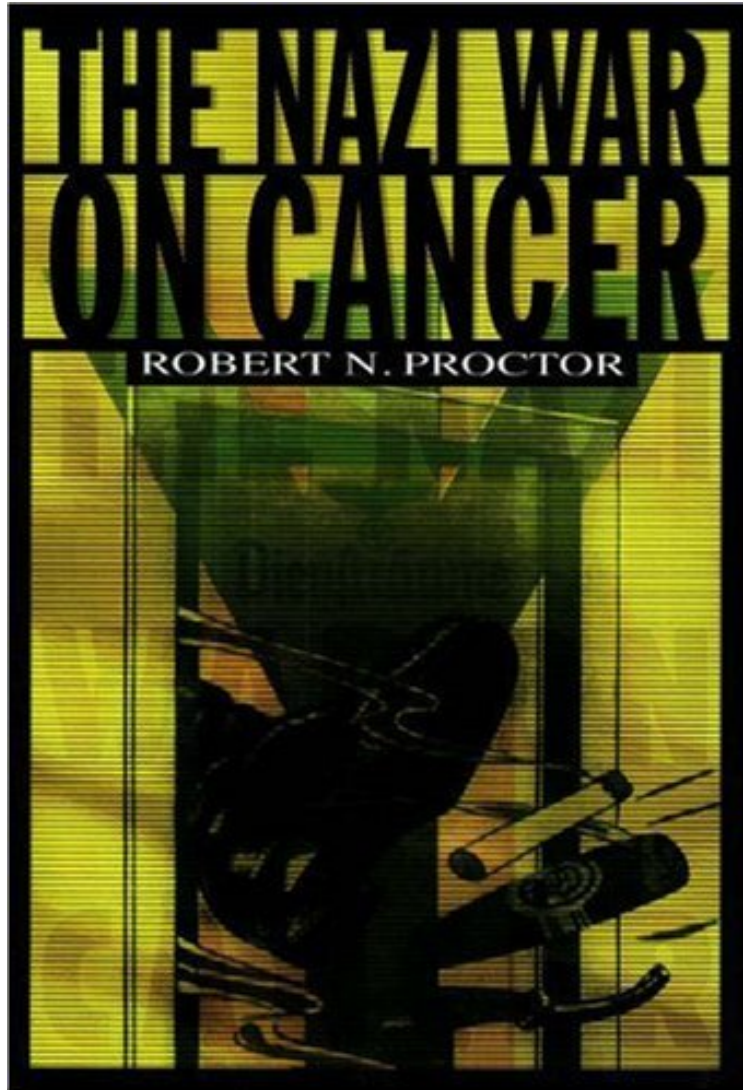


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The Nazi War on Cancer

Robert N. Proctor

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Robert N. Proctor : The Nazi War on Cancer before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Nazi War on Cancer:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. this book was better than I had expected By Aloma D. Alberthis book was better than I had expected, it talks about industrial problems that could be from today's headlines as well, for a historian of the time or someone interested in public health issues like advertising of cigarettes or what's in our factories and food a good history read.8 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Almost Too Objective By R. Schultz This book was written in large part to correct the public impression that science under the Nazi regime was uniformly perverse, biased, and Mengele-monstrous. Instead, Proctor wants to show that legitimate scientific

