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From SS-Obersturmbannführer to dentist president: The astonishing career of Gerhardt Steinhardt*

Introduction: Until 2022, Gerhardt Steinhardt has been the only university lecturer to be elected both President of the DGZMK and the DGMKG. At the same time, he is the only DGZMK president with an SS membership in the Third Reich. This paper looks at Steinhardt's life and work, and in particular clarifies how these seemingly irreconcilable findings fit together.

Material and methods: The central basis of the study are primary sources from the Schleswig-Holstein State Archives and various file collections from the Federal Archives in Berlin. In addition, a critical reanalysis of secondary literature by and about Steinhardt was carried out, with special reference to a dissertation on the life and work of Gerhard Steinhardt published in 2004.

Results: Steinhardt was one of the leading professors in the Federal Republic of Germany, especially with his contributions to the physiology and pathology of the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) and his clinical expertise as a maxillofacial surgeon. He was also regarded as an assertive professional politician. During the Third Reich, he joined the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party), the SS (Schutzstaffel) and other Nazi organisations, resigned from the church in accordance with Nazi ideology and took on various political tasks. After 1945 he was enacted for political reasons but managed a return to the university in the 1950s.

Discussion and conclusion: Steinhardt was extraordinarily well connected both during the Nazi era and in the Federal Republic. He also impressed with his broad education and professional versatility. Politically, he showed himself to be strongly adapted in both systems. In the Third Reich he appeared as a convinced National Socialist and used his political network to establish a career. After 1945 he tried to construct a distance to Nazi ideology through a series of deliberately false statements. In the end, he was able not only to continue his university career, but even to expand it considerably. He also achieved high social honors.

* In 2022, the DGZMK Board unanimously passed a resolution to posthumously revoke the honours awarded to Gerhard Steinhardt (Honorary Fellowship, Golden Badge of honour) due to his political entanglement in the Third Reich.

Keywords: maxillofacial surgery; National Socialism; SS (Schutzstaffel); temporomandibular joint; Würzburg

Introduction

Gerhardt Steinhardt's career offers two striking features: On the one hand, he was the only university lecturer until 2022 to be elected both president of the "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Zahn-, Mund- und Kieferheilkunde" (German Society for Dental and Oral Medicine, DGZMK) (1965–1969) and president of the "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Mund-, Kiefer- und Gesichtschirurgie" (German Society for Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, DGKG, today: DGMKG) (1969–1971), which clearly shows his broad professional recognition in dentistry and maxillofacial surgery. On the other hand, he is the only DGZMK president with SS membership and extensive contacts with influential Nazi officials..

This paper deals with Steinhardt's life and work. In a first step, Steinhardt's academic and political work will be analysed and classified. Then it will be clarified how Steinhardt was able to achieve such success despite the aforementioned political burden. In this context, it is also necessary to look at the only biography of Steinhardt to date. In 2004, Wencke Fischer wrote a dissertation on his life and work and explains Steinhardt's loyalty to the regime under National Socialism with the statement: "People in high and important positions, like Prof. Dr. Dr. Steinhardt, had no other option than to join the NSDAP and SS" [12].

But is this assertion accurate? And how did Steinhardt himself see and outline his role in National Socialism? These questions are discussed in detail in this article. Accordingly, a strong focus is placed on Steinhardt's political stance in the Third Reich and on his denazification procedure.

Material and methods

The study is based on a variety of primary sources from the Schleswig-Holstein State Archives, the Federal Archives in Berlin and the Cologne University Archives. In addition, Steinhardt's publications were evaluated – with special attention to his writings during the Third Reich.

Furthermore, a critical analysis of the secondary literature on Steinhardt's places of work and the afore-

mentioned biography was carried out. The same applies to the laudations and necrologies published by and about Steinhardt.

Results and Discussion

1. Gerhard Steinhardt: Central stations in his life

Gerhard Friedrich August Wilhelm Steinhardt (Fig. 1; [9]) was born on May 24, 1904 in Damerkow in Pomerania [7, 12, 14–16, 33, 36–41, 46, 47, 50, 52, 76, 77]. He was the son of the farmer and farm owner [4] Wilhelm Friedrich Steinhardt and his wife Berta Pauline Ernestine, née Hapke, and had three younger siblings [12].

Gerhard Steinhardt graduated from the Realgymnasium Belgard (today Białogard, Poland) in 1923. In the same year he enrolled in Heidelberg to study chemistry but changed to dentistry after two semesters at the same university. Here he passed the dental examination in November 1927. At that time, the Heidelberg Dental Institute was headed by Georg Blessing (1882–1941) [13]; the other authoritative teachers were the titular professor Gerhard Weißenfels (1890–1952) [13] and Elsbeth von Schnizer [13, 28], who habilitated under Blessing in those years.

Steinhardt took up an assistant position with Blessing after his studies. In 1928 he received his doctorate (Dr. med. dent.) with the thesis "Zur Pathogenese der zirkulären Karies am Milchgebiss" (On the pathogenesis of circular caries in the milk dentition) [53]. His doctoral supervisor was the Heidelberg pathologist Siegfried Gräff (1887–1966) [12]. At that time Steinhardt studied medicine – parallel to his part-time work in the Heidelberg prosthodontics department. In 1931 he passed the medical examination in Heidelberg. He completed the mandatory practical year at the Medical Clinic of the University of Heidelberg with Richard Siebeck (1883–1965) [12] and at the Pathological Institute of the Katharinenhospital Stuttgart with the oral pathologist Herbert Siegmund (1892–1954) [43, 51]. In June 1932 he received his licence to practise medicine and in December 1932 he com-



Courtesy of "Deutscher Ärzteverlag".

