



Peter C. Caldwell, Karrin Hanshew. *Germany Since 1945: Politics, Culture, and Society*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. xiii + 366 pp. \$31.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4742-6241-5.

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Teaching postwar German history as a separate theme makes perfect sense. Of course, even today, Germany in many ways still stands in the shadows of the Nazi era and the Second World War, but this does not imply every course should have to start with Hitler, Bismarck, or even Luther. Germany's development from a defeated and divided, morally and economically bankrupt nation under foreign rule in 1945 into the affluent democracy and leading member of the European Union it is today merits its own courses and programs. Still, teaching postwar German history comes with challenges. It is, for instance, hard to find a good textbook in English on the matter, as I discovered some fifteen years ago, when I taught about the "Berlin Republic" for the Duitsland Instituut of the University of Amsterdam (Germany Institute or DIA). I ended up using *Germany since 1945* (2004) by the Irish historian Pól Ó Dochartaigh, a fine textbook that sheds light on all essential events and developments, without, however, really challenging students on an intellectual level.

The same-titled *Germany Since 1945*, a new textbook recently published by two American historians, should therefore receive a very warm welcome. For one, it brings the story to the present day and age, presenting a full chapter on the turbulent decade between 2007 and 2017. The

economic turmoil of the European financial crisis, the party-political fragmentation of the Merkel era, and the hesitant foreign policy of the reluctant leader Germany are all neatly discussed based on the crucial publications and entries in the debate. Moreover, far more than its predecessor, the new textbook really tries to portray and bring to life the ideas and politico-intellectual debates that founded and accompanied Germany's course since 1945. It is an approach that comes through in suggestive sentences like this one about the mental state of the country right after the war: "Amid the destruction, Germans tried to make sense of what had happened and how they, as a nation, had gotten to this dark moment in history" (p. 7).

The authors are less interested in examining these ideas and debates for their own sake, aiming instead to create within their readers a deep understanding of what it meant (and means) to be German. As a recurring theme that enables many fruitful discussions in class, the book sketches how the people living in the parts of Central Europe associated with Germany negotiated a degree of common identity and how they related to other national communities in Germany's neighborhood and in the wider world. From this in essence very classical vantage point of historical empathy, they then venture upon an intense, very

well-written analytical narrative of postwar German history.

This perspective fits well with the authors' backgrounds, since they have, as lecturers and researchers, always combined the history of German politics with that of its cultures, mentalities, and ideas. Peter C. Caldwell (Rice University) is a well-known expert on constitutional thought in the Weimar era and has also studied state-planning and social theory in the German Democratic Republic. Karrin Hanshew (Michigan State University), reaching deep into the Weimar era as well, has written an outstanding book, titled *Terror and Democracy* (2012), on the politico-intellectual background of the confrontation in the 1970s between the West German state and establishment on one side and left-wing terrorist groups like the Red Army Faction and the largely nonviolent left-alternative milieu around them on the other.

The book, which is the result of their collaboration, is well structured and contains three parts, each of which is made up of three to five chapters: "Dividing Germany, 1945-70"; "New Beginnings, 1969-92"; and "The Berlin Republic, 1990-2017" (note the overlap between them, which provides food for thought for every caesura-obsessed historian). These largely follow the chronology of events but also have a clear thematic focus, which will help students comprehend the long-term trends. To ease comprehension, West and East Germany are at times dealt with separately, but it remains clear that leaders and populations on both sides of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain often struggled with the same issues—some of which included the more prosaic question of how to feed, house, teach, and control the people.

In sum, this textbook can only be highly recommended. Of course, it is very rich in stories, names, and details, and this will sometimes confuse students who are starting to become experts in the field. This is outweighed, however, by the many interesting, concise, and to-the-point discus-

sions of, for instance, the 1960s' East German New Economic System of Planning and Management or the 1970s' West German "Modell Deutschland" bluster of Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. Also, there could have been some more encouragement for students to broaden their scope—the suggestions for further reading listed after every chapter contain few German-language publications. But then there are the many, mostly abridged, sources sprinkled through the book, as well as the often rather original and sometimes surprising illustrations—who would have expected to see "larger-than-life music personality" Nina Hagen in a textbook on Germany since 1945 (p. 238)? In times of Spotify and other streaming platforms, this may trigger twenty-first-century students to go on wildly rewarding explorations in German popular culture that might enrich their understanding of postwar Germany even further.

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