

[Review of the book *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin*]

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the First World War viewed propaganda with caution and skepticism once peacetime had arrived, the Nazis ascribed to it enormous significance as they prepared for the next global conflict.

In arriving at these judgments, Welch very properly draws on a wide range of sources: propaganda campaigns, monthly government reports on the mood of the population, parliamentary debates, and the diaries of insightful observers such as Princess Blücher (while not neglecting the actions and voices of ordinary people such as participants in food riots). He also focuses on the shifting fortunes of the successive war loan drives as a way of gauging fluctuating support for the war effort. Most commendably, the volume features a wealth of excellently rendered and judiciously chosen illustrations of war posters, postcards, and cartoons, helping the reader to follow discussions of themes and images. The inclusion of organizational charts of the administrative divisions of government propaganda bodies is also very useful.

Even more explicit comparisons and contrasts to contemporary entente propaganda would further strengthen the work, but its contribution to the growing historiography of the First World War and its social, cultural, and intellectual impact is clear. This book will appeal to general readers in European history as well as specialists in German history or the First World War and is now among the important works dealing with the origins of propaganda as a factor in modern politics.

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Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin.

By *Belinda J. Davis*.

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. Pp. xiv + 347. \$55.00.

In this study, Belinda J. Davis offers a highly original interpretation of politics in World War I Germany and makes an important contribution to our understanding of the collapse of the German state in 1918. Over the course of the war, she argues, a major shift occurred in Germans' expectations of what a state or government should do for its citizens. Collapsing "largely from within," the state failed "to act successfully in the role of a government as the populace now fashioned it" (p. 6). Two things make this study pathbreaking. First is the demonstrated course by which Berliners acknowledged a new site of the German nation. "Women of lesser means" (*minderbemittelte Frauen*) came, in the eyes of many urban residents, to represent the German people. Second, Davis convincingly shows that food was central to the imperial German state's loss of legitimacy.

Home Fires Burning is at once a history of everyday life, a history of food, and a shrewd analysis of the way that both shape politics. Instead of focusing on individual actors, Davis relies on "personae"—composite types that stand in for specific individuals. The "women of lesser means" are one example, and the "soldier's wife" is another. Davis's access to these women is not unmediated—their words and deeds come to us through police and press reports—and she acknowledges that police officers and journalists in turn "drew on the powers" of female consumers to express their own interests. As a history of food, the study looks both at aggregate statistics and at rich anecdotes, cartoons, and songs that get at the cultural meanings of food and the importance of various foodstuffs to Berliners' sense of Germanness.

A skilled story teller, Davis has devised an innovative structure for the book: each

season or year of the war is viewed through the lens of a particular foodstuff. Bread, potatoes, butter, milk, and jam all take center stage in turn. She begins with bread shortages in the fall and winter of 1914–15. Early protesters blamed “traitorous fellow German consumers” (p. 24) for the shortages, and Berliners settled on the unlikely figure of the “soldier’s wife,” with her unfair privilege, as the primary culprit. This surprised officials, who expected the soldier’s wife to be a figure of universal sympathy in wartime. During the potato crisis of 1915, the “woman of lesser means” who lacked privileged access to foodstuffs emerged as a new social protagonist, “constituted in opposition to the soldier’s wife” (p. 39). By 1915, Davis notes that struggles among different categories of consumers receded as many Berliners shifted their anger to merchants and profiteers. Profