



David G. Williamson. *Germany from Defeat to Partition, 1945-1963.* Seminar Studies in History. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001. xvii + 179 pp. \$14.60 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-29218-5.



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Compact and Balanced Historiography

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This is a very fine educational British textbook to be recommended for use in various types of classrooms. Its author is a former head of history and politics at Highgate School in London. If this wouldn't have been told on the book flap, one would have suspected it by the clear and thoughtful didactic structure of the book. David Williamson has also written textbooks on nineteenth-century as well as on Nazi Germany and he certainly is a professional for this feature.

Two thirds of this publication has been actually written by the author himself, followed by a sample of excerpts from documents, a chronology, an useful who's who of some key figures from Germany's early post-war history and a selected bibliography. The latter omits some secondary literature, particularly German-language books, which also might have been included. But since a bibliography on a subject like this in a textbook has to be incomplete anyway, Williamson has done a decent overall job in this respect.

In his concisely written, highly informative and very

readable narrative of events and patterns between 1945 and 1963, the author draws heavily on citations from documents and secondary literature listed in the final part of the book. In some cases, where historical assessments of personalities, events and structures are still quite disputed in the profession, Williamson more or less inadvertently sides with one opinion when exclusively quoting a single author and not referring to historiographical debates. However, as he has no obvious ideological or partisan tilts and preferences this is mostly bearable even for German historians versed in all sorts of highly principled battles for the "truth" and the dominance of certain interpretations. Indeed, the fact that the author is British, and not German, is one of this book's advantages.

Williamson has to be credited in this respect for having written a truly "German" history of this period by equally dividing his narrative between the two German states and their societies. He has also succeeded in being remarkably fair and balanced on both, without resorting to a moral equivalency between the competing political systems of parliamentary democracy and authoritarian party dictatorship. Before 1990, a title containing the sin-

gle word “Germany” in a book referring to both states up to 1963, would have been quite a political statement. Nowadays “German history” on the post-1945 period has become so commonly accepted that it is difficult to recall that the contrary was ever the case.

The book starts with a brief introduction to the background of German zonal division by referring to the allied conferences between 1943 and 1945. Then Williamson tells the story of the Western and Eastern zones in two joint chapters on allied occupation policy until December 1947, before he traces the paths to the division of Germany by the emergence of two states in 1949, the FRG and the GDR. In order not to let the broader historical context slip out of sight, he then outlines the major developments of the Cold War concerning the two Germanies and their integration into antagonistic blocs, culminating in 1961 in the Berlin Crisis.

The two most extensive chapters of the book deal in similar length with the political, economic and social developments in both states. For the FRG Williamson lays out the emergence of democracy and the so-called “economic miracle”, before briefly sketching some social and cultural patterns. The GDR is characterized by the various political maneuvers and pitfalls of the ruling communist party, the Socialist Unity Party, between 1949 and 1961 as well as by planned economy and agricultural collectivization. Williamson’s concluding attempt to assess

“socialism and the East German people” also does not fail to mention internal opposition to the Communist Party’s monopoly on power. A final retrospective on both states and a very short comparison between them sums up the book quite nicely.

Obviously one could take issue with the selection of some of the following thirty-eight documents from primary sources and secondary literature. In combination with the previous text and its respective references they contribute nonetheless to an overall understanding by bringing into life some atmospherics of that time. There are very few minor lapses; for instance, there is no “Archbishop of Meissen” (p. 121; just a Bishop), no “Schlaitz” whom Walter Ulbricht visited in 1945 (p. 122; actually “Schleiz”), and by 1962 “Sebastian Hafner” (actually “Haffner”) was already a liberal rather than a “moderate conservative” journalist (p. 142). But these are petty errors, and far from endemic in this book.

“Such is the pace of historical enquiry in the modern world that there is an ever-widening gap between the specialist article or monograph, incorporating the results of current research, and general surveys, which inevitably become out of date. *Seminar Studies in History* is designed to bridge this gap” (p. x). This textbook by David Williamson convincingly proves that claim from the publishers’ “Introduction to the Series”.

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