

Conversations in History

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UNDERGROUND EUROPE

and the Anti-Fascist Imagination



In the 1930s and early 1940s, oppositional politics in Europe operated in a subterranean mode and European émigrés urged the British and American publics to look underground for allies in the fight against Hitler. This hope in the underground, justified or not, was a relatively new phenomenon. For decades the underground had served as the quintessential space of subversion, but exiled anti-fascists reimagined it as a space of democratic freedom, popular agency, and legitimate politics. With particular attention to the German antifascist group New Beginning, this talk traces the changing fortunes of the underground from the murky world of Russian terrorism in the late nineteenth century to the myth of “Underground Europe” invented in the era of fascist dictatorships. While postwar European politics may have diverged from the plan of Underground Europe, the 1960s counterculture would revive the underground as its chief subversive metaphor.

Terence Renaud is a postdoctoral associate and lecturer in the Humanities Program and the Department of History at Yale, where he is also a fellow in the Whitney Humanities Center. A Boston University alumnus, he received his doctorate in intellectual history from the University of California at Berkeley.

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Room 504, History Department, 226 Bay State Road