

Swarthmore College

## Works

---

History Faculty Works

History

---

12-1-1998

### Review Of "Education And Middle-Class Society In Imperial Austria, 1848-1918" By G.B. Cohen

Pieter M. Judson , '78

*Swarthmore College*, [pjudson1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:pjudson1@swarthmore.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to these works benefits you](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Pieter M. Judson , '78. (1998). "Review Of "Education And Middle-Class Society In Imperial Austria, 1848-1918" By G.B. Cohen". *Journal Of Modern History*. Volume 70, Issue 4. 971-973. DOI: 10.1086/235190

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history/73>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact [myworks@swarthmore.edu](mailto:myworks@swarthmore.edu).

Swarthmore College

## Works

---

History Faculty Works

History

---

12-1-1998

### Review Of "Education And Middle-Class Society In Imperial Austria, 1848-1918" By G.B. Cohen

Pieter M. Judson , '78

*Swarthmore College*, [pjudson1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:pjudson1@swarthmore.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to these works benefits you](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Pieter M. Judson , '78. (1998). "Review Of "Education And Middle-Class Society In Imperial Austria, 1848-1918" By G.B. Cohen". *Journal Of Modern History*. Volume 70, Issue 4. 971-973. DOI: 10.1086/235190

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-history/73>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact [myworks@swarthmore.edu](mailto:myworks@swarthmore.edu).

pressed some of his actions in his strongly pedagogical memoirs. Like so many men and women accustomed to power, influence, and esteem, he left the political stage unwillingly and with considerable bitterness. He had his greatest moments in deepest crisis situations—as occupation officer in France, in the face of total collapse in 1945–46 Germany, when the Allies appeared determined to veto a strong, sensibly federal constitution, and when in the 1955 Moscow negotiations the Soviets seemed unwilling to release the remaining German prisoners of war. Yet he found it harder to sustain longer term influence at the top. One suspects that Schmid himself would have been delighted that his biographer was still ready to engage with him critically in the year of his hundredth birthday. Yet Weber evidently shares his nonideological, humane socialism, even with its unabashed elitism; and she admires his devoted struggle for close relations with his mother's native land, France, for rapprochement with Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe, for European integration, and, in opposition to the New Left's postnationalism, a love of nation, which included the dream for the eventual German reunification that he did not live to see. This splendid book, based on extensive archival research in France and Germany, will undoubtedly remain the definitive biography of this fascinating political-cultural figure, whom Willy Brandt called “the secret father of the free, democratic Germany.”

DIETHELM PROWE

Carleton College

**Education and Middle-Class Society in Imperial Austria, 1848–1918.** By

Gary B. Cohen.

West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1996. Pp. xxi+386.

Gary B. Cohen's latest book reminds historians of modern Europe that it is possible, if rare, today to employ a complex empirical analysis in order to make important arguments about cultural identity and historical experience. In his first book (*The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* [Princeton, N.J., 1981]), a brilliant study of the German-speaking community in nineteenth-century Prague, Cohen deployed a sophisticated local statistical study to analyze the larger construction of national and class identities in Austrian society. This time he examines the backgrounds of secondary and university students in order to address questions of middle-class formation and social transformation in the Habsburg monarchy. *Education and Middle-Class Society in Imperial Austria, 1848–1918* challenges several influential assumptions that have for too long structured thinking about imperial Austria's middle classes. In place of these tired arguments, Cohen's book offers a nuanced, richly complex, and comparative basis for examining the recruitment and comparative power of the Austrian *Burgertum*. In particular, Cohen asks whether secondary and higher education perpetuated the social power and cultural values of elite groups in the monarchy, the traditional view, or whether it provided a means for members of diverse classes, ethnic groups, and religious minorities to gain social advancement on their own terms?

Cohen's first chapters trace changing educational policy in imperial Austria, starting with the post-1848 reforms of Leo Thun, continuing with the generally expansionary policies initiated by the liberals in the 1860s and 1870s, and followed by the antiliberal backlash of the Taaffe years (1879–93). Here Cohen demonstrates the limits of state policy in shaping the educational choices of young Austrians. Targeted expansion of opportunity in the liberal era, for example, brought unexpected consequences in the

form of growing general interest in higher education, a trend the antiliberal policy makers of the 1880s and 1890s, try as they might, simply could not reverse. Enrollment numbers and specific educational choices (technical vs. classical secondary schools, for example) may have reflected changing economic opportunities, particularly during the depression years starting in 1873, but by 1900 demand for education had assumed its own powerful dynamic quite apart from state policy and economic growth. As increasingly mass-based political movements linked educational opportunities more explicitly to their own nationalist programs, the state could not ignore demands for expanded opportunities in higher education.

