REVIEWS

Jeffrey Herf. *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. 527p.

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Jeffrey Herf has written a masterful account of the ways in which the political elites in both East and West Germany dealt with the Nazi Past. With the new research that he has uncovered, Herf not only synthesizes much of the existing literature, but also contributes invaluable new material to anyone interested in German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Now that his book has been available for the past three years, most recently in paperback, Herf's book will serve as a benchmark for future work on postwar political elites' treatment of the Nazi past.

In the case of *Divided Memory*, it is perhaps best to break convention and begin at the outset with its limitations and weaknesses, since these are so inextricably tied to the book's strengths. Herf consciously excludes a broad socio-cultural exploration of German guilt, repression, and memorialization and instead concentrates on the more traditional arena of elite political activity and discourse. His concern lies only fleetingly with the wider German public's reaction to the "unmasterable past" (Charles Maier), but instead with a handful of the most prominent and powerful of male political leaders to roughly 1960. In the Federal Republic, the cast of characters is principally limited to Konrad Adenauer, Kurt Schumacher, and Theodor Heuss. In the German Democratic Republic, center stage is taken by Walter Ulbricht, Otto Grotewohl, Wilhelm Pieck, and lesser-known Communists such as Paul Merker and Alexander Abusch. By focusing on these political leaders, Herf is able to explore official versions of the past as well as challenges from leading political opposition figures. He reconstructs their individual approaches to the troubling legacy of Nazi Germany, as well as real but stifled alternatives. Herf maintains that the bifurcation of official versions of the past in East and West Germany illustrates the "multiple restorations" of the pre-Nazi German traditions after World War II.

In order to appreciate fully the service this monograph provides to our understanding of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the reader should begin with a basic understanding of German history during the Cold War. In prior historiography, East German approaches to the Nazi past have been portrayed as a disingenuous self-

conceptualization of the Communist state as the triumph of the progressive, socialist "other Germany" which bore no responsibility for "German fascism," understood as the outgrowth of high monopoly capitalism's late crisis. However, Herf almost single-handedly uncovers a significant group of German Communists around Paul Merker, who spent the war years in Mexico rather than those around Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck, who escaped to the Soviet Union. Merker and others made a forceful case that East Germany should recognize the special victimization of the Jews, and provide reparations for those victims and survivors. In chilling detail, Herf shows how this "faction" fell victim to the anti-cosmopolitan campaign and purges beginning in the late 1940s, ultimately ending in a show trial in 1955. Thereafter, any recognition of the racial component of Nazism in the GDR was treated as a threat to the founding myths that sustained Ulbricht and his successors. In short, a real alternative to evasive self-exculpation existed even within Soviet-dominated east Communism, but it was truncated.

Herf also challenges dominant historical interpretations of the Federal Republic's *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*. Rather than viewing the Adenauer's politics of reparations as simply a sleight of hand that enabled the mass of West German society to sink into a mode of forgetting the crimes of the past, the author argues that the Social Democrats, led by Kurt Schumacher and his colleagues, prodded conservatives toward a policy of greater memory and justice — and reparations — than would otherwise have been evident throughout the 1950s. Still, Herf stresses that Adenauer's support of reparations was a bolder step than many have acknowledged. The West German politics of memory he reconstructs is far more complex than interpretations hitherto presented by scholars, and also more convincing. This is a book that must be read by anyone seeking an understanding of the evolving and contentious politics of memory and commemoration in post-Nazi Germany. ❋