



A Reply to The success of the “sub-humans”

by
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About the author

Ludwig Berlin was born 1921 in Nuremberg. He emigrated to England in 1939.

Professor Shuler’s interesting article about the reason for “the remarkable success of so many of the Jewish immigrants who came to the United States in the 1930s as teenage refugees from Nazi Germany” calls for comment.

He ascribes this success to 1) Self selection 2) Freedom and equality in the US and 3) Lack of a family “safety net”.

He reasons: “Forget for the moment the virulent anti-Semitism of the Nazis and focus on Wilhelmine Germany and / or the Weimar Republic. What were the chances of Henry Kissinger becoming Secretary of State or my friends and immigrant colleagues Walter Kohn and Raoul Hoffmann becoming Nobel Laureates in Chemistry ...?”

And again: “In discussing the interesting question posed by Gerhard Jochem and Susanne Rieger with some of my successful friends in academia and business, there was complete agreement that our career in the U.S. could not possibly have taken place in Germany completely leaving aside the Nazi period. None of us would have presumed to dream so high in this rather stifling, conservative, tradition bound society with its latent anti-Semitism.”

Well, I consulted my trusty old “Philo-Lexikon, Handbuch des jüdischen Wissens,” which was published in 1935 and found:

“Walter Rathenau: born 1867 in Berlin, died (assassinated) 1922
Minister für Wiederaufbau and Außenminister 1921/22 [Außenminister is the German equivalent of the US Secretary of State].

- Otto Wallach: born 1847 in Königsberg, died 1931
 Nobel Prize for Chemistry, 1910
- Richard Willstätter: born 1872 in Karlsruhe [died 1942]
 Nobel Prize for Chemistry, 1915
- Fritz Haber: born 1868 in Breslau, died 1934
 Nobel Prize for Chemistry, 1918.”

This list, which could readily be extended by including Nobel Prize winners for Physics and Medicine, is a refutation of Professor Shuler’s argument which, I believe, is based on too short a perspective. We should not think merely of the 1930s refugees. We should think in terms of millennia.

All of us are descendants of almost a hundred generations of survivors, of self-selectors. The freedom and equality in the United States was, and is, no doubt very helpful but there is another side. In Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany conditions for Jews were far from perfect and they were at a disadvantage. In spite of this, they achieved phenomenal success in almost every field of human endeavour. The “safety net” which German-Jewish families provided for their young did not inhibit these achievements.

I would rather introduce additional arguments to explain the success of Jews, whether refugees or not:

- Education: Are we not the People of the Book?
- Original thinking: Is ours not the first monotheistic religion?
- Being disadvantaged: Do we not have to try harder?

All this applied to the Jews of Germany.

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