investigation was not only carried on, but even encouraged in the Third Reich. As much as everyone would like to discredit all research done by anyone associated with Nazism, Proctor points out that such blanket condemnation led to the world's subsequent dismissal of even valid cancer research that could have saved countless lives had it been considered. In order to illustrate this point, Proctor reviews many areas of cancer research done during the Nazi years. One of his chapters deals with the mass X-ray screenings instituted in many parts of Germany to detect tumors. In connection with this early initiative to root out cancer, Proctor makes the point that Nazi medicine never presented a monolithic front. At the same time these screenings were taking place, there was a large faction of German doctors objecting to them on the theory that X-rays promoted more cancerous growth than they detected. You might find this section of the book to be of particular interest in light of the current debate over mammographies. Another chapter deals with the German Government's concern over carcinogens in the workplace. German researchers did one of the first, most comprehensive studies linking asbestos and cancer. Then there's a chapter on German concern with the link between diet and cancer. This led to campaigns promoting whole wheat bread and fresh, organic produce. Much of this initiative overturned earlier, unscientific beliefs that held fresh fruit and vegetables actually promoted cancer. However, the section of the book dealing with the links that German researchers documented between tobacco smoking and cancer might be the most relevant to current debates. Smoking and cancer of the mouth had long been associated. But until Third Reich scientists began to do meticulous statistical studies and autopsies, few suspected a specific link between smoking and lung cancer. Then, as now, many tobacco manufacturers argued that factors such as auto exhaust were responsible for more lung cancer than cigarettes. However, Proctor cites comparative studies done by German scientists showing lung cancer rates in rural areas (where there were few cars in the 1930's) and heavily trafficked urban areas to be nearly identical. Also, women had markedly less lung cancer, likely as a result of Hitler's insistence that German women avoid cigarettes in order to keep themselves undefiled for childbearing. The Germans coined the term "passive smoking" and campaigned for smoke-free environments generally. The German studies could have been used to counter many arguments being made by smoking apologists today, but most of these studies were automatically ignored or dismissed due to their association with the Nazi regime. Therefore we are covering the same ground again. So Proctor does a good job giving credit where credit is due for pioneering cancer research. Still, the book left me feeling somewhat frustrated. I kept hoping for some more definitive condemnation of Nazi medical research. Even if Reich studies often came up with some right answers - the research was done in the wrong spirit, and therefore was ultimately dangerous. Cancer diagnoses and cures were sought in order to better enable the Germans to do their "duty" of being healthy. Everything was framed in terms of one's duty to the Higher Powers and to the German Nation as a whole. Failure to be fit for doing practical work was considered virtually criminal. So as Proctor sums up, the "war on disease became a war on the diseased," including those deemed to be diseased by virtue of age, ethnicity, or any medical/mental health problem. Proctor does consider some of these philosophical questions in his final chapters - which are well worth reading. He argues, no doubt rightly, that if a person is bad, that doesn't mean everything that person produces should be dismissed as bad. Such an attitude leads to logical and practical absurdities. However Proctor further argues that no equation should be made between the enforcements favored by modern fanatic anti-smokers and any facet of the Nazi program. That aspect of his even-handed approach might give a reader a little more pause. If there's danger in allowing the wrong letter of the law to prevail, there's also danger in allowing the wrong spirit to prevail.

36 of 41 people found the following review helpful. A Healthy National Interest
By Glenn Jordan
As we walk away from the twentieth century, its most publicized reign of terror, Nazi Germany, continues to confound many. Modern history has tirelessly portrayed the sheer evil unleashed on Europe by Hitler and the National Socialist Party. The Nazis, along with the Soviet Communists, ensured that the people of Central and Eastern Europe had to endure at least a half-century of life within the brutal confines of totalitarian society. However, the passage of time presents us an opportunity to see Nazism as something much subtler than an overpowering evil force. Historian Robert N. Proctor guides readers through Hitler-led Germany in "The Nazi War on Cancer." He examines a ruling regime and society grappling with health problems such as the exposure of factory workers to carcinogens in the plant, the damage caused by alcohol and tobacco use and the impact of poor diet. Proctor considers how public health concerns influenced the goal of creating a stronger, healthier and racially-pure population. The deliberation over public health during the Nazi era pushed German researchers and scientists ahead of their counterparts around the rest of the industrialized world in connecting many health problems to the fast-paced and often stressful twentieth century lifestyle. Proctor does not portray the German medical elite as being completely manipulated by the Nazis. In fact, many men of science used the Nazi takeover of Germany as an opening to purge Jews, Socialists and Communists from important research positions. Proctor concludes that the Nazi experience with public health gives us an opportunity to understand the appeal and triumph of fascism as more than an aberration. Overall, Proctor presents a solid study of German medicine under Nazi rule. He brings many interesting facts to light which may surprise many readers who picture the Nazis as an all-powerful wave washing over and consuming all of Germany. In presenting his study, Proctor is mindful that many may misuse his facts to discredit modern public health initiatives or to justify the existence of Nazism though he does not let this stop him from delivering a thought-provoking interpretation of a little known aspect of twentieth century history.

