germans surveyed. Johnson and Reuband assert that 'a majority of Germans identified with the Nazi regime at least temporarily' (p. 332). According to the results of the interviews and questionnaires, the reduction of mass unemployment was considered to be the Nazis' most important achievement. Even among people who claimed to have opposed the regime, a majority crossed

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this off on the survey. In complete contrast to the constant fear felt by most German Jews during the Nazi era, only a small minority of non-Jewish Germans surveyed said that they had 'always' feared arrest by the Gestapo. The percentage of respondents in each of the four cities surveyed was remarkably consistent, ranging from a low of only three per cent in Berlin to a high of seven per cent in Krefeld. This evidence completely flies in the face of the widely-held assumption that fear and terror were decisive in shaping the everyday behaviour of the German population. Johnson and Reuband suggest that the most important reason for this lack of fear 'is probably because the majority of citizens supported the regime or at least conformed to the system' (p. 357). With regard to the mass murder of the Jews, the survey results show that, depending on the city in question, between twenty-seven and twenty-nine per cent of Germans had received information about this before the end of the war, whilst between ten and thirteen per cent had 'suspected' that it was taking place. Given that their sample constituted people who had been relatively young during the Nazi era, and that older people were found to have been as a rule more aware of the mass murder than younger people, Johnson and Reuband controlled for the age factor and discovered that thirty-three per cent, 'or every third German, would have either „heard" or „known" something about the Holocaust before the war's end' (p. 372). The most important sources of knowledge turned out to be people the respondents knew personally, such as family members, friends, neighbours and work colleagues (p. 383, table 13.4).

The extent of knowledge about the Holocaust among Germany's non-Jewish population during the war years is so difficult to assess, that even the two authors themselves have somewhat differing evaluations of the evidence provided by their survey. Reuband contends 'that approximately one-third of the German population eventually became aware of the mass murder during the war years'. Johnson, however, believes that 'a better estimate would be about half' (p. 393). He is of the opinion that when people ask what the German population knew about the Holocaust, they are asking about what the *adult* population knew and maintains that the estimate should only, therefore, be based on those respondents who had reached adulthood before the Second World War (and the Holocaust) began. Johnson also argues that many of those who answered that they had 'suspected' it was taking place should be included in the final estimate. Whichever estimate one is inclined to accept, the shocking and inescapable result of this survey is that the mass murder of Europe's Jews was no secret to millions and millions of German citizens whilst it was still being carried out.

What We Knew is written in a style which is easy to follow, even for readers with limited prior knowledge of the issues and debates dealt with. The results of Johnson and Reuband's unprecedented study provide us with what must be the best estimates available for the critical questions posed in this book. The scale and depth of the survey which forms the foundations for the book, the scholarly treatment of its results and the lucid argumentation of the two authors make this a highly impressive and valuable work.

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