In the most compelling section of the book, Cohen examines first the changing backgrounds of secondary and university students, and then their changing social experience. Here he also addresses difficult questions about the larger functions of the Austrian educational system and, indirectly, about the power and influence of middle-class society in the empire. Did higher education serve to reproduce elite values and power, or did it tend to break down those values by admitting an increasingly diverse group into the ranks of the educated elites? Naturally, Cohen does not present the alternatives in such simplistic terms. On the whole, however, his work uses empirically based arguments to suggest that Austrian society was far more "modern," far more democratic, and also far less paralyzed by nationalist conflict than historians have traditionally allowed.

It seems clear from Cohen's statistical analyses that, in ethnic, religious, and class terms, Austria's secondary and university students constituted a remarkably diverse group and that at least in ethnic and religious terms, this diversity increased steadily in the period 1848–1914. As one might expect from his previous work, the author does not shy away from complexity when he comes to speak about cultural identity. Cohen consistently takes care to emphasize the contingency of the very identities he examines. His statistics never simplify German-speakers into German nationals, or Polish-speakers into Catholics, for example. He is carefully attuned to the nuances of local constructions of cultural identity, as much for students in the Bukovina or Galicia as for students in Bohemia, Moravia, or the Alpine lands. We learn that while those who represented themselves as German-speakers maintained a far higher, if steadily declining, proportion of students than their numbers in the general population, Bohemia and Moravia produced relatively more of these students than the economically more isolated Alpine lands. Similarly, the remarkable statistical growth in numbers of Polish-speaking students around the turn of the century often included hidden others like Jews, Ukrainians, and foreign students. Cohen's analysis also enables him to link particular regional, ethnic, or religious groups to specific choices of faculty. Thus, in general terms, for example, the Galician Polish and Alpine German Catholics preferred the philosophical or theological faculties, while Jews chose medicine or law, and Protestants the technical faculties. It is a strength of Cohen's analysis, however, that even these generalizations are made not in static but in dynamic terms, as other factors came into play to alter the educational strategies of particular ethnic, religious, or occupational groups over time.

Cohen consistently places his analysis of the social background of students in the context of comparable developments in the rest of Europe, particularly those in Germany. As in Prussia, for example, the largest numbers of secondary school graduates in Austria came from lower middle-class backgrounds, the children of families without property holdings or higher education. Within this larger category, however, the proportions of students from white-collar backgrounds increased significantly as those from peasant and craft families slowly declined. And not surprisingly, matriculated students at the Czech University or Technical College in Prague were far more likely to come

from lower middle-class backgrounds than their counterparts at the German universities and technical colleges who generally came from higher, more educated social backgrounds. There were noticeable differences between Austria and the German states as well: Austrian secondary schools and universities, for example, produced comparatively more graduates from families of wage workers. And the number of students from propertied families grew more in Germany, where faster and earlier economic development strengthened the size and relative representation of the commercial, financial, and industrial classes.

One of the hallmarks of Cohen's previous work has been his ability to relate local events to larger developments at the state level, to connect the situation of the individual to the construction of collective social identities. Although his first book more clearly articulated the different elements of micro- and macrohistories, this book makes sense precisely because of its attentiveness to local context in forging its larger theoretical arguments. If anything, this reviewer wished the book could have been longer in order to make room for even more local examples.

Historians of Central Europe owe Cohen an enormous debt of gratitude. His work invites us to discard popular but unproven paradigms and to view the society of imperial Austria in dynamic new terms. And, in a time of increasing polarization within academe over questions of method, Cohen's authoritative voice demonstrates how creative and careful empirical study can help to answer the most difficult historical questions about cultural identity.

PIETER M. JUDSON

*Swarthmore College*

**The Road to Romanian Independence.** By *Frederick Kellogg*.

West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1995. Pp. xvi + 265. \$32.95.

*The Road to Romanian Independence* represents a slightly revised and enlarged (by a single chapter) version of Frederick Kellogg's 1969 dissertation, "Rumanian Nationalism and European Diplomacy, 1866–1878."<sup>1</sup> (There is no indication of this, however, either in a note or in the bibliography.) Kellogg's theses, which arrived twenty-six years ago, remain basically unchanged although more recent publications have been added to the bibliography.

Kellogg's central theme is the influence of the diplomacy and foreign policy of the major European powers on the Romanian policy of independence, which formed a central component of Romanian nationalism in the period between 1866 and 1880. It came at the end of a period in which Romania belonged to the Ottoman Empire as a half-independent duchy; at the same time, since the Paris Treaty of 1856 Romania had possessed a collective guarantee of its autonomy by the major European powers. The beginning and ending dates, marking the election of Carol the First of the House of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen as the Prince of Romania in 1866 and the final recognition of an independent Romania by the European powers in 1880, delimit an important period in the gradual emergence of Romania as an independent state. One important goal of Romanian nationalism, complete independence, received a vigorous boost through the selection of a foreigner as prince, who pursued this goal consistently. Such

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Kellogg, "Rumanian Nationalism and European Diplomacy, 1866–1878" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1969).