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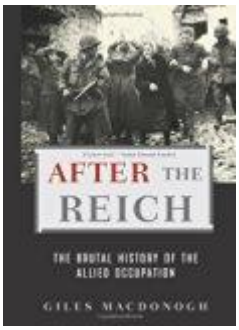

Giles MacDonogh. *After the Reich: The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation.* New York: Basic Books, 2007. xviii + 618 pp. Illustrations $32.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-465-00337-2.

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Retribution and Reconciliation

In the preface to this book, Giles MacDonogh makes the following observation: "If children are included in collective guilt, this could be accepted on the basis that they were going to grow up to be Germans and therefore possibly Nazis" (p. xiv). With this statement, he raises the troubling moral quandary of Allied behavior in a debilitated Germany after organized resistance crumbled in 1945. From MacDonogh's view, the crimes of the National Socialist regime did not justify the brutalization of the German civilian population, mainly because "it was not the criminals who were raped, starved, tortured or bludgeoned to death but women, children and old men" (p. xiii). To make his case, MacDonogh has waded through multiple first-hand accounts to reconstruct a portrait of incessant despair and injustice, meted out by an alliance of the willing to a population of unarmed, defenseless civilians. Although MacDonogh's narrative gives the reader a fascinating picture of a chaotic and incredibly violent time in world history, he leaves many archival stones unturned. Compounding his methodological shortcomings, MacDonogh fails to differentiate his judgment as a historian from the often overtly racist views espoused by an indignant deposed German nobility, furious with the intemperate louts wreaking havoc on the estates of eastern Germany. In every instance, according to MacDonogh, Allied troops stood by while ignorant riff-raff wreaked a misguided revenge on innocent German civilians who themselves had been victims of Nazi intimidation, Allied bombing, and now postwar reprisals.

MacDonogh divides his work into four sections. The first section describes the end phases of the war in 1945. Of note are the descriptions of Prague and Vienna, which set this book apart in scope from Norman Naimark's and Max Hastings' portrayals of the last months of the war in the east and west. Regardless of geographical locale, similar threats menaced German civilians: liberated peoples, bent on revenge; occupying troops, intent

on exacting sexual and material tribute from a captive people; and DPs and former POWs whose criminality transcended that of all of the others. Here, MacDonogh sounds a theme that becomes all too familiar in the rest of the book: local racism as directed toward the occupiers, evidence of which is collected from reminiscences. In one instance, MacDonogh relates an episode from Ernst Jünger's postwar memoir in which "the villages were full of drunken American blacks with women on their arms, looking for beds" (p. 74). MacDonogh states this observation as fact, but I searched in vain for a reference to any U.S. Military Government sources that might have corroborated this claim. The second section chronicles daily life in the respective occupation zones of the victorious powers in Austria and Germany. MacDonogh's reportage is replete with naïve but craven Americans, larcenous and vengeful French, dignified but arrogant English, and rapacious and bestial Russians. Much of this material is reduced to the level of caricature by MacDonogh's use of anecdotes gleaned from bemused and outraged Junkers.

By far the best section of this book is the third, which investigates the growing moral relativism induced by the occupation. In many ways, this section echoes the observations made by Tony Judt about the obverse condition: namely, the German occupation of Europe from 1939-45.[2] When moral and legal authority is commanded by criminals, crime becomes the accepted communal norm, indistinguishable from rule of law during normal times. This tendency breaks down the codes that characterize civil society. MacDonogh marshals abundant examples of such moral ambiguity: Catholic priests encouraging their parishioners to steal bread and coal to stay alive; surly Nazis defending themselves before Soviet judges in the compromised courts at Nuremberg; Allied forces changing the status of surrendered German soldiers so that they could be leased as slave labor throughout Europe; and the economic netherworld of the black market where even money did not hold its face value. MacDonogh's argument takes on its greatest contemporary relevance here, especially for Americans during this decade dealing with their nation's travails in Iraq, and, conversely, assessing the extent of Iraqi travails under the American occupation.

MacDonogh's book grinds to a sloppy halt in his last section, a ponderous, often incoherent overview of the rising sympathy for Germany in the West after 1945. Here, his writing and any semblance of analysis break down. For example, in a section on postwar diplomacy, MacDonogh begins a paragraph with the comment, "Naturally Stalin knew Attlee well" (p. 490). He then proceeds to discuss an entirely different group of men in the rest of the paragraph. Was this a sloppy cut-and-paste? This section adds nothing to what we know about Germany and the emerging Cold War. In fact, it is inferior to any treatment of postwar diplomacy surrounding the division of Germany that I have read.

Despite its many faults, this book does raise troubling issues. Under what circumstances is it justifiable to rape civilian women, murder, or beat and starve children? Is it ever permissible to engage in officially sanctioned theft from a defeated foe? A certain irony to the account emerges because the Americans considered themselves morally superior to the Germans. On the other hand, as historian Max Hastings has recently written (citing Michael Howard), Germany's program in the 1930s had been "fuelled by a militarist ideology that rejected the bourgeois liberalism of the capitalist West and glorified war as the inevitable and necessary destiny of mankind."[3] The West attempted to avoid war in the 1930s, to a fault. The Germans started a war that led to European deaths equivalent in number to the prewar population of France. Germany's responsibility for starting the war does not mitigate Allied (mis)behavior in every instance, an insight that is particularly valid when we consider the loss of life occasioned during the forced evacuation of the ci-

vilian German population from East Prussia. However, after 1945, the occupying forces did not found annihilation camps in Germany. Ultimately, some German POWs did return home. Germans were allowed to set up relatively normal governments in a semi-sovereign environment. Indeed, as MacDonogh himself notes at the end of this ordeal of a book: "The West was patched up quickly; buildings went up here there and everywhere to replace those destroyed in the war. A vast ugliness replaced the ruins. If they were allowed to, they could finally forget the blood they had spilled, and concentrate on the birth of a new Germany, which they had watered with their own" (p. 546). This development was far more than anybody living under a German occupation could have hoped for at the end of the war.

Notes

[1]. Max Hastings, *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany 1944-1945* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004); and Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1995).

[2]. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 38.

[3]. Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan, 1944-45* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 5.