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Friedrich Lenger, ed. *Towards an Urban Nation: Germany since 1780*. Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2002. ix + 186 pp. ISBN 978-1-85973-586-2.



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This short introduction to the urban history of Germany since 1780 is noteworthy for contributions by many influential German historians, including Franz-Josef Brueggemeier, Friedrich Lenger, Axel Schildt, Klaus Tenfelde, Hans-Ulrich Thamer and others. A series of essays presented chronologically covers multiple themes in German urban history, including urban culture; the *Buergertum* and its political and civic concerns; municipal welfare; perceptions of cities; pollution and zoning; urban politics in the Weimar era; urban reconstruction in the two Germanies after the Second World War; and models for planning the Berlin city center. The book aims to give readers a sense of major directions of inquiry by German urban historians. The reader acquires a sense of the major research agendas in German urban history; however, even in a work that seeks to summarize research, it would be useful if some of the essays were longer and richer in detail.

Within a number of individual essays the reader will find several interesting insights. Tenfelde, for example, suggests that urban history should not be conceptualized simply as a history of space or populations, but as an inquiry into culture, communication and notions of time and family (pp. 25-31). Lenger reveals myths about urban migrants at the turn of the last century: the high rate of migration to and from cities obscures the facts that in

many cases labor migrants were primarily young people from the surrounding region, and expected to stay for only a short time (pp. 90-92). Brueggemeier notes that occupation of the Ruhr and passive resistance in 1923 made clear the damage of pollution by providing a banner year for tree growth (pp. 115-116). Schildt explains how the opportunities for rethinking city planning after the Second World War were far more limited than many initially perceived, because of the “reality of the second underground city.... Even when buildings were rubble, the urban infrastructure of gas, water, electricity, telephone lines, sewers, and trains still guided postwar planning” (p. 145).

Tenfelde in his essay on urban culture raises an issue that looms over the rest of the book. Tenfelde concludes that urban culture has spread from cities to all of Germany. “Urbanity as a mode of life and value orientation is universalizing” (p. 34). This notion has a certain ring of truth, though anyone who has spent a weekend in a small German town may think otherwise. However, if the city has conquered the country even where the city does not exist, is there any longer such a thing as urban history? This collection, with its very wide concerns does not fully clarify that basic issue. If urban history is the history of the *Buergertum*, the working class, politics, government, welfare, the environment, culture, ideas, and planning,

what distinguishes it from German history? Or, does urban history only retain a sharp focus for time periods when both urban spaces and urban culture stand out as distinct?

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