Figure 1 Portrait of Gerhard Steinhardt [9]

pleted his medical doctorate (Dr. med.). This second dissertation, "Über besondere Zellen in den alternden Mundspeicheldrüsen (Onkocyten)" (On special cells in the ageing oral salivary glands [oncocytes]), was again a pathological study. It was supervised by Siegmund and submitted in Heidelberg [54]. The starting point of Steinhardt's study were the "oncocytes" described by Herwig Hamperl (1899–1976) in 1931, which made Hamperl famous within a very short time [32].

After his second doctorate, Steinhardt worked for another year as an assistant at the Stuttgart Institute of Pathology: there he now devoted himself to his habilitation project – namely "Untersuchungen über die Beanspruchung der Kiefergelenke und ihre geweblichen Folgen" (Studies on the strain on the temporomandibular joints and their consequences for the tissue) [55]. From 1933 he was also an assistant at the Dental Institute of the University of Cologne under Karl Zilkens (1876–1967) [13], where he soon became head of the prosthetic department.

In September 1933, Steinhardt married the factory owner's daughter Elisabetha Gutermann. Their only child together, a daughter, was born in 1934 [12].

The next career step followed in the same year: in November 1934 he submitted the above-mentioned ha-

bilitation thesis in Cologne [55], with Zilkens and the pathologist Ernst Leupold (1884–1961) [43] acting as reviewers. The formal route via the Cologne medical faculty and via Karl Zilkens was necessary because the Katharinenhospital in Stuttgart did not have university status and therefore had no habilitation rights. Steinhardt was able to complete the procedure in July 1935 and was appointed Privatdozent. During that period, there was a change of head in Cologne dentistry: Zilkens – a member of the Catholic “Deutsche Zentrumspartei” (German Centre Party) – was considered politically suspect by the Nazis; he had already been dismissed in 1934 and was officially forced to resign in 1936. Steinhardt, however, remained unaffected by this measure: in 1935, he was able to move to the Surgical University Clinic in the Bürgerspital in Cologne as an assistant to Hans von Haberer (1875–1958) [43], where he expanded his general surgical knowledge; he worked there until February 1937 [12].

In March 1937 Steinhardt took up a visiting professorship at the State Dental School in Tokyo. For three years he lectured there on oral pathology and worked as an assistant at the surgical department [4]. In November 1939, while still in Tokyo, he was appointed associate professor in Cologne. After his return to the German Reich in May 1940, he then took up a position as senior physician at the University Clinic of Maxillofacial Surgery in Berlin. This clinic, directed by Otto Hofer (1892–1972) [40, 62], was considered leading in the German Reich. There Steinhardt also got to know the senior physicians Heinrich Hammer (1891–1972) [13] and Ewald Harndt (1901–1996) [13, 18, 66]. Steinhardt's time in Berlin also saw an important private change: after his first marriage had been divorced in July 1942, he married the dentist Annemarie Jänicke (*1915) in August 1942. Jänicke had been acting as ward physician in the surgical department headed by Hofer since March 1941 [5]. Three children were born of this second marriage [12].

Steinhardt was dismissed from university service in 1945. He left

Term of office	Name	NSDAP Membership	Life data
1906–1926	Otto Walkhoff	+	1860–1934
1926–1928	Wilhelm Herrenknecht	+	1865–1941
1928–45, 1949–54	Hermann Euler	+	1878–1961
1954–1957	Hermann Wolf	+	1889–1978
1957–1965	Ewald Harndt	+	1901–1996
1965–1969	Gerhardt Steinhardt	+	1904–1995
1969–1971	Eugen Fröhlich	+	1910–1971
1972–1977	Rudolf Naujoks	–	1919–2004
1977–1981	Werner Ketterl	+	1925–2010

Table 1 The presidents of the CVDZ (from 1933: DGZMK) who experienced the Third Reich as adults and their party-political orientation

Berlin and arrived in Satrup near Flensburg. There he worked as a self-employed dentist from August 1945 to December 1949, with his wife acting as a “dental assistant” [12]. However, he was temporarily detained in Neuengamme near Hamburg from December 1945 to February 1947 [48].

In 1950 Steinhardt obtained a lectureship at the University of Kiel: his former colleague Heinrich Hammer had in the meantime become director of the Kiel Dental Institute and was able to arrange that (minor) teaching position for him [12].

With effect from April 1, 1952, Steinhardt was appointed head of the newly founded jaw clinic of the (non-university) “Städtische Krankenanstalten Bremen” (Bremen Municipal Hospitals). There he soon gained professional recognition, especially in the field of therapy of temporomandibular joint disorders [12]. In July 1956 he obtained a civil servant position there and was promoted to department director. Nevertheless, he retained his lectureship in Kiel.

In 1957, the next step in his career followed: Steinhardt was appointed (non-tenured) associate professor and clinic director at the Uni-

versity of Würzburg, succeeding Karl Peter (1896–1959), who was seriously ill. After Peter's death in 1959, he was appointed tenured associate professor there [12, 42, 44].

