

D. G. Williamson. *The Third Reich*. New York and London: Longman, 2002. xvii + 198 pp. \$13.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-582-36883-5.

David G. Williamson. *Germany from Defeat to Partition, 1945-1963*. Seminar Studies in History. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001. xvii + 179 pp. \$14.60, paper, ISBN 978-0-582-29218-5.



Reviewed by Robert P. Stephens

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In these two books in the Seminar Studies in History series from Longman, D. G. Williamson has set out to create hybrids: texts for advanced secondary students and undergraduates that attempt to bridge the gap between a general survey and the rarified world of specialist monographs. Both books aim at introducing students to the major debates in the field and, as the series editors put it, "provide a selection of documents to illustrate major themes and provoke discussion" (*Third Reich*, p. x). Although the difficulty of creating an engaging narrative that can hold students' attention and including a substantial discussion of the historiographical debates is daunting, Williamson does a good job of balancing these two essential tasks. For those primarily interested

in teaching the political and economic history of the Third Reich or postwar Germany, these texts offer a good combination of narrative, historiography, and primary sources. Yet these books are both essentially conservative. Although Williamson tips his hat toward newer trends in gender history, the new cultural history, and the history of everyday life, these books both privilege the political and economic and focus on the state and major political figures. For those less interested in concentrating on political and economic history, these may not be the best texts to use.

This third edition of Williamson's *The Third Reich* is a substantial revision. He has reorganized the chapters and included updated research. This edition includes several supplements that will be

of considerable help to students, including a chronology of major events between 1918 and 1945, four well-made maps, a glossary of German terms and organizations as well as short biographical sketches of significant figures, and, most importantly, forty-eight short document excerpts. The documents cover a wide array of topics--ranging from the 1920 German Workers' Party platform to a Nazi history syllabus to a Hitler Youth report on Swing Kids in Hamburg during the war--and certainly add a great deal to the book; one might wish for longer excerpts, but with the demands of a short text, the length of the selections is perfectly understandable.

Williamson begins with a short chapter on the parameters of the historical debate on National Socialism, focusing on Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Sonderweg* thesis. Yet Williamson fails to note that the notion of Germany's "Special Path," its failure to modernize and create a workable liberal system, has been under attack since the publication of *The Peculiarities of German History* almost twenty years ago. Williamson is certainly aware of this debate, yet after a short introduction to the topic, he abandons it. Instead, Williamson sees the major debate as between the structuralists (he names in particular Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen) and intentionalists (Andreas Hillgruber and Klaus Hildebrand), claiming that this split "still pervades every aspect of modern research on the Third Reich and Nazism" (p. 5). Certainly this has been a central divide, particularly in respect to the Holocaust; yet the *Historikerstreit* is now more than a decade and a half past, and much of the conflict of the last decade has focused on what can broadly be grouped as anthropological, feminist, and post-structural challenges to the traditional historiography. This, however, is a criticism of absence, rather than a criticism of omission. It is clear from both the choice of topics within the book and in the bibliography, that Williamson believes that students need to master the political and economic history before exploring the "challenging aspects of recent research

into the more complex areas of culture, mentalities and memory." [1]

The organization of the chapters proceeds in chronological manner but also focuses students on particular debates within the field (i.e. the origins of National Socialism, the bases of support for the Party, the role of Hitler, the politics of racism and eugenics, and the questions of modernity versus tradition). All of the chapters are well written and offer a good balance of narrative and introduction to the historiographical debate. Williamson is best in his discussion of the internal politics of the Nazi Party, the economy, and the foreign policy of the Reich, which were the focus of the first two editions. His inclusion of new material on the racial state and the *Volksgemeinschaft* and the social history of the Reich are welcome additions to this new edition. The documents, which are noted at the appropriate place in the text, are broadly representative and helpful.

Significant portions of the book focus on the debate between structuralists and intentionalists. Williamson carefully lays out the arguments of both sides, and on most topics he seems to hedge toward the intentionalist argument. For example, at the conclusion of the chapter on racial policy of the Nazi regime, Williamson concludes: "The structuralists are almost certainly correct that Hitler's horrific threats were not precise plans for the Holocaust, but it is hard not to see them as expressions of intention, however vague and unformulated. As Dawidowicz observed about an earlier speech of Hitler's, 'in the post Auschwitz world' his words carry a 'staggering freight'" (p. 71). Likewise, in his conclusion to the section on the Holocaust, Williamson argues: "It is probable, as the structuralists stress, that the exact form it took was largely dictated by events in eastern Europe. The intentionalists are nevertheless correct in stressing Hitler's absolute determination to rid the European states of their Jewish citizens, and that the process would not have been gentle" (p.

99). These conclusions are symptomatic of the tone of much of the book. Williamson is careful to render the debates fairly, but his own voice is one that favors a model of the Third Reich as a totalitarian system dominated by the Nazi party and Hitler. At times this creates some startling incongruities. For example, Williamson allots the Holocaust three and one half pages at the end of the chapter on "Germany, Europe and the World, 1939-1945," while the German resistance is given an entire chapter, twelve pages in all. As troubling, Williamson's focus on the German resistance inflates its importance and elides complicated questions of guilt, complicity, and victimization that ought to be central to the study of the Nazi period.[2] "Whatever the politics of the German resistance groups were, it is clear that its members were men of great personal bravery who opposed Hitler for moral reasons," Williamson argues. "Their tragedy was, as Ritter has observed, that they received no backing 'from either within or without'. Those hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of Germans who were secretly critical of the Third Reich behaved as the great majority of the people of any nationality do in a dangerous and threatening situation" (p. 123). Little of the newer research on complicity in the Third Reich justifies such a broad statement.[3]

Despite these criticisms, Williamson takes great pains to present both sides of the debate and sees the value in both sides. His coverage of the politics of rise of National Socialism, his careful breakdown of the social groups involved, his inclusion of an entirely new chapter on the racial state, and his excellent coverage of foreign policy and diplomacy make this a valuable addition to the textbook market.

