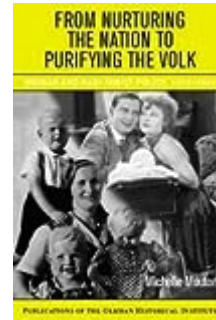


Michelle Mouton. *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk: Weimar and Nazi Family Policy, 1918-1945.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xvi + 309 pp. \$78.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-86184-7.



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Intent vs. Implementation

Michelle Mouton's fine book, *From Nurturing the Nation to Purifying the Volk*, examines and compares German family policy, its implementation, and its reception during the Weimar and Nazi regimes. It is a local history focusing on Westphalia. The six substantive chapters treat marriage and divorce, Mother's Day celebrations, Nazi forced sterilization, economic and other aid to mothers, policies toward single mothers and their children, foster care, and adoption. Mouton enters the historiographical debate over continuity and change between the Weimar and Nazi eras firmly on the side of change; she argues that Weimar attitudes, innovations, and institutions did not pave the way for the Nazi family policies that followed. Each chapter begins with a section describing Weimar debates and practices, followed by a substantially longer section on the Nazi era. Each concludes that, although eugenic and/or coercively interventionist voices were present in Weimar family discourse, a lack of consensus precluded the adoption of radical new programs like those adopted by the Nazis. Weimar lawmakers across the political spectrum were convinced that

state support and protection of women and families was critical to saving and regenerating the German nation after the First World War. However, fierce disagreement on what the ideal family should look like, combined with an unwillingness by both liberals and conservatives to seriously undermine the privacy and autonomy of the patriarchal family, ruled out significant alterations to the existing civil code. Nazi policymakers agreed that the family was important. They demanded, however, that it be subordinated to the population and racial aims of the state. Full fellowship in the national community, including access to state-sponsored welfare, was available only to hereditarily healthy, politically acceptable members of the "Aryan" race.

A significant amount of scholarship already exists on the official family policies of the two regimes. What is new and important in this study is its emphasis on how those policies—especially from 1933 to 1945—were implemented at the local level and how families experienced them. This is appropriately done through a microhistorical approach. Westphalia is well chosen as an area where

economic activity and religious and political composition showed considerable variation. Mouton examines an impressive array of sources: documents of government and private relief agencies, including Catholic and Protestant church records; state personnel files for doctors and judges; social workers's files; court records involving divorces, adoptions, child support for illegitimate children, and sterilizations; and oral interviews with individual women. She skillfully weaves compiled data with compelling stories of individuals from case files and from her interviews. Mouton finds that, although official Nazi family policy represented a major rupture from the Weimar era, the actions of elected and appointed officials, healthcare professionals, judges, and bureaucrats, along with the exigencies of politics and war, made those differences less apparent. She also shows how women and families negotiated their way through both systems with selective compliance, challenge, or evasion. As she puts it, "one might argue that the most continuous aspect of Weimar and Nazi family policy was the moderating effect that implementation had on policy" (p. 282).

One of the reasons that this book deserves a wide readership is that it concerns a central dilemma of the liberal welfare state—how to protect the vulnerable and enhance the quality of life for all citizens without invading privacy or undermining individual liberty. While she is careful to qualify her statements, to some extent, Mouton's close adherence to her central thesis of the rupture between the two regimes precludes her engaging this theme as productively as she might have. For example, she writes that "while improving family health did involve state monitoring of families to a greater de-

gree than before, both conservative and liberal [Weimar] politicians maintained the importance of preserving the family; and that "almost state programs [for aiding mothers] existed already during the Weimar era, but took on a new form when the Nazis added ideological guidelines" (pp. 15, 154). Mouton convincingly demonstrates that the goals of the two regimes were very different indeed, and that is significant. But what the book generally does not interrogate is whether or not Weimar public officials and private citizens adopted new attitudes about proper relationships between the individual and the state or about the individual vs. the common good that predisposed them to accept more coercive policies by the Nazis. Did Weimar expectations and beliefs or "the moderating effect that implementation had on policy" help Germans ignore warning signals about Nazi intent (p. 282)? How dangerous is it for a "good" regime to set up monitoring systems or other potentially invasive programs that might be inherited and perverted by a "bad" one? Where exactly is the line between them? In a time of perceived crisis, how much surveillance and regulation should a population accept for "its own good"? More treatment of the shortchanged Weimar period might have helped push the analysis a bit deeper on these points.

If Mouton's history does not answer all our philosophical questions it nonetheless provokes them. It is a valuable addition to the history of modern Germany, public health, and population policy. It is an excellent demonstration of the fact that national politics and the meanings of citizenship cannot be properly understood apart from gender and family issues.

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