At the beginning of 1961, Steinhardt then took the opportunity of another guest professorship – this time at the Medical Faculty of the University of Alexandria in Egypt, where he worked as a lecturer and surgeon for several months.

Once again, the return from abroad was followed by a promotion: in March 1962, Steinhardt was able to take up a full professorship at Erlangen University; at the same time, he was appointed Director of the Clinic and Polyclinic for Dental Diseases there. Steinhardt had thus climbed the last rung on the career ladder as a university lecturer. From the winter semester of 1969/70 to the summer semester of 1972, he also acted as provisional head of the Department of Orthodontics in Erlangen [12].

Steinhardt formally became emeritus professor on September 30, 1972, but remained provisional director until October 1, 1973. He then moved with his wife to Feldafing on Lake Starnberg. During this period, he suffered from the late effects of a

self-experiment: as a young researcher he had infused a colloidal solution of the then new X-ray contrast medium Thorotrast into the ductal system of his parotid gland [12, 71]. The agent had the desired effect, but later nodules formed in the tissue and the cells eventually degenerated. Thus, a parotidectomy had to be performed, which resulted in peripheral facial paresis.

Steinhardt died on June 18, 1995 in Feldafing and was buried in the local mountain cemetery (section A, grave no. 16). His widow subsequently moved to Rottach-Egern (Rupertihof) [12].

2. Steinhardt's scientific and professional status in German dentistry

Steinhardt's career was impressive: already at a young age he had gained experience abroad and held leading positions in both prosthodontics and oral surgery. He had acquired profound expertise in pathology and was also trained in internal medicine and general surgery. He was able to publish basic studies (in the field of temporomandibular joint disorders), but was also considered an accomplished clinician. In addition, he had a track record in university and professional politics: He was Dean of the Erlangen Medical Faculty in 1965/1966 and was also, until 2022, the only university lecturer to chair both the DGZMK and the DGKG (today: DGMKG) [10, 12, 16, 33].

It was precisely the professional versatility described above that was appreciated by contemporaries. Erwin Reichenbach (1897–1973) [19] and Eugen Fröhlich (1910–1971) [30] emphasised: “The range of his training is unusually wide. Apart from working as an assistant in prosthodontics and surgery at the specialist dental clinics in Heidelberg and Cologne [...] we find him [...] as an assistant physician at the internal clinic in Heidelberg, the surgical clinic in Cologne and at the pathological institute of the Katharinenhospital in Stuttgart, where Siegmund was instrumental in determining his later main direction of work” [50]. Indeed, Siegmund laid the foundation for Steinhardt's career. Konrad Thiele-

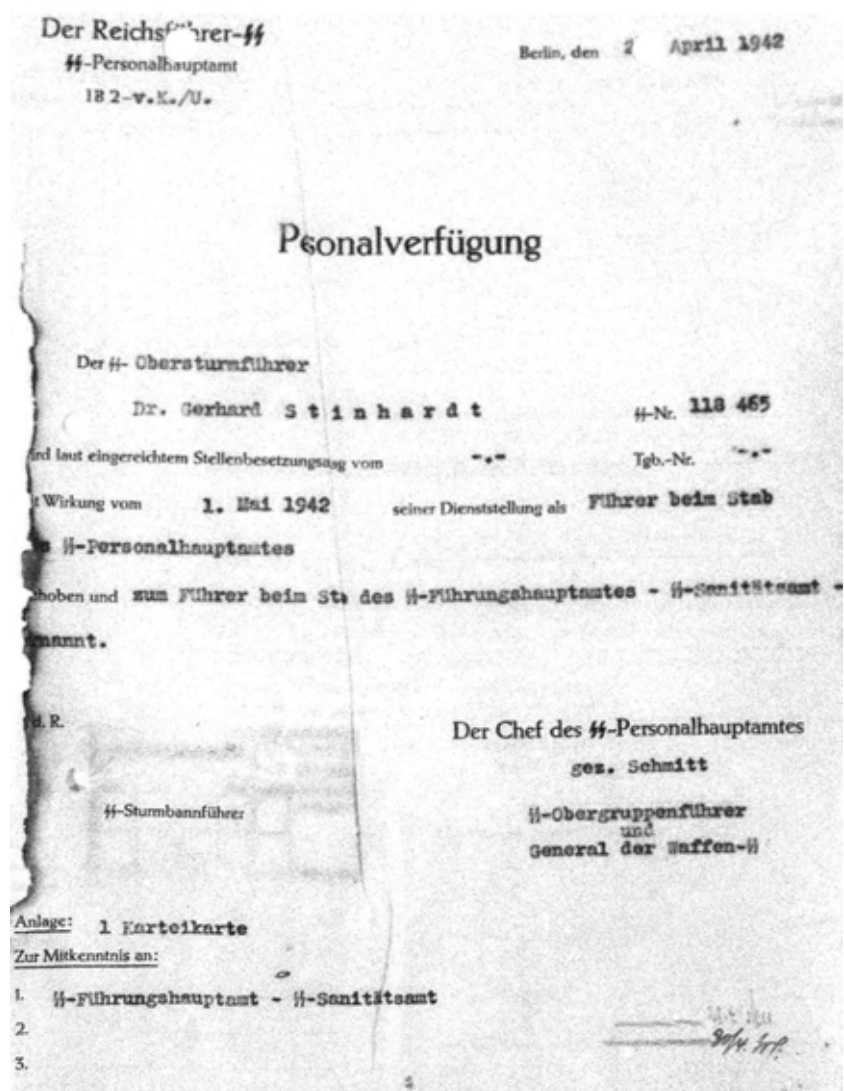


Figure 2 Document concerning Gerhard Steinhardt's SS membership (1942) [6].

mann (1898–1985) [13] was also part of Steinhardt's early network: he met him around 1932 at the Katharinenhospital in Stuttgart. Together they investigated the connections “between occlusion and temporomandibular joints”. Both later also worked together in the field of focal infection [49].

