

History

GERMANY FROM NAPOLEON TO BISMARCK, 1800–1866.

By Thomas Nipperdey. Trans. by Daniel Nolan. Princeton Univ. Press. 760 pp. \$69.95

In the study of German history, revisionism is especially sharp edged. Over such matters as the significance of Luther or Bismarck, the causes of World War I, or (especially) the sources of Hitler's National Socialism, fierce interpretive rivalries rage.

Amid such *Sturm und Drang*, the work of Thomas Nipperdey, a professor of history at the University of Munich until his death in 1992, shines as a beacon. Nipperdey's interests ranged widely, from the Reformation to political parties in Imperial Germany. But his crowning achievement was his three-volume history of Germany in the 19th century, of which the present volume is the first to appear in English.

When the German original, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1866, Bürgerwelt und starker Staat*, was published in 1983, it was widely praised (even by Nipperdey's rivals) as a masterwork, and it has since become the standard academic prelude to Gordon Craig's *German History 1866–1945*. Perhaps more surprising, it was also a best-seller in Germany. These successes are due in part to Nipperdey's engaging style but also to the way he cut against the prevailing trends in German historiography.

He did so by writing *narrative* history. Nipperdey makes no reference to scholarly debates and feels no compulsion to document sources. (The German edition contains a relatively modest bibliography.) His book has neither preface nor introduction, and the epilogue fills barely a page. What Nipperdey does do is tell a story, thickly detailed but also spirited. "In the beginning was Napoleon," he opens. Then he sets off at a gallop for the finish line, some 700 pages ahead. There he closes with a succinct account of Prussia's victory over Austria and the creation of an enlarged Prussian state in

the north. Like Craig, he sees 1866, not 1871 (when Bismarck's Reich was established), as the turning point. Yet Nipperdey spurns the deterministic hindsight of many of his colleagues. In his view, the future in 1866 was still "open."

While the great historians of the last century, such as Franz Schnabel, focused on the history of ideas, Nipperdey gives equal atten-

tion to how institutional and cultural changes affected family life, the status of women, the conditions of labor, and the hopes and fears of different classes. And while the so-called critical historians (a group of theory-oriented academics led by Hans-Ulrich Wehle in the 1970s) have found clear continuities in German history leading up to Hitler, Nipperdey sees instead "infinite shades of gray," contradictions, and incongruities.

Yes, Nipperdey finds "a deeply ingrained tendency towards the doctrinaire" in the infant parliamentarianism of the 1840s. Yes, he concedes that "each pre-1933 epoch is indirectly related to Hitler." But each period was also "immediate to itself," he contends. Through sustained comparisons with contemporary developments in other European societies, he resists the idea of a German *Sonderweg*, or special path.

Nipperdey also raises tough questions about how much our understanding of one period can help us make sense of a later epoch. Whether we are searching for clues about today's reunified Germany or coping with post-Cold War disunity and fragmentation elsewhere, these are questions worth pondering anew.

—Jeffrey Gedmin

A TALE OF TWO UTOPIAS: *The Political Journey of the Generation of the 1900s.*

By Paul Berman. Norton. 300 pp. \$24

What is utopia but the worship of perfection at the expense of the good? Thomas More understood this when he contrasted his neologism *utopia*, meaning "no place,"



with *eutopia*, meaning “the good place.” The Right has its utopias, usually in the Good Old Days. But for serious utopias, set in the Glorious if Receding Future, the Right can’t hold a candle to the Left. There have been moments—in 1830, in 1848, in 1917—when the Left thought itself just one manifesto, protest, or burning barricade away from utopia. But these expectations were not met—a point memorialized by graveyards around the globe.

Berman, a staff writer for the *New Yorker*, is a man of many expectations. He would add two more dates to the list of revolutionary moments: 1968 and 1989. To some degree, he is merely stating the obvious. Clearly, 1968 was one of the more tumultuous years of the century, and 1989 was arguably the most important year since 1945. But Berman wants to do more than mark these milestones. He wants to connect them as parts of a single utopian project.

Berman contends that 1968 was the apogee of not one but four revolutions. The first was the Western youth revolt, epitomized in the United States by the New Left and the counterculture’s “insurrections against middle-class customs.” The second revolution was one of the spirit, encompassing everything from a turn toward Asian religion to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. The third comprised the worldwide insurrections against Western, mostly American, imperialism. And the fourth was the battle against communism, spearheaded by the Prague Spring.

Berman tries to knit these diverse revolts, rebellions, reforms, and riots into a single, essentially left-wing fabric. But too many threads keep unraveling—most notably the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia and the less velvety revolutions in the rest of Eastern Europe. Undeniably there were affinities between these anti-communist movements and the Western counterculture. Vaclav Havel was a champion of what Herbert Marcuse called “the great refusal,” urging his fellow Czechs to create “parallel lives” where they could live “in truth.” The rock bands, the cult of Frank Zappa, the sexual liberationism, the anticareerism—these were all too recognizably the hallmarks of protest in the West.

But what does it mean to be left-wing under communist rule? To Berman’s chagrin, Havel and some of his like-minded

compatriots moved from *Ramparts* to *Commentary*, began to read Adam Smith, and praised President Ronald Reagan’s Euromissile policy as a necessary bulwark of freedom. Berman records his dismay at visiting Czechoslovakia and seeing the “utopianism” of the average citizen’s admiration for America. His only consolation, it seems, is that “eventually the people of the East were fated to get a clearer idea of American bleakness and social decay.”

In the end, Berman’s mostly hortatory attempt to equate 1989 with 1968 founders on the facts. Unlike the New Left, the protest movements of Eastern Europe did not dream of building the perfect society. They did not consider liberal democracy to be morally bankrupt. Instead, they sought to disentangle themselves from the failed utopia of communism and achieve what they called “a *normal* society” of family, friends, work, and faith—a eutopia, at most.

—Jonah Goldberg

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

Stanley I. Kutler et al., eds. Macmillan. 4 vols. 1,941 pp. \$385

The tone of this excellent new reference work is that of the academy in the 1990s—neither cheerleading nor doomsaying, skeptical of government’s ability to do good but wary of the presumed magic of markets. “Nostalgia is our greatest barrier to historical understanding,” writes editor in chief Kutler (a historian at the University of Wisconsin and editor of *Reviews in American History*). There is nothing nostalgic about the articles dealing with governance and public policy. Historian James Patterson, for example, gives a masterful account of government efforts to shape the contours of wealth and poverty. Harry Schieber’s article on federalism provides much needed perspective on current fantasies of a benign, decentralized, Tocquevillian future. And political scientist Bert Rockman’s brilliant review of the 20th-century presidency concludes that, for all the increased visibility and bureaucratization of the White House, “it is not clear that the office is any more powerful in 1993 than it was in 1893.” As Rockman quips, “the buck stops nowhere in the American system.” In historians’ handbooks, it is rare to find such a fine, dry spirit of realism.

—Michael Lacey