Germany from Defeat to Partition, 1945-1963 is, as far as I can ascertain, unique. Despite the growing interest in the postwar period, the textbook options are surprisingly meager, particularly texts that attempt to cover both the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic.[4]

None of these, however, dedicate the entire book to the period between 1945 and 1963. The format of this volume follows that of *The Third Reich*, a survey of both the history and historiography of the period. The focus of the volume is again politics and economics. Unlike the previous work, however, this book lacks an introductory essay that traces the major debates. The first three chapters outline the history of the German-German relationship from the end of the war to the building of the wall, while Chapters Five and Six deal with the internal politics of the two German states separately. Williamson outlines a familiar argument: the history of postwar Germany is a history of economic success and democratization in the West and the emergence of a second German dictatorship in the East. The major themes in the first three chapters include occupation and the Cold War. In the chapter on the Federal Republic, Williamson focuses on the success of Adenauer, democratization and European integration, the Economic Miracle, and social modernization, while in the GDR, he highlights the "SED Dictatorship," de-Stalinization, the building of the Wall, the planned economy and collectivization, as well as opposition to the state. Like the earlier volume on the Third Reich, this book has an appendix of thirty-eight documents, which add another dimension to the package.

As political and economic history, it is a strong text. But it is also a conventional text, recapping the debates from a fractured historiography. Christoph Klessmann has argued persuasively that, a decade after reunification, "the continuing post-war history demands a new set of questions." [5] Klessmann's formulation, that historians ought to focus on the *Abgrenzung* und *Verflechtung* (separation and interconnection) between the two states offers a more insightful way into the history of Germany divided. Though Williamson does treat the two Germanys together in the first three chapters, the bulk of this is given over to discussions of high politics and economic policy. Perhaps it is too much to ask of a synthetic

text to ask new questions, but the results seem incomplete and unsatisfying. In particular, the focus on elites and policy omits a number of the most important strains of current research in the field: *Alltagsgeschichte*, the history of consumption, and gender history to name a few. Given the outpouring of new work on postwar Germany in the past decade, particularly in the fields of social and cultural history, there are a number of significant omissions.[6]

Despite these criticisms, Williamson's volume is a valuable addition to a field in desperate need of usable and useful textbooks. One would hope that he would continue this series and produce a follow-up text that would take the story forward to at least reunification. In summary, the hybrid nature of these two textbooks offers much to instructors, presenting a readable narrative, an outline of major debates, and a good selection of primary documents. If you agree with Williamson that students are best served by a firm grounding in political and economic history, these texts have much to offer. If, on the other hand, you are more interested in introducing your students to social, cultural, and gender history, your needs might be best met elsewhere.

Notes:

[1]. Williamson makes the reasonable argument that students need to know the political and economic to fully appreciate the complexities of culture in his response to a review of *Germany from Defeat to Partition 1945-1963* by Pertti Aho-nen for the Institute for Historical Research's *Reviews in History* series, <<http://www.ihrinfo.ac.uk/reviews/paper/williamsonDG.html>>, March 2002.

[2]. For an excellent introduction to the debates about "victims" and "perpetrators" see David F. Crew, ed., *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[3]. See, for example, Robert Gellately's provocative *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). The recent research on denuncia-

tions also clearly points to the role of ordinary Germans in making National Socialism possible: Gerhard Paul, Klaus-Michael Mallmann, and Peter Steinbach, *Die Gestapo: Mythos und Realitaet* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995); and Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy, 1933-1945* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[4]. Among the few choices are Lothar Kett-nacher, *Germany since 1945* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Mary Fullbrook, *Interpretations of the Two Germanies*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

[5]. Christoph Klessmann, introduction to *The Divided Past: Rewriting Post-War German History*, ed. Christoph Klessmann (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), p. 2.

[6]. See for example: Alf Luedtke and Peter Becker, eds., *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster: die DDR und ihre Texte: Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997); Axel Schildt, *Moderne Zeiten: Freizeit, Massenmedien und "Zeitgeist" in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahre* (Hamburg: Christians, 1995); Robert Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Erica Carter, *How German is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Michael Wildt, *Der Traum vom Staatwerden: Hunger und Protest, Schwarzmarkt und Selbsthilfe* (Hamburg, VSA Verlag, 1986) and *Am Beginn der "Konsumgesellschaft": Mangel-erfahrung, Lebenshaltung, Wohlstandshoffnung in Westdeutschland in den fuenfziger Jahren* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1994); Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Beduerfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkul-tur in der DDR* (Koeln: Boehlau Verlag, 1999); *Aldeheid von Saldern and Inge Marssolek, eds., Radio in der DDR der fuenfziger Jahre: Zwischen*

Lenkung und Ablenkung (*Tuebingen: Edition Diskord, 1998*); Lutz Niethammer, Dorothee Wierling, and Alexander von Plato, *Die volkseigene Erfahrung: eine Archaeologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR: 30 biographische Eroeffnungen* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1990); Elizabeth Heine-man, "The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany's 'Crisis Years' and West German National Identity" *American Historical Review* 101(1996): pp. 354-395; Heide Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity after Hitler* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

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