The early studies on the temporomandibular joint conducted with Siegmund are still considered Steinhardt's most important contributions and it was no coincidence that one of the research papers from this period was awarded a prize by the Adolf Witzel Foundation in 1934 [56]. Ewald Harndt particularly highlighted Steinhardt's habilitation thesis on this topic [37]. Karl Häupl (1893–1960), international pioneer of

orthodontics [20], also paid tribute to Steinhardt's studies on the temporomandibular joint [35]. Even decades later, Steinhardt showed his commitment to this field: in 1989, in collaboration with Albert Gerber (1907–1990), he wrote a textbook entitled “Kiefergelenkstörungen – Diagnostik und Therapie” (Temporomandibular joint disorders – diagnostics and therapy) [72].

As clinic director in Erlangen, Steinhardt then established a “Department for Functional Dentition Analysis” – the first institution of its kind in the German-speaking world; Oskar Bock (1915–1979) became head of the department in 1964.

Steinhardt's scientific focus [76] also included salivary gland research [57, 64, 71], the management of

mandibular and temporomandibular joint fractures [68, 70, 74], tumour therapy [67, 69, 71], the therapy of bite anomalies and jaw malpositions [60, 61, 73], prosthetic treatment of the gap dentition or the role of the temporomandibular joints in prosthetic planning [59, 63, 65] and focal infection [58]. No scientific, but clinical fields of work were root tip resection and the therapy of cleft lip and palate.

Steinhardt was not a “prolific writer”. In terms of quantity, his oeuvre of around 90 publications remained significantly behind that of other DGZMK presidents. Werner Ketterl, for example, published well over 300 papers [31], Hermann Euler over 240 [25, 34] and Hermann Wolf [29] wrote more than 180 publications.

Notwithstanding the basic research-oriented contributions to TMJ, Steinhardt was considered a good clinician and surgeon [15]. Steinhardt’s student Ferdinand Sitzmann (*1939) noted: “He was able to single-handedly translate scientific pretension with technical operative skill into practice [...] He [...] was able to make the right decision at the right moment. Through his performance and example, he was a natural, self-evident authority” [52].

Steinhardt, who continued to play golf into old age [52], was regarded by his colleagues as sociable and eager to debate. Harndt noted: “Steinhardt prefers ‘uncomfortable’ colleagues; he loves sharp, objective discussion [...]” [37]. Sitzmann also confirmed this characteristic: “He loved sharp, factual discussions [...]. Tolerance towards dissenters was an important maxim” [52].

Steinhardt’s trainees found in him a committed mentor, which Martin Herrmann (1895–1976) [13] also emphasised in a laudation [38]. In addition to the aforementioned Ferdinand Sitzmann, his academic students included Manfred Straßburg (1930–2014) and Hans-Dietrich Mierau (1930–2019).

A critical undertone, on the other hand, can be found in Carl-Heinz Fischer (1909–1997) [34], who as Rector of the University of Düsseldorf (1970–1972) was also one of the

powerful protagonists of the discipline. He stated in his memoirs that Steinhardt had “done everything” to become DGZMK president in 1965 and to prevail against the opposing candidate Ulrich Rheinwald [11].

The fact that Steinhardt was highly respected and well networked among his colleagues becomes clear from the large number of offices, awards and honours he received [10, 12, 78]: In addition to the two presidencies in the DGZMK and the DGKG (DGMKG) mentioned above and the office of dean, he served as press officer of the then DGKG as early as the 1950s. In 1960 he was appointed honorary member of the Italian Dental Society. In 1970 and 1971 he served as conference president of the DGMKG. In May 1973 he was appointed honorary member of the Swiss Dental Society and in the same year he received the Badge of Honour of the “Deutsche Zahnärzteschaft” (German Dental Association). In 1974 he was awarded the Golden Badge of Honour of the DGZMK, in 1977 he became an honorary member of the DGZMK and in 1980 an honorary member of the DGMKG on the occasion of the 30th annual conference in Zurich. The “Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Funktionslehre” (Working Group for Functional Theory, DGFDT) also appointed him as its honorary member.

3. Gerhardt Steinhardt and National Socialism

Steinhardt joined the NSDAP shortly after the Reichstag elections of March 3, 1933 (admission May 1, 1933; membership no. 2,117,571) and also decided to join the SS as early as summer 1933 (admission August 1, 1933; no. 118,465). He also became a member of the “NS-Ärztebund” (Nazi Medical Association). Furthermore, he joined the “NS-Volkswohlfahrt” (Nazi People’s Welfare) and the “NS-Dozentenbund” (Nazi Lecturers’ Association) (admission January 1, 1940) [1, 4, 6].

