

**“Hast thou murdered, and also taken possession?”  
Nazi Wrongs and the West German Equalization of Burdens Law**

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The project investigates, for the first time, how the West German Equalization of Burdens Law (*Lastenausgleichsgesetz*, LAG) coped, in theory and in practice, with cases involving Nazi wrongs. The LAG was enacted by the West German legislature on August 14, 1952. It intended to financially compensate those Germans who had suffered economic harm due to World War II. A major reason for the law was the eight million ethnic Germans living in West Germany who had fled or been expelled from Central and Eastern Europe after the war. Many of them had had to leave behind all their belongings and hence had lost everything they possessed. The ultimate purpose of the LAG was to offset these massive material injuries. Compensation covered lost household goods, apartments, factories, and other real estate. The LAG has thus affected millions of German citizens since its enactment in 1952. Nevertheless, it is a largely forgotten issue in today's German society and a much-understudied topic in historiography.

Drawing on hitherto unrevealed documents from the Equalization of Burdens Archive (*Lastenausgleichsarchiv*) in Bayreuth, Germany, and cross-checking LAG claims with land registry records, the research project aims to establish the LAG as a significant field of research. The project particularly focuses on how the law dealt with Nazi crimes. How did it address instances in which expelled ethnic Germans demanded compensation for lost assets that they had obtained through Aryanization, i.e., the Nazi plunder of Jewish property, and through Germanization, i.e., the takeover of local non-Jewish property? How did the law deal with cases in which expellees filed for compensation for lost real estate that had been used as sites of forced labor during World War II? What does the LAG and its application in practice reveal about how West Germany has dealt with its Nazi past?

By focusing on Nazi wrongs, the project closes a major research gap on the intriguing LAG and enhances our understanding of both the participation of ethnic Germans in Nazi atrocities in Central and Eastern Europe and West German society's coping with the Nazi past.