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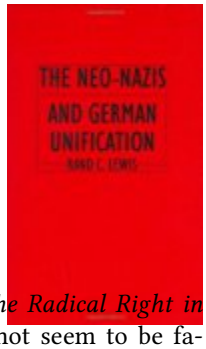
Rand C. Lewis. *The Neo-Nazis and German Unification.* Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 1996. xiv + 119 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-95638-7.



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This slim volume is not for sophisticated readers. Based on a limited range of press and secondary sources, it does not offer any new information or original insights on the German radical right today for anyone reasonably familiar with contemporary Germany. Yet the book is a generally accurate and fair-minded basic summary that offers a handy, simply written source for the general reader who does not want to commit to a major scholarly analysis on the subject.

Lewis, a retired military man, first got interested in the neo-Nazis while he served as a unit commander in the U.S. Army in Germany during the eighties and again after the reunification. Disturbed by the violence of the nationalist mini-groups, he tried to learn as much as possible about this ugly phenomenon in the context of a German society he wanted to understand. The sources he assembled for this survey will not impress scholars. He relies primarily on general press reports, most notably the Army's *Stars and Stripes*, as well as major American news magazines, a few newspaper articles, and the two popular *New Yorker* articles by Jane Kramer and former neo-Nazi Ingo Hasselbach (an abridged retelling of his German book-length interview). There are also some references to articles from *Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit*, and other German news sources, with the articles curiously listed either in English or in misspelled German. Except for Thomas Assheuer/Hans Sarkowicz, *Rechtsradikale in Deutschland* (1992) and Claus Leggewie's 1993 *Druck von Rechts: Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?* (also listed with misspellings), none of the major German works on the radical right (by Wilhelm Heitmeyer, Richard Stoess, Juergen Falter, Wolfgang Benz, Paul Gerhard, Klaus Schoenekaes et al.) are mentioned, nor are the leading recent American books on the subject, Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (1994) and Herbert Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe* (1995). Lewis does not seem to be familiar with these works. There are no sources given for any of the tables, and there are a few critical misspellings (Markus Meckel, Paul Wilkinson, *Wehrsportgruppen* Hoffmann, Ludwigshafen, Allensbach, Nuernberg, Frankfurt an der Oder). It is thus not surprising that some of Lewis's judgements are curious–e.g. that "public opinion in the United States (on German reunification) tended to reflect British sentiment" (p. 5), just because the percentages of approval he found happened to be identical; or that Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher's resignation was "a major blow to the legitimacy of Kohl's CDU party" (p. 9).

Yet I would recommend this book as a clear, well-balanced, and responsible summation, written in plain language and presented in brief easy-to-follow chapters. While Lewis wants the reader to understand that the racist, anti-democratic parties and youth gangs are an ugly and serious threat to an otherwise democratic and peaceful new Germany, he is neither sensationalist nor alarmist. He eschews the hysterical overreactions of many leftists like Gerhard Zwerenz (*Rechts und Dumm*) or Klaus Farin/Eberhard Seidel-Pielen (*Rechtsruck: Rassismus im neuen Deutschland*), which is listed in the bibliography); and he does not blame some deep-seated cultural or constitutional racism in German culture. But he also reflects critically on ineffective officia measures against symptoms rather than causes of rightist violence. After summarizing the reunification and the radical right parties before 1989 in the first two chapters, he soberly traces the radical right story in six chapters from the first post-reunification disturbances through the 1992/93 peak explosions to the decline and the beginnings of international cooperation to shut down neo-Nazi supply

links. The concluding chapter and epilogue point to the deeply ambivalent nature of the "miracle" of reunification, which has been remarkably peaceful even as the fissures through German society seem to have multiplied in a new, unexpected messy normality.

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