In the archive files Steinhardt repeatedly describes himself as “gottgläubig” (God-believing). This term had been introduced by the Nazis for those believers who had renounced the institutionalised Chris-

tian churches for ideological reasons and was therefore regarded as a sign of particular closeness to National Socialism. Steinhardt had left the Protestant Church in 1935 [5, 6]. Steinhardt’s second wife Annemarie Jänicke was not a party member, but also classified herself as “gottgläubig” [5].

Whether Steinhardt was convinced of the Nazi ideology or acted opportunistically is difficult to assess retrospectively. What is certain is that he supported the Nazi regime with his various memberships and by leaving the church. His stay in Tokyo from May 1937 to May 1939 must also be placed in this context: In the Third Reich, research stays in the partner country Japan [45] were always carried out in close coordination with political decision-makers. Only representatives loyal to the regime were considered for exchange with Japan. This was also evident in the Steinhardt case. For example, the files of the Federal Archives contain the minutes of a meeting that took place on September 3, 1936 between the Japanese host and rector of the Tokyo university, Professor Thol Shmanine, the dental “Reichsdozentenführer” Karl Pieper (1886–1951) [23] and the “Reichszahnärztesführer” Ernst Stuck Groß (1899–1979), who was in Tokyo at the time, would return to Germany in the spring of 1937 and that Steinhardt would take his place [4]. Groß – also an avowed National Socialist – was to leave early to replace Zilkens, who had been forced to resign, as head of the Dental Clinic of the University of Cologne [13]. Only one day after the meeting, Pieper then officially proposed Steinhardt as Groß’s successor to the head of the NS-Dozentenbund – Hermann Hiltner – pointing out that Steinhardt had been an NSDAP member since 1933 and was thus politically reliable and that there were no other noteworthy candidates [4].

Before Steinhardt left for Japan, he was “honorably discharged” from the SS; his reinstatement was envisaged for the time of his return. In the first year of his stay in Tokyo, however, Steinhardt then received information that “former members of

GERMAN De-nazification Committee
Deutscher Entnazifizierungsausschuss

Kreis: Land Schleswig-Holstein

After consideration of this case we recommend that
Nach Beratung des Falles schlagen wir vor, daß

Professor Dr. S t e i n h a r d t Gerhard
(Name) (Christian name)
(Name) (Vorname)

Who was interviewed /not interviewed be
Der persönlich befragt wurde /nichtpersönlich befragt worden

Dismissed (entlassen wird) Nichtbestätigung in Amt.

Reason (Begründung) wird

Further information required St. war von 20.12.1945 bis 7.2.1947 in Neu-
Nähere Auskunft wird erwünscht engamme interniert (vorläufig kategorisiert in
Gruppe III.)
St. war Mitglied der NSDAP seit 1933. Er hat der
allgemeinen SS von 1935 bis 1937 angehört und
hatte dort den Rang eines Unterscharführers in
der Sanitätsstaffel. Er ist 1933 aus der Kirche
ausgetreten. St. ist im Jahre 1937 als Gastpro-
fessor für einige Jahre nach Japan berufen worden und ist deshalb 1937
aus der SS ausgeschieden. Es erscheint zweifelhaft, inwieweit die Be-
rufung des St. als Gastprofessor nach Japan auf seine Zugehörigkeit
zur SS und seine besondere politische Zuverlässigkeit zurückzuführen ist.
Auf alle Fälle kann St., der im Jahre 1933 der NSDAP beigetreten ist,
zugleich aus der Kirche austrat und seit 1935 Mitglied der SS im Range
eines Unterscharführers war, keineswegs als nur nominales Mitglied der
NSDAP angesehen werden, zumal Umstände, die St. ernstlich entlasten könn-
ten, nicht erreichbar sind. Der Ausschuss hält daher einstimmig eine Zu-
lassung des St. zur Universität für politisch nicht tragbar.
Einstufung in Gruppe III. Ausschluss von allen Ämtern unleitender
Tätigkeit in der Privatwirtschaft.

Chairman (Vorsitzender)

Date Datum: 22. July 1947

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Figure 3 Denazification notice for Gerhardt Steinhardt dated July 22, 1947 [48].

the SS who are abroad can remain in the SS on application for the duration of their stay abroad". Steinhardt took this information as an opportunity to proactively apply for instant reinstatement in the SS. The local group leader in charge supported Steinhardt's application. On October 27, 1938 Steinhardt received the message that his application had been granted: "You are reinstated in the Schutzstaffel with effect from September, 20" [6].

Steinhardt's demonstrative zeal had an effect: only a few months later – on January 30, 1939 – he was appointed SS-Untersturmführer. In addition, his stay in Japan, originally scheduled for two years, was ex-

tended by one year. This success message was sent to Steinhardt by Pieper by telegraph after Otto Koellreutter (1883–1972) had given Steinhardt a positive report. This information is found in a correspondence between Pieper and Steinhardt dated 4 May 1939 [4]. Koellreutter, a professor of law, was, like Pieper, a convinced National Socialist. He had already come to prominence in 1934 as the author of "Der deutsche Führerstaat" (The German Führer State) [43]. Koellreutter was in Japan during those years and had apparently got to know Steinhardt in Tokyo.