"Lively prose and clear organization make this a wonderful book. The Nazi War on Cancer makes a major contribution to the field of Nazi history, with its attention to progressive' concerns within repressive and racialized settings. Rather than normalizing' evil, Proctor refines it in his sustained discussions of the ethical paradoxes he has encountered in his research."--Claudia Koonz, Duke University "This book is interesting, informative, original, well-researched and well-written, and critical yet balanced in its judgments. It breaks new ground, and should attract considerable interest among and beyond historians of science, medicine, and National Socialism."--Mark Walker, Union College "Robert Proctor is an outstanding historian of science and an outstanding historian of the Third Reich. By establishing Nazism's pioneering contributions in the areas of preventive medicine, environmentalism, and public health, he takes us right to the heart of the most difficult questions in the analysis of fascism. His treatment of smoking and cancer will be a revelation. This book troubles the politics and ethics of historical interpretation in the very best ways."--Geoff Eley, author of *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* "The Nazi War on Cancer makes a major contribution to the field of Nazi history, with its attention to progressive' concerns within repressive and racialized settings. Rather than normalizing' evil, Proctor refines it in his sustained discussions of the ethical paradoxes he has encountered in his research."--Claudia Koonz, author of *Mothers in the Fatherland* and *The Nazi Conscience* (forthcoming) "Racily and wittily written, Proctor's interesting book is a brilliant demonstration of how marginal the Nazi past has become to contemporary health issues. A conclusion long since obvious to the former inhabitants of Bosnia or Rwanda, shot or hacked to death, in the very long shadow of the Holocaust."--Michael Burleigh, author of *Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide* "A profound and provocative analysis of the very essence of medical research and health policy. While Robert Proctor focuses on cancer research in Nazi Germany, his book is a detailed examination of the basic value system underlying medical research and public health policy. This unsettling and fascinating account is a must read' for every medical scientist."--William E. Seidelman, M.D., University of Toronto "This book is a major contribution to the history of science and medicine in the Nazi era. Nazism emerges as a kind of vast hygienic experiment that tried to create an exclusionist utopia, by using both good science' and laudable health drives, along with murderous practices aimed at the Jews and others deemed to be unworthy of life.' The book should be of interest to anyone concerned about the ethical, political, and social implications of modern science."--Robert Gellately, author of *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy* "Robert Proctor has once again produced a brilliant volume that will both fascinate and infuriate readers.... Just as he did in his previous book *Racial Hygiene*

.com Familiar as we are with the horrific history of Nazi medicine and science, it may come as a surprise to learn that the Nazi war against cancer was the most aggressive in the world. Robert N. Proctor's thought-provoking book, *The Nazi War on Cancer* recounts this little-known story. The Nazis were very concerned about protecting the health of the "Volk." Cancer was seen as a growing threat--and perhaps even held a special place in Adolf Hitler's imagination (his mother, Klara, died from breast cancer in 1907). The Nazi doctors fought their war against cancer on many fronts, battling environmental and workplace hazards (restrictions on the use of asbestos) and recommending food standards (bans on carcinogenic pesticides and food dyes) and early detection ("men were advised to get their colons checked as often as they would check the engines of their cars..."). Armed with the world's most sophisticated tobacco-disease epidemiology--they were the first to link smoking to lung cancer definitively--Nazi doctors were especially passionate about the hazards of tobacco. Hitler himself was a devout nonsmoker, and credited his political success to kicking the habit. Proctor does an excellent job of charting these anticancer efforts--part of what he terms "the 'flip side' of fascism"--and, along the way, touches on some unsettling issues. Can an immoral regime promote and produce morally responsible science? Or, in Proctor's words, "Do we look at history differently when we learn that ... Nazi health officials worried about asbestos-induced lung cancer? I think we do. We learn that Nazism was a more subtle phenomenon than we commonly imagine, more seductive, more plausible." Proctor is no apologist--one of his earlier books, *Racial Hygiene* is a scathing account of Nazi atrocities--but he clearly wants to engage in the complex moral discussions surrounding the fascist production of science and Holocaust studies. Proctor's thorough research, excellent examples, and dozens of illustrations are complemented by his authoritative prose. *The Nazi War on Cancer* is a fine addition to the literature on both the Holocaust and the history of medicine. --C.B. Delaney
From Publishers Weekly
In a book that plumbs both the dark and light sides of the utopian impulse, Penn State history of science professor Proctor (*Racial Hygiene*; *Cancer Wars*; etc.) takes a look at the healthy side of fascism. Hitler's government implemented many laudable public health measures, including the regulation of pesticides, asbestos and food dyes. Germany, Proctor notes, had the most aggressive anti-smoking campaign in the world, and German scientists were the first to link smoking with lung cancer. As Proctor outlines the sophistication of German medical science and the ambitions of Nazi public health policy, he asks provocative questions about the relationship between scientific culture and political culture, describing, for instance, how cancer metaphors were used to describe the "subhumans" the regime sought to exterminate as tumors on the German body. Proctor's moral compass stays true: he doesn't exonerate Nazi science but rather looks at how the cult of the Aryan race, which stressed healthy living, played out in the everyday work of scientists who concerned themselves with public health. "My intention is not to argue that today's antitobacco efforts

have fascist roots, or that public health measures are in principle totalitarian," he writes. Instead, Proctor seeks to give his readers a more complex appreciation of "how the routine practice of science can so easily coexist with the routine exercise of cruelty." At this, he succeeds admirably, giving readers a thoroughly researched account of Nazi medical science and posing difficult questions about the ultimate worth of good research carried out under the auspices of evil. Illustrations. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Discovering that forward-looking health restrictions (about smoking, asbestos, radiation, and diet) were mixed in with the monstrous policies of Nazi-era German medicine, Proctor investigates without sensationalizing. His first-rate history restores complexity and a squeamishly recognizable contemporary element to our often cartoonish picture of that time. An excellent work of scholarship that is also well told. (LJ 4/15/99) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.