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**Review of *Folklore and Fascism: The Reich Institute for German Volkskunde*, by Hannjost Lixfeld, and *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline: Folklore in the Third Reich*, edited and translated by James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld**

Alan E. Steinweis

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, [asteinweis1@unl.edu](mailto:asteinweis1@unl.edu)

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*Folklore and Fascism: The Reich Institute for German Volkskunde.* By Hannjost Lixfeld. Edited and translated by James R. Dow. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1994. Pp. xxi + 308. \$35.00. ISBN 0-253-33512-4. *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline: Folklore in the Third Reich.* Edited and translated by James R. Dow and Hannjost Lixfeld. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1994. Pp. xx + 354. \$35.00. ISBN 0-253-31821-1.

Taken together, these two books do much to explode what they characterize as the myth of "two German folklores." This is the notion, still disturbingly widespread in German academia, that during the National Socialist era the field of *Volkskunde* was split into two distinct groups, the first consisting of serious scholars whose work remained largely untainted by Nazism, and the second consisting of hacks, publicists, and weak scholars who championed the Nazi ideology and program. By dispelling this myth,

these volumes contribute to the ever-growing body of scholarship that documents the role of traditional German elites in the legitimization and promotion of National Socialism. The simplistic differentiation between a respectable and moderate establishment, on the one hand, and a radicalized Nazi insurgency on the other, might have helped facilitate the reintegration of academic and cultural elites into postwar West German society, but it has not held up under the scrutiny of historians.

*Folklore and Fascism* by Hannjost Lixfeld, is a monographic study of a single proposed institutional base for the study of folklore in Nazi Germany, the Reich Institute of German *Volkskunde*. *Nazification of an Academic Discipline*, edited by Lixfeld and James R. Dow, is a more wide-ranging anthology of articles on German *Volkskunde* before and after 1933. Lixfeld, Dow, and the contributors to the anthology are, without exception, scholars of folklore rather than historians. All except Dow are German. Consequently, these volumes constitute an effort by scholars to come to terms with the history of their own discipline. In the epilogue to *Nazification*, Lixfeld and Dow note that attempts to expose both the record of folklorists during the Nazi era as well as the partly National Socialist pedigree of post-1945 German *Volkskunde* has met with bitter resistance in German academic circles. The younger scholars who have contributed to these volumes have been denounced as *Nestbeschmutzer* by senior colleagues seeking to protect the reputations of their own *Doktorväter* who had been active during the Nazi years. It is a virtue of both volumes that critical engagement with the history of the discipline rarely dissolves into polemics. The authors instead have compiled overwhelming documentary evidence to make their case.

Lixfeld's monograph traces the development of *Volkskunde* as an academic discipline from the German Empire through the Third Reich, focusing on the institutionalization of scholarship in the Reichsgemeinschaft für deutsche Volksforschung and the Reichsinstitut für deutsche Volkskunde, which was planned but never actually established. The book's brief text is supplemented by appendixes containing 14 useful documents. Lixfeld argues that folklorists played a key role in the construction of a *Germanenideologie* in the decades before 1933, identifying and cataloging a myriad of peculiarly Germanic customs, habits, and values. After 1933, the Nazi regime found obvious uses for such research, to which it devoted expanded financial resources. Academic folklorists who, before 1933, had operated in the "bourgeois-national" tradition readily cooperated with regime-sponsored programs, not only out of sheer academic opportunism but also because the tendencies of their previous work had been so proximate to the central assumptions of National Socialism.

Much of Lixfeld's book describes the now familiar byzantine bureaucratic machinations of Alfred Rosenberg, Bernhard Rust, Heinrich Himmler, and other Nazi leaders who sought to establish control over folklore research. Although important for understanding how *Volkskunde* became institutionalized in the Nazi state, as well as for illuminating the modalities

of academic collaboration with the regime, much of this information will seem arcane to readers who are more interested in what folklorists actually argued and wrote.

For readers seeking a more comprehensive treatment of the subject, the *Nazification* anthology, edited by Lixfeld and Dow, will probably be of greater practical utility than Lixfeld's monograph. Most of the thirteen contributions in this volume are less concerned with institutional issues than they are with the substance of *Volkskunde* as practiced during the Nazi era. With one exception, all of the contributions have been published previously in German, in some cases as far back as the 1960s. Notable contributions include Christoph Daxelmüller's account of the Nazi attack on Jewish folklore studies, Rolf Brednich's detailed analysis of folklore research on the swastika and other supposedly Germanic symbols, and Anka Oesterle's extensive examination of how folklore scholarship was organized in the SS and eventually applied in the wartime plundering of artifacts and during operations to resettle ethnic Germans. Two contributions focus on the post-1945 legacy. Wolfgang Jacobeit's article on folklore studies in the German Democratic Republic traces the search for a usable *Volkskunde* in a Communist framework and how it subverted the traditions of the discipline (although Jacobeit seems unwilling to acknowledge the problems inherent in the politicization of scholarship in the GDR). Lixfeld and Dow conclude the volume with an account of the struggles over *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* among West German folklore scholars.

Lixfeld and several of the contributors to the anthology underscore the racist, as opposed to merely culturally ethnocentric, underpinnings of a great deal of folklore scholarship produced during the Nazi period. It is therefore somewhat curious that they cling so steadfastly to the term and concept of "fascism." Radical racialism distinguished German National Socialism from other right-wing, authoritarian, nationalist movements and regimes, and *Volkskunde*, as the authors show, was among the most racist of academic disciplines in Germany. It seems to me, therefore, that the scholarship contained in these volumes undermines the notion of a generic fascism, and I wonder to what extent the frequent references to fascism are echoes of an academic "antifascism" that has more to do with post-1945 political identity than it does with heuristic utility.

The extensive bibliographies found at the end of both of these volumes should be a boon to scholars in a number of fields. Unfortunately, these important books contain German-style name indexes, making it extremely difficult to locate information pertaining to specific subjects. Also unfortunately, the difficulties inherent in translating academic German, with its long, contorted sentences and multiplicity of compound and hyphenated nouns, are conspicuous in these volumes.

ALAN E. STEINWEIS  
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, LINCOLN