In view of his promotion to Untersturmführer, Steinhardt wanted to

adapt his uniform in Tokyo to the new SS grade. Therefore, on June 9, 1939, he requested the "sending of the [matching] sleeve stripes as well as the collar insignia" for a fee, in order to be able to wear the uniform in a correctly adapted form at meetings of the NSDAP local group Tokyo-Yokohama [6]. Steinhardt had joined the aforementioned local group in Tokyo and functioned there as a "Blockleiter" (block leader); this emerges from a letter dated November 5, 1939 [4].

Steinhardt was in regular correspondence with Reichsdozentenführer Pieper during his stay in Japan. He made no secret of his attitude to Nazi politics. On December 1, 1939, for example, he wrote to Pieper: "We have followed the victory of our armies in Poland with enthusiasm. Now our eyes turn to our brave navy, which we all hope will continue to deal such considerable blows to the British fleet in conjunction with the Luftwaffe that proud England will soon fall to its knees [...]. For Führer and people may it bring victory over presumptuous England and her mean methods of war leaders and propaganda. With heartfelt greetings and Heil Hitler!" [3].

At the end of April 1940, Steinhardt began his return journey to Germany. Already in 1939, it had been explored in the German Reich how and where Steinhardt could continue to be employed after his return. Karl Friedrich Schmidhuber (1895–1967) [27] – director of the Heidelberg Dental Clinic, leader of NS-Dozentenbund in Heidelberg and also a member of the SS – announced as early as 1939 that he would make a position available for Steinhardt at his institution [75]. At the same time, however, there were efforts to get him into position as a lecturer at the Charité. This proposal came from none other than Max de Crinis (1889–1945), prominent ministerial advisor for medical matters in the Berlin Ministry of Science and full professor of neurology at the Charité [43]. It was explicitly supported by Pieper.

It was precisely against this background that Steinhardt was appointed professor in November 1939 – in absentia [75]. This titular profes-

sorship was formally conferred on him at his last university location: in Cologne. By doing so, Steinhardt was able to take up his post at the renowned University Clinic for Maxillofacial Surgery at the Charité in Berlin as professor (and senior physician) (May 1940). This clinic was considered a career springboard and was also timely from a professional point of view: since Steinhardt had previously worked mainly in prosthodontics (and oral surgery) at the dental clinics in Heidelberg and Cologne, he was now able to gain important clinical experience in maxillofacial surgery.

In 1942, the dental chair at the University of Tübingen had to be filled. The Tübingen Medical Faculty put Steinhardt [13] on its list of three favourites, in addition to the much older colleagues Walter Adrion (1891–1960) [13] and Karl Greve (1897–1942). All three were party members. In addition to professional assessments, it was customary at the time to obtain expert opinions on the political views of each list candidate. One of the opinions on Steinhardt came from Reichsdozentenführer Pieper: on February 24, 1942, he praised Steinhardt in the highest terms and stated that he had “worked to a very significant extent for Nazi Germany in Japan scientifically, practically, but also politically”; he also pointed out that Koellreutter was of the same opinion [4]. Gustav Borger (1899–1989) [13, 43], temporary head of the Department of Science in the Nazi Lecturers’ Association, came to the same conclusion on March 30, 1942 [4]. The Tübingen chair ultimately went to Adrion, who was 13 years older and far more experienced. All the experts involved according to the files – Erwin Reichenbach, Otto Hofer and Eugen Wannemacher (1897–1974) [43] – had assessed Steinhardt positively, but also indicated that he was still in the process of gaining in-depth surgical experience. Wannemacher stated: “It can be assumed that his development in maxillofacial surgery will soon be completed, so that he will be able to fully represent this field” – implying that this point in time had not yet been reached [4].

