

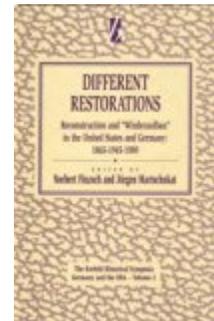
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Norbert Finzsch, J. Martschukat, eds. *Different Restorations: Reconstruction and "Wiederaufbau" in Germany and the United States: 1865, 1945 and 1989*. Providence, R.I. and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996. ix + 422 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-086-1.

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Published on H-War (July, 1997)



Comparative history is always a difficult medium in which to work, and the authors of the varied studies contained in this collection doubtless found the task made even more difficult by the disparate topics they were attempting to address. These papers, presented at the 4th Krefeld Historical Symposia, a triennial gathering of historians and political scientists held in Krefeld, Germany, are dedicated to examining the phenomenon of reconstruction following a war or conflict. In this case, the foci are the reconstruction of post-Civil War America, post-Second World War Germany, and post-Cold War Germany.

As Norbert Finzsch, one of the editors of this collection, suggests in the introduction, the three events or periods help define the history of their respective nations. In the United States, the Civil War and the following events of the Reconstruction, have been used to delineate the boundaries of American historical thought, hence, the multitude of general studies of American history, where-in the Reconstruction era is seen as an obvious break or change in society. In a similar manner, students of modern German history have come to regard the drastic changes brought about by the conclusion of the Second World War and the on-going changes resulting from the end of the Cold War as well as the resultant German re-unification, as being equally significant.

In order to address these issues, the scholars involved held sessions combining topics relevant to "Reconstruction", "Wiederaufbau" (post-Second World War Germany), and "Wende" (post-Reunification Germany). The five sessions identified in the text cover general problems of reconstruction and the feasibility of comparative history, the social and economic history of tran-

sition, a session discussing the treatment of the losing side, political parties in a period of transition, and a final session discussing the questions of national identity and regionalism. Each session consisted of papers presented, commentaries upon the papers, and transcripts of discussions—all presented in order in the text. There is also a bibliography and index provided, and all papers include footnotes. As far as format goes, then, there are no surprises to be found in this collection.

Unfortunately, there are also no real surprises in the papers themselves. They are competently written and demonstrate a solid understanding of the various chosen areas, but there are no earth-shattering discoveries demonstrated by the papers presented at this conference. In fact, some of the statements made are fairly facile, such as the intriguing opening of one paper where it is proposed that "War—including cold wars—usually end in victory and defeat" (p. 27). But if there are no startling presumptions made, that does not mean that the papers lack any intrinsic value.

For example, as the work is directed at specialists in widely divergent areas, it was often necessary for the authors of the introduction and assorted papers to provide basic information upon some of the aspects of their discipline. Thus, in the introduction one can find a brief synopsis of the 'Sonderweg' theory of German history (p. 10), while in the chapters one may find discussions of such disparate topics as the doctrine of 'Stande Null' (pp. 27-47) and comparative examinations of the American Reconstruction and the German Reunification (pp. 352-72).

The papers, and the attendant discussions, which comprise the various sessions of this conference, con-

stitute an interesting introduction to the cross-temporal nature of comparative history. While the level of the argument may be above the heads of any looking for a basic introduction, for those who have already established themselves in the field, or those who want to stretch their understanding of some of the comparative theories involved, they will find this volume an interesting exercise. If nothing else, it has helped this reviewer to a better grasp of the historical debate concerning recent German

history and some of the related aspects of the American Reconstruction. It has also asserted the value of historical comparisons for 'opening a space for historical argumentation' (p. 23).

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**Citation:** Daniel German. Review of Finzsch, Norbert; Martschukat, J., eds., *Different Restorations: Reconstruction and "Wiederaufbau" in Germany and the United States: 1865, 1945 and 1989*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. July, 1997.

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