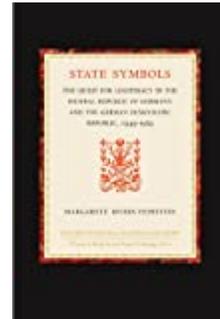




**Margarete Myers Feinstein.** *State Symbols: The Quest for Legitimacy in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1959.* Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2001. xxiv + 250 pp. \$74.20 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-391-04103-5.



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The past decade has witnessed a trend in the historiography of postwar Germany toward examining the East and West as two halves of a whole, and treating the GDR and the FRG not as states that happen to lie next to each other, but rather as inextricably related entities that cannot be understood without reference to both. In this view, their history as separate states should not be seen as parallel lines, but rather as a double helix, folding over on itself, impossible to separate without distortion. Jeffrey Herf's book *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanies*, is perhaps the best-known illustration of the trend, but other historians have been using the insight to great advantage. This approach is used by Margarete Myers Feinstein in her illuminating study of the adoption of national symbols as tools for state legitimization in the postwar Germanies. Examining both states together is particularly helpful, even necessary for Feinstein's theme, because the adoption of many potent symbols in both East and West Germany had much to do with placing themselves in contrast to their other half.

The method, while a wise and welcome choice, is not without problems. Often, truly satisfying comparisons cannot be made because the data available simply is not comparable. In Feinstein's work, as in that of so many others, the East German material available to the author does not correspond with that collected for West Ger-

many, as richly as the historian would like. The effort to place the two Germanies side by side, then, ultimately tends to portray the East as an insubstantial shadow compared to the robustly concrete West Germany that emerges. While unfortunate, this imbalance is not the author's fault, and Feinstein's meticulous research transcends the inherent limitations of the evidence.

The subject Feinstein has chosen seems especially thought-provoking at present, when questions of nationalism, nation-building, patriotism and national identity hover in the air everywhere. This study, for example, invites reflections on the meaning of the U.S. flag, ubiquitous these days as a nonverbal statement, yet of exactly what, we cannot be sure. The study of any nation's symbols and how they reflect, successfully or otherwise, the message of the state will always be fascinating, but the case of the two postwar Germanies is especially rich. As Feinstein explains, every nation's symbols reveal something of the values or ideologies for which the state wishes to stand and a particular version of history that the state wants its citizens to embrace. Moreover, successful acceptance of state symbols by the public indicates some kind of acceptance of the state's intended message, but the public can and does put its own meanings on those symbols, not necessarily the ones officially promulgated.

In the case of the two Germanies, other complications are present as well. First, both states attempted to negotiate versions of recent German history for and with their citizenry. Herf's study explores the divergent interpretations of the Holocaust in the two Germanies, a function of political ideology. Feinstein suggests that in the case of adopting and embracing state symbols, the Nazi past was not the only era requiring some kind of gloss. The two states wrestled with how (or whether) to incorporate the chaotic Weimar period, the militaristic second Reich, and the failed revolutionary movement of 1848, not to mention more contemporary controversies, such as which state was most responsible for the division of Germany. To which traditions were the new Germanies heir? Second, the two states were engaged in a battle with each other for the heart and soul of the German nation. Each represented a political system fundamentally opposed to the other. The development of competing narratives was focused on negating the legitimacy of the other. The symbols incorporated by both states often included elements of this competition between the two Germanies. The two states also reacted to each other's symbols in a competitive way, often by offering competing interpretations of the same symbol. So, for example, the GDR claimed to view the use of the *Deutschlandlied* in West Germany as an indication that the FRG continued to harbor fascist tendencies, while West Germans interpreted the fact that workers in East Berlin sang the *Deutschlandlied* during the June 17, 1953 uprising as a sign that the controversial anthem represented anti-Communism. The song developed new layers of meaning to fit the new political reality.

The book is divided into chapters explaining the adoption and embracement of different symbols, such as flags, capital cities, anthems, holidays, and postage stamps. Not every symbol that Feinstein examines had equal symbolic weight in the minds of the public. For example, the national flag probably has deeper resonance than the civilian service medals given out by the states, while postage stamps, as the author correctly points out, are not only symbols of the state but necessary and practical items regardless of their design. Nevertheless, her account of the debates surrounding the adoption of these symbols is fascinating reading.

One particularly good example of Feinstein's analysis is the chapter on national anthems. As the author points out: "Nowhere were the West German government's willingness to compromise with the Nazi past and the East German regime's determination to create a new order more clearly evident" (p. 86). In fact, for

several years the FRG avoided the issue entirely, preferring to maintain the fiction that the division of Germany would last only into the near future. On the other hand, shortly after the creation of the GDR, President Wilhelm Pieck turned his attention to the question of a new anthem. Feinstein speculates that the specific role of an anthem—lyrics performing a didactic function while inducing mass participation—made the anthem more important than the flag for the Communist regime.

Her discussion of the *Deutschlandlied* shows more powerfully than any other issue the shadow of the Nazi past, because the song was so closely associated with the Nazis. The tune came from Haydn (1797), and the lyrics, by Hoffmann von Fallersleben, embodied the democratic nationalism of 1841. In the twentieth century, however, the song became unambiguously nationalistic and militaristic. The Nazis sang only the notorious first verse, in an aggressive and threatening stance. The song was more closely associated with the Nazi period than any of the other symbols the author discusses. (Of course, uniquely Nazi symbols such as the black-white-red swastika were outlawed, first by the occupation regime and then by the FRG.)