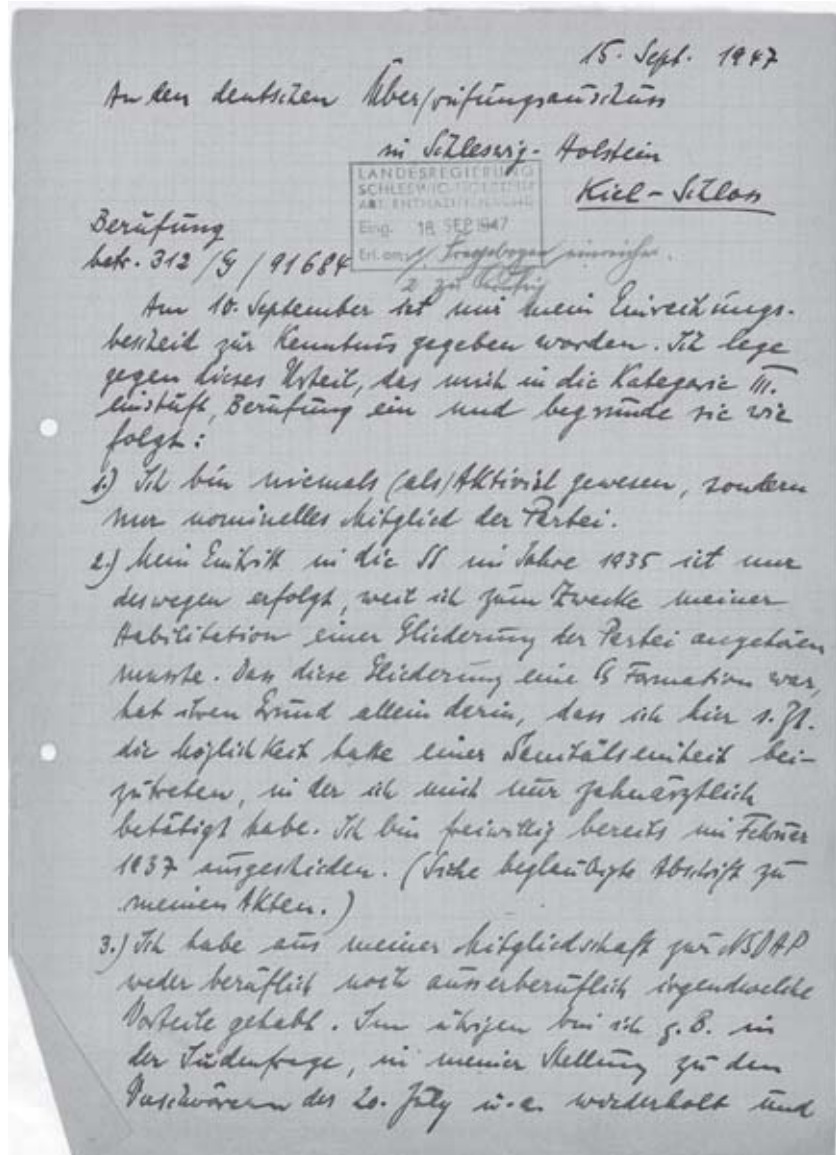


Figure 4 Letter from Steinhardt to the Review Committee dated September 15, 1947 [48].

Shortly before the end of the Third Reich, another appointment opportunity seemed to arise: There was a professorship to be filled at the German University in Prague, where Steinhardt was again counted among the favourites in 1944 [2]. But the end of the war got in the way: instead of filling the position of clinic director, the entire German University was dissolved in 1945 and the clinic was “handed over” to the local maxillofacial surgeon František Kostečka (1893–1951).

When comparing Steinhardt’s attitude and activities in the Third Reich with other dental university teachers covered in this series, it is

striking that he was much more politically involved – not only at the level of memberships, but also through personal networking with influential Nazi officials.

Steinhardt’s network ranged from the central functionaries of the dental profession (Ernst Stuck, Karl Pieper) to the responsible representatives in the Nazi lecturers’ association (Gustav Borger, Hermann Hiltner) to the “Theorist of the Führer State” [43] Otto Koellreutter and the powerful ministerial advisor Max de Crinis. Steinhardt sought and cultivated these contacts. Therefore, Wencke Fischer’s statement that “people in high and important positions, such as

Prof. Dr. Dr. Steinhardt was," had "no other option" at that time "than to join the NSDAP and SS" [12] is clearly inadequate: Steinhardt's actions, unlike those of the majority of university teachers [17], went beyond "purely nominal" memberships. Joining the SS and holding the position of SS-Obersturmführer (cf. Fig. 2) were also by no means typical. This is shown by the fact that not even one in ten of the approximately 400 dental university lecturers in the Third Reich had SS membership, as a still unpublished study by our research group shows. Among the SS members, practitioners and rather insignificant scientists predominated. At most, the professors Karl-Friedrich Schmidhuber (1895–1967) [27] and Eugen Wannemacher (1897–1974) [13] attained similar career positions – but even they did not come close to Steinhardt in academic terms.

Steinhardt had also established a network beyond the aforementioned Nazi functionaries, which already proved useful in the Third Reich, but also after 1945: Hans von Haberer [43] had hired Steinhardt at the Cologne Surgical University Hospital in 1935 – at a time when its previous head Karl Zilkens had been suspended and was thus no longer eligible as an academic mentor. At the beginning of 1942, von Haberer then gave Steinhardt a positive reference – in the context of the Tübingen appointment procedure – as Pieper mentioned in his letter of February 24, 1942 [4]. Von Haberer was a university-political "heavyweight": as Rector, he was at the head of the politically centralised University of Cologne from 1935. Heinrich Groß – Zilkens' successor in Cologne – also exerted a supportive influence on Steinhardt's career: in 1940, as the responsible expert at the University of Cologne, he supported Steinhardt's appointment there as a titular professor; it took place in absentia because Steinhardt was still in Tokyo [75]. Heinrich Hammer in turn provided him with a lectureship at the University of Kiel in 1950 and thus enabled him to make his first connection to the university in the post-war period. Ewald Harndt, who, like von Haberer, Groß and Hammer, was a party

member before 1945, supported Steinhardt in his career within the DGZMK: under Harndt's presidency Steinhardt moved up to the DGZMK board, and after Harndt's retirement Steinhardt became his successor [33]. The fact that the two cultivated a friendship was shown, among other things, by the fact that they honoured each other with laudations and also referred to their personal relationship [8, 36, 37, 66].

The questions of how Steinhardt's denazification proceeded and whether he critically reflected on his relationship to National Socialism after 1945 still require an answer:

The denazification procedures pursued the goal of determining the political burden of those affected. In the end, they were to be classified in one of five categories (I main culprits, II incriminated [activists], III lesser incriminated, IV followers and V exonerated). Steinhardt was initially held in the British internment camp Neuengamme at the end of 1945, as he had been "provisionally" classified in group III (cf. Fig. 3; [48]). He was not allowed to leave the camp until February 1947.

In the denazification proceedings, it was established practice that those affected procured character references – popularly known as "Persilscheine". The name was derived from the detergent "Persil", because the certificates were intended to cleanse the person concerned of any accusation of political incrimination. In Steinhardt's case, too, the statements – including a statement by Karl Zilkens – were intended to "prove" his political distance from National Socialism. Thanks to the practice of character references, the trial chambers increasingly developed into "Mitläuferfabriken" (follower factories). In the end, even obviously incriminated National Socialists were mostly denazified as followers (group IV) or even exonerated (Group V) – at the latest in the revision proceedings [17].

In the case of Steinhardt, however, the denazification committee came to the conclusion in July 1947 that he was to be classified in Group III (cf. Fig. 3; [48]). The reason given was that Steinhardt "could by no means be regarded as only a nominal

member of the NSDAP, especially since circumstances that could seriously exonerate Steinhardt are not apparent. The committee therefore unanimously considers an admission of St. to the university to be politically unacceptable" [48]. The last sentence was of decisive importance, because it meant that Steinhardt's desired university career would be blocked.

The latter submitted a revision request on September 15, 1947, which was common practice (cf. Fig. 4; [48]). But Steinhardt's objection mainly contained false statements – which was rather unusual in this form and obviousness. Steinhardt's statement about his SS membership was particularly brazen: he claimed, on the one hand, that his entry into the SS had only taken place in 1935 – at the time of his habilitation and exclusively against this background – and, on the other hand, that he had left the SS "voluntarily as early as February 1937". Both were untrue: he had already joined the SS in 1933. Above all, however, he had not finally left the SS in 1937 as Unterscharführer. He had only suspended his membership "in honour" for purely formal reasons because of his stay in Japan, in order to rejoin on his own initiative the following year and subsequently achieve the rank of SS-Obersturmführer. Steinhardt had apparently withheld this crucial fact from the committee in the first proceedings – for in the denazification decision of July 1947, it was erroneously stated that he had already left the SS in 1937 on his own initiative as a Unterscharführer, which he was given credit for.

In his appeal, Steinhardt also emphasised that he had disapproved of anti-Semitism. In doing so, he wrote on an attached sheet under the heading "Einstellung zur Rassenfrage" (Attitude to the question of race) the (incomplete) sentence: "Gelegentlich der Berufung nach Japan durch das dortige Kulturministerium Austritt aus der SS, 1937" (On the occasion of the appointment to Japan by the Ministry of Culture there, resignation from the SS, 1937) [48]. This remark was apparently intended to suggest that he felt prompted by Nazi policy

on the “racial question” to “resign” from the SS and saw the appointment to Japan as a suitable opportunity to do so.

Furthermore, Steinhardt claimed to have been “only a nominal member of the party”; moreover, he stated that he had had “neither professional nor non-professional advantages of any kind” due to his membership in the NSDAP [48]. These two statements also did not correspond to the facts – in more ways than one: his research stay in Tokyo would have been inconceivable without his membership and without political protection. In addition, there is evidence that he acted as a “Blockwart” in Tokyo and appeared in SS uniform – this also does not fit the picture of a purely nominal party membership. The same applies to his (unmentioned) promotions in the SS (1939, 1940), his appointment as titular professor in absentia (1940), initiated by Max de Crinis and Pieper, and to the two list placements in the aforementioned appointment procedures for professorships (1942, 1944). The provision of the position of senior physician at the Charité (1940) was also the result of party-political protection.

Thus, the question of whether Steinhardt critically reflected on his relationship to National Socialism after 1945 can be answered with a clear “no”. The opposite was the case: he suppressed incriminating facts and glossed over his own role.

Unfortunately, there is no explicit paper in Steinhardt’s denazification files that could shed light on whether his aforementioned revision request of September 15, 1947 was successful. However, there is a document dated October 4, 1947, which again notes the classification in Group III. Another letter showing the same classification is not dated [48]. Thus is it most likely that the original classification (III) was retained. This is also indicated by the fact that Steinhardt actually only returned to the university in a roundabout way and with considerable delay (a mere lectureship in Kiel in 1950, a non-university management function in Bremen 1952–1957). And yet he ultimately managed to pass through all the stages of a successful university career.

Conclusions

Steinhardt showed remarkable scientific and professional achievements. He was medically broadly trained, acquired several sub-specialties within the field of dental medicine and achieved recognition both in basic research and in the clinic. He was also an excellent networker; this is shown by the numerous offices and functions Steinhardt attained.

In the Third Reich, he clearly served the Nazi regime, joined several Nazi organisations and used his contacts to Nazi functionaries and party comrades for his own career development. Some – other university teachers such as the aforementioned Karl Pieper [23], Fritz Faber (1887–1961) [22], Heinrich Fabian (1889–1970) [21] or Hans Fliege (1890–1976) [26] – also derived considerable professional advantages from their proximity to National Socialism, but the latter would hardly have been able to achieve a university career without political protection, while Steinhardt was also far above average in purely professional terms.

Ultimately, of all the DGZMK presidents who experienced the Third Reich as adults and who are examined in more detail in this series, he exhibited the strongest political commitment. It should also be pointed out that Steinhardt constructed a distance to Nazi ideology in the denazification proceedings through a series of very obvious, blatant false statements. Although euphemistic claims can also be identified, for example, in the proceedings of DGZMK presidents Harndt [18] or Fröhlich [30], these were less misleading than in Steinhardt’s case. So, despite the political commitment described above, Steinhardt found his way back to success in post-war Germany.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest within the meaning of the guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.

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