

H-Net Reviews

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Paul Bookbinder. *Weimar Germany: The Republic of the Reasonable.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996. vii + 275 pp. \$18.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7190-4287-4; \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7190-4286-7.

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Weimar Germany is part of Manchester University Press's series "New Frontiers in History," which aims to provide "up-to-date overviews of key topics...together with accompanying source material and appendices....The series also explores established topics which have attracted conflicting analysis and require a synthesis of the state of the debate." This book also aspires to become the standard introduction to Weimar Germany for first-year college students. Unfortunately, it falls short of all of these goals.

Bookbinder relies heavily on the interpretations of Hans-Ulrich Wehler and the Weimar civil servant and political scientist Arnold Brecht. How one feels about this book therefore depends largely on how the reader feels about the *Sonderweg* thesis and Brecht's autobiography. Much material has not been footnoted, so the prospective reader is at a loss to find additional studies on a topic. Almost all the material cited has been written in English or translated into English. The relative lack of important German primary and secondary sources is a considerable flaw.

Unlike many histories of the Republic, this book is broken down by topic. The chapter titles are "The Founding of the Weimar State," "Constitution and Political Spectrum," "Prussia: Bulwark of the Republic," "Bavaria: Reluctant Republicans," "The Prussian Police Experiment," "The Feme and the Weimar Judiciary," "The Weimar Bauhaus," "Did the Weimar Republic have a Golden Age?," "The German Economy and the Weimar Republic," "The Women's Movement," "The Situation of the Jews," and "National Socialism within the Republic." There is no indication as to why these topics were chosen over others such as labor, urban life, Weimar finance,

big and small business, popular culture, the military, the roles of foreigners, or gay and lesbian life—all of which have undergone important and recent study and which might have provided fruitful insights.

The best chapters are the ones on the Bauhaus (written by Judith Bookbinder) and the women's movement. Both of these chapters use secondary sources written in the last ten years and give a fairly good introduction to the state of scholarship. The weakest chapter is the one on the economy, which does not recognize the works of Knut Borchardt, Carl-Ludwig Holtfrerich, Theo Balderston, Michael L. Hughes, William McNeil, or Gerald Feldman's scholarship of the last twenty-five years. The most dubious chapter is the discussion of the Prussian police, which Bookbinder praises as a harbinger of the democracy that could have been. This reader wondered how many of these "ordinary men" went on to commit atrocities during the Nazi era, as Christopher Browning demonstrates in his study of the Hamburg police. It is perhaps unreasonable to ask that consideration of the Weimar Republic be carried out in isolation from the Nazi period which followed, but at times Bookbinder's foreshadowing almost makes one think of everyone as Nazis in the making. A discussion of anti-Semitism in Weimar would be far more profitable if comparable movements and personalities in France, Britain, Soviet Russia, and the United States were brought in.

The documents at end of the volume are unnecessarily pedestrian. Ten of the twenty-one documents are articles from the *Literary Digest* or the *New York Times* which merely expand on the text. Comparable German newspaper accounts would have provided a little more insight. The original platforms of the Spartacists and the Nazis are

reprinted, but the voices of other opponents and doubters of the Republic are missing. None of the documents are written by women, despite the chapter on the women's movement. There is no reference in the documents to the Bauhaus school. None of the footnotes in the text refer the reader to the documents, thus giving an impression that the documents were selected almost at random. Undergraduates needing an introduction to the Weimar Republic would be better off reading A.J. Nicholls' *Weimar*

and the Rise of Hitler or, if they want something more advanced and detailed, E.J. Feuchtwanger's *From Weimar to Hitler: Germany 1918-1933*. The relevant chapters from Bookbinder might be useful for instructors conducting classes in cultural studies or women's studies.

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