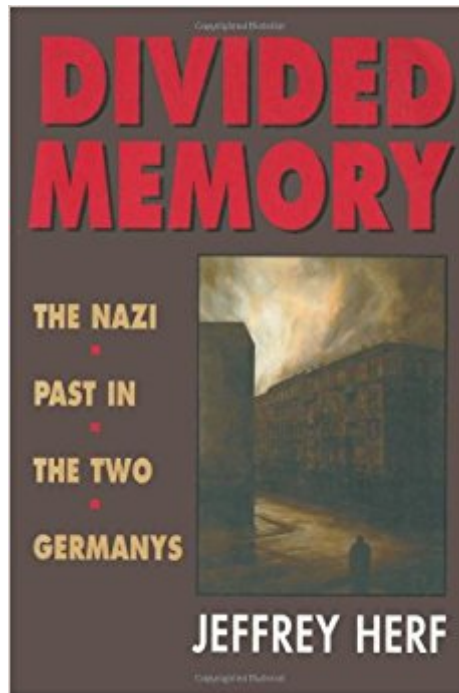


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Divided Memory: The Nazi Past In The Two Germanys



Synopsis

What has Germany made of its Nazi past? A significant new look at the legacy of the Nazi regime, this book exposes the workings of past beliefs and political interests on how--and how differently--the two Germanys have recalled the crimes of Nazism, from the anti-Nazi emigration of the 1930s through the establishment of a day of remembrance for the victims of National Socialism in 1996. Why, Jeffrey Herf asks, would German politicians raise the specter of the Holocaust at all, in view of the considerable depth and breadth of support its authors and their agenda had found in Nazi Germany? Why did the public memory of Nazi anti-Jewish persecution and the Holocaust emerge, if selectively, in West Germany, yet was repressed and marginalized in "anti-fascist" East Germany? And how do the politics of left and right come into play in this divided memory? The answers reveal the surprising relationship between how the crimes of Nazism were publicly recalled and how East and West Germany separately evolved a Communist dictatorship and a liberal democracy. This book, for the first time, points to the impact of the Cold War confrontation in both West and East Germany on the public memory of anti-Jewish persecution and the Holocaust. Konrad Adenauer, Theodor Heuss, Kurt Schumacher, Willy Brandt, Richard von Weizsacker, and Helmut Kohl in the West and Walter Ulbricht, Wilhelm Pieck, Otto Grotewohl, Paul Merker, and Erich Honnecker in the East are among the many national figures whose private and public papers and statements Herf examines. His work makes the German memory of Nazism--suppressed on the one hand and selective on the other, from Nuremberg to Bitburg--comprehensible within the historical context of the ideologies and experiences of pre-1945 German and European history as well as within the international context of shifting alliances from World War II to the Cold War. Drawing on West German and recently opened East German archives, this book is a significant contribution to the history of belief that shaped public memory of Germany's recent past.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A previous view has mischaracterized this work as one that deals with attitudes toward Israel. The primary purpose of this book is the role of the Holocaust in memory among the respective West and East German elites following World War II. It is not a broader work on social history, which one could argue needs to be done, but criticizing someone for the book he didn't write is misplaced. Herff's arguments center around the coming to grips with the Holocaust in politics in the two German states. He asserts, correctly, that East German leaders chose to adopt the Marxist line that WWII was a fascist war, and the Holocaust a product of fascism rather than racism. The leaders did so in order to portray the installed Stalinist state as the legitimate government in eastern Germany and being utterly disconnected from the Nazis. The result was a whitewashing of historical memory, portraying Jews and other minorities as virtual martyrs of the East German state. Herff further argues, and places blame, on West German leaders for failing to engage the Holocaust. However, he points out that Karl Adenauer's efforts to engage conservatives on this issue was a forward-thinking move, and ultimately salvaged West Germany on this issue. Ultimately, the issue of the two Germanys and Israel has to do with the evolution of historical memory rather than philo-semitism or philo-nazism. This book will be useful for those seeking to understand the role of memory in WWII and the Cold War.

good

Herf applies a very simplistic test to determine the Nazification of both Germanies: did they side with Israel in the Middle East version of the Cold War or did they not? The trial against Paul Merker in the East, which had as its background East Germany's reluctance to pay reparations to expropriated Jews, serves as his prime evidence for the continuation of things Nazi in the GDR. But both of these arguments completely ignore the Marxist ideology underlieing the rationale of the East German leadership and bypass more complicated issues of political allegiance. Moreover, they totally eclipse the East German cultural discourse on the Holocaust, a discourse that was decades ahead of discussions in the West and still proves to be more sophisticated than most that is being

written in Western academia.

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