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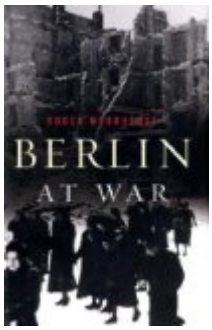
Roger Moorhouse. *Berlin at War.* New York: Basic Books, 2010. 464 pp. $29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-465-00533-8.



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Several new studies devoted to German suffering during and after the Second World War have appeared over the past few years. Richard Bessel (*Germany 1945: From War to Peace* [2009]), Giles MacDonogh (*After the Reich: The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation* [2007]), and Frederick Taylor (*Dresden: Tuesday, February 13, 1945* [2004]) have all recently published narrative histories of Germany's devastation during the war that target a popular audience. Following in this same vein is the work of Roger Moorhouse, who concentrates his attention on the residents of Germany's capital. In this engaging book, Moorhouse uses a vast array of sources to examine the diversity of Berlin's denizens and their wartime experiences (aerial bombing, blackouts, rationing, homelessness, death). His chronicle seeks to give readers "a 'Berlin-eye view' of the Second World War ... charting the violent humbling of a once-proud metropolis" (p. xvi).

In his introduction, Moorhouse asserts that the residents of wartime Berlin were not "an indoctrinated mass of Nazified automata sleepwalking into catastrophe" (p. xvi). This point, certainly valid, guides the rest of his study. As Moorhouse rightly notes, Berlin was a diverse place that was home to all kinds of different people during the war: Communists, Jews, foreigners, informants, resisters, soldiers, children, and of course, Nazi Party elites. And there can be no question that the city--both before and after the Nazi seizure of power in 1933--was by no means a Nazi stronghold. Yet few readers would likely imagine wartime Berliners to have been brainwashed Nazi supporters willing to sacrifice everything for Adolf Hitler's war. Most residents of the capital were neither Nazi zealots nor anti-Nazi resistance fighters. Instead they were often indifferent people who were most interested in their own lives, jobs, and families. Moorhouse's book does a fine job of highlighting the many different inhabitants of Berlin and the ways in which the Third Reich and World War II did--and sometimes did not--affect their everyday lives.

This social history of the German capital at war draws heavily on the journals and diaries of

those who witnessed these events first-hand. Moorhouse repeatedly cites Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, Ursula von Kardorff, Helmuth James von Moltke, William Shirer, and Marie Vassiltchikov, whose names would likely be familiar to most specialists reading his work. Additionally, he sprinkles in an assortment of other memoirs and diaries in his narrative, as well as material from oral histories that he personally conducted in the course of his research. These liven up the narrative and underscore the everyday experiences of war for Berliners in the early 1940s. For instance, Moorhouse notes that while historians have often discussed the amounts that rations entitled Germans to purchase, few have investigated how much food was actually available to the average consumer. In developing this point, he incorporates material from his interviews to underscore the daily struggle to acquire food and the poor quality of what could be bought in the stores of the capital. Nevertheless, elite voices dominate the narrative and give an interesting--if not always representative--perspective on the challenges of life in wartime Berlin.

The book consists of seventeen chapters, each of which concentrates on a specific aspect of the wartime experience. Some chapters focus on specific groups of people, such as forced laborers, the Gestapo, and members of the anti-Nazi resistance. In a chapter dedicated to the *Kinderlandverschickung* (KLV), which required children to leave the cities in order to protect them from Allied attacks, Moorhouse highlights how the war affected the education, family life, social interactions, and even sexual development of the youngest Berliners. The most engaging chapters, however, are those that investigate the everyday fears and anxieties of the city's population, such as hunger, death, and aerial bombing. It is in these chapters that his narrative most successfully moves beyond the well-known journals and memoirs of wartime Berliners and draws from the diaries of other individuals and the many interviews that he conducted. For instance, in a chapter on the use of radio by Berliners during the war, Moorhouse points out that it was not only valuable as a source of information (either from German or British sources). But, in the final year of the war, radio also provided advance notice of air raids even before authorities activated the city's sirens. Thus, as one of his interviewees makes clear, radio became a tool of survival as the war neared its end. Because of the thematic approach to the book's organization, there is some repetition in the chapters as Moorhouse continually moves back and forth across the six years of war experienced by Berliners. Yet many of his examples are so rich and detailed, the reader will likely forgive him for returning briefly to material that he has already covered in previous chapters.

Although the book concentrates solely on the suffering of those in the German capital, Moorhouse in no way seeks to excuse the Germans for the crimes they committed in the Second World War. There is no attempt to equate the suffering of the Germans with that of their victims in this work. Yet in places where his sources are not as strong, his narrative sometimes slips into the passive voice. Arguably one of the pitfalls of narrative history, the use of the passive voice in some chapters occasionally obscures the responsibility of Germans for the misery of their fellow Berliners. This is perhaps most disconcerting in the chapter devoted to the experiences of Berlin's Jewish population. For instance, Moorhouse documents the deportations of many Jews from the capital in 1942 with little reference to their tormenters. As a result, one learns that many of Berlin's Jews were marched, collected, loaded, transported, dispatched, shot en masse, and murdered, but it is not always clear precisely who was behind these actions. Certainly the availability of sources may have hampered his ability to construct a more vivid narrative in this instance, yet this passage contrasts markedly with the second part of the chapter. Following his overview of the deportations, Moorhouse analyzes the "imagination gap" that made it difficult for most Berliners--

Jews and non-Jews alike--to "believe the grim truth of the Holocaust" (p. 174). In this later section, the narrative becomes much more engaging, as he draws on a rich array of sources to illuminate the inability of the city's residents to comprehend the horrors transpiring all around them.

Moorhouse's book is based primarily on published memoirs and secondary literature, which he supplements with his interviews with Berliners who survived the war. It also draws on a limited amount of German and British archival material, in particular reports on civilian life in Berlin from state and federal archives. A third, but significant, source base for Moorhouse's work is the Internet. A number of personal stories cited in his book are published online at such sites as the Deutsches Historisches Museum (www.dhm.de), Zeitzeugengeschichte (www.zeitzeugengeschichte.de), and the Jewish Women's Archive (www.jwa.org). These websites would be of particular value to those who might seek to delve deeper into the individual experiences of Berliners during the war or to those who would like to locate primary sources for use in the classroom. Readers, however, may be less enthusiastic about Moorhouse's use of Wikipedia, Answers.com, and RelicHunter.com, all of which are cited in his notes.

A lively and engaging read, this book is likely to be of interest to a variety of different audiences. Specialists of modern German and European history will likely appreciate this focused social history of life in the wartime capital. The book could also be potentially valuable in upper-level undergraduate courses on the Third Reich or World War II. Finally, the book should appeal more broadly to anyone interested in the experiences of civilians at war. As Moorhouse's study makes clear, World War II brought misery and anguish to every Berliner in some fashion. His book reminds us once again that there is no safe place in an age of total war.

Note

[1]. See Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); Giles MacDonogh, *After the Reich: The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation* (New York: Basic, 2007); Frederick Taylor, *Dresden: Tuesday, February 13, 1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

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