

The Mind of the Nation: *Völkerpsychologie* in Germany, 1851-1955

By Egbert Klautke



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Völkerpsychologie played an important role in establishing the social sciences via the works of such scholars as Georg Simmel, Emile Durkheim, Ernest Renan, Franz Boas, and Werner Sombart. In Germany, the intellectual history of "folk psychology" was represented by Moritz Lazarus, Heymann Steinthal, Wilhelm Wundt and Willy Hellpach. This book follows the invention of the discipline in the nineteenth century, its rise around the turn of the century and its ultimate demise after the Second World War. In addition, it shows that despite the repudiation of "folk psychology" and its failed institutionalization, the discipline remains relevant as a precursor of contemporary studies of "national identity."

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Editorial Review

Review

"This concise and lucid book makes the case that scholars have consistentlymischaracterized and unappreciated Völkerpsychologie, a now obscure but once robust set of approaches to understanding national or collective psychology...A learned, well-researched, and fluidly written book, The Mind of the Nation ably traces the lineage of a now forgotten intellectual project, situating its apogee between Herder and Hegel, on the one side, and Nietzsche and the new social sciences, on the other. Along the way, it fills gaps in the historical literature and sheds new light on the activities and influences of both familiar and lesser-known figures." • Canadian Journal of History

"Klautke charts the historical and systematic differences between the concepts of Völkerpsychologie over a century in a book of fewer than 200 pages. Readers will consult with profit this short, but important history of ideas, science, and culture, which deals with the arguments and topics relating to Völkerpsychologie." • German Historical Institute London Bulletin

"Klautke provides readers both with useful biographical summaries and with cogent accounts of his protagonists' specific interpretations of Völkerpsychologie. But he also expands his narrative horizon beyond mere intellectual biography. Laudably, he pays special attention to the broader reception of their writings in an attempt to correct the misperception that Völkerpsychologie was merely 'political propaganda dressed up as a social science'." • German History

"Overall, Klautke has written a clear and concise narrative that summarizes the history, evolution, and reception of Völkerpsychologie...Scholars of many disciplines would find this book to be an enlightening read. They would gain a better understanding of how Völkerpsychologie contributed to the development of the social sciences and the humanities. The book would also be a great choice to assign in an introductory course in psychology, sociology, or the history of science. It would be an excellent method to introduce students to the concept of discredited sciences. It would likewise provide an interesting example of how disciplines are constantly changing and how these shifts influence the development of both academia and scholarly research." • German Studies Review

"...within the field of German intellectual history this book has a solid position, fleshing out and succinctly characterizing a set of thinkers who have often been passed over quickly in wider studies, and giving a nuanced appreciation of a set of debates and concerns which have at times been caricatured or dismissed. It shows that proponents of Völkerpsychologie were important participants in a whole international discourse, stretching across Europe and the Americas, on key subjects of the 'character' of nations and peoples." • European History Quarterly

"...a well-written and compellingly constructed study on a topic that, until now, has been unjustly ignored. There are still many open questions, but any study that tries to answer them will have Klautke's book as an essential reference. In addition, it is a valuable and original contribution to the history of the human sciences from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, ranging from sociology and anthropology to the psydisciplines." • German Politics & Society

"This is a very careful and meticulous study of the history of a forgotten science, namely Völkerpsychologie, a scholarly attempt to study the psychological structure of nations. We can now understand not just its

complex origins reaching back to the German intellectual history of the early 19th century, but also the intellectual intricacies in the works of its main protagonists." • Uffa Jensen, Max Planck Institute for Human Development

"This is a valuable and original study of an important subject... The author presents a new narrative of the genesis and decline of Völkerpyschologie [that] is characterised by careful and illuminating scholarship, starting with detailed analysis of the principal authors' writings and proceeding to evaluate their impact." • Mark Hewitson, University College London

About the Author

Egbert Klautke is Senior Lecturer in the Cultural History of Central Europe in the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at University College London. He is the author of *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten:* "Amerikanisierung" in Deutschland und Frankreich, 1900–1933 (2003).

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