In comparison to the situation in the nascent GDR, in the West the adoption of an anthem was of no great importance in comparison with other pressing needs. In September 1949, however, a coalition of center-right parliamentarians pressed to make the *Deutschlandlied* the official anthem of the FRG. The coalition tried to justify the continued use of the first verse, claiming that the "text is not arrogant" (p. 92) and dismissing opposition. Their protests were disingenuous; supporters of the motion included expellees' organizations and former Nazis, who, for perhaps different reasons, had no problem with an overtly expansionist interpretation. President Theodor Heuss was given the responsibility of choosing an anthem. He delayed for some time, secretly commissioning a new song, because he did not support the use of the *Deutschlandlied*. He hoped that his new anthem, *Hymne an Deutschland*, would be adopted by the people after some time. The new song, was not, however, embraced. Many objected to its overtly religious lyrics; indeed, even religious people were uncomfortable with the blend of religion and nationalism, a combination the Nazis had used and distorted. More importantly, the melody was judged by most to be inferior to Haydn's. Because it was weak and discordant, Feinstein suggests, the new melody was perceived as overly feminine and thus failed to express a sense of renewed vigor, with which the nation hoped to overcome its "crisis of masculinity". This is one exam-

ple (of several in the book) where Feinstein's interpretation seems to stretch. Even though the *Deutschlandlied* was controversial in meaning, its beauty is undeniable. It is more likely that, rather than reflecting femininity, the new melody was not as lovely as Haydn's tune; moreover, the public tends to favor the familiar over the new and unknown.

By 1951, the West German public leaned toward the use of the *Deutschlandlied*. In spite of its Nazi associations, unavoidable for anyone who had lived through that period, many saw it as connecting the present with an even older past. As the *Deutschlandlied* began to be played at sporting events, the tide in its favor became almost invincible. This phenomenon was not entirely an organic one. Members of the SPD, who continued to object to the *Deutschlandlied*, were painted by the Adenauer government as unpatriotic, craven and hypocritical to foreign opposition. Public support grew to the extent that Heuss was forced to acknowledge the song's legitimacy. On May 6, 1952 it was announced that the third verse of the song would be the new anthem of the FRG. Although the decision was criticized by many foreign governments as a sign of the resurgence of German nationalism, the song was finally transformed, for some people at least, into a more democratic symbol on June 17, 1953, when East German workers sang it as they waved the black-red-gold. Thus, the song became a symbol of anti-communism, rather than one of militaristic aggression. The adoption of the *Deutschlandlied*, the author argues persuasively, helped to legitimize the new FRG. Public support for the song reveals a strong thread of national identity running through the postwar Germanies, a national identity available for the FRG and the GDR to utilize if their symbols reflected a tolerable reality.

While the *Deutschlandlied* strengthened the legitimacy of the FRG, it increased the distance between the two Germanies. The GDR perceived, or claimed to perceive, the song as a sign of continuing fascist tendencies in the west. While the GDR adopted other symbols from Germany's past—Berlin as a capital city and the black-red-gold tricolor—it commissioned an entirely new anthem suitable for the communist state. The new song consciously reflected the history, values and image that the GDR wished to portray. "Arise from ruins," the new state acknowledges that "[o]ld danger must be conquered," but vows that "[w]e will beat the people's enemy ... that nevermore a mother / Her son mourns" (pp. 127-28). The song does not explain what constitutes the "people's enemy," but leaves an opening for other didactic techniques to reinforce the GDR's interpretation

of the past. Again, Feinstein is not able to present a thorough account of East German acceptance of the song, but she notes some of the composer's own observations that within a few years the song was widely accepted.

The author's impressive research in other, equally important parts of the book supports her fundamental point that the symbols adopted by the two Germanies served to legitimate the states, more or less successfully, in the eyes of their citizens. The most significant revelation is the extent to which both Germanies shaped their identities in opposition to one another. Could the character of West Germany, as it developed during the Cold War, have existed without East Germany, or vice versa? Certainly not, Feinstein's research shows. There are, however, some significant flaws with the author's interpretation. Most important is the sometimes awkward and unconvincing use of gender analysis in what is otherwise a history of political culture. Many will object that political culture, like all human culture, is inherently gendered. That may be true, but the insertion of gender analysis into this particular discussion seems in many cases forced, as if a peer reviewer suggested the author incorporate the perspective. There is no doubt that the postwar occupation can and should be seen as the history of both men and women acting in distinct ways, and the role of women in the reconstruction of Germany is well known. Some of the suggestions made by the author, however, are uncertain and beside the point. One example, noted above, that the alternative anthem was not sufficiently masculine for widespread acceptance, is unconvincing. Another assertion, namely that the singing of the *Deutschlandlied* by German POWs in Soviet camps is seen as a "redefinition of German masculinity" from that of "military victory" to "courage, belief in homeland, hope, and honor" (p. 105), seems to be merely a nod to some other, unstated imperative. The author's research and conclusions stand strong without the addition.

The second criticism is that the author, at times, seems to go too far to insure a balanced treatment of east and west, which itself leads to imbalance. At some points she adopts a thoroughly suspicious tone for the Adenauer government, seeming to suggest that it manipulated anti-communism solely for its own political purposes; yet clear evidence indicating the GDR regime was far more ruthless in its manipulation of symbols and ideology is noted without comment. Moreover, while she provides fascinating material on the efforts of the FRG to incorporate a wide spectrum of political views into the body politic, she is unable to document a similar effort in East Germany. The debates over songs, flags, capital

cities, and so forth are richer and more contentious in the FRG, including persistent and disturbing voices from the far right. But is it correct to assume that there were no closet Nazis in East Germany? More likely, the GDR suppressed all voices of dissent. A more skeptical stance to the methods and intentions of the GDR might provide a more appropriate tone.

These are small criticisms, however, of a substantial study based on solid research and impressive analysis. The author has a clear and compelling writing style, and

the book adds tremendously to the literature on the post-war era and the relations between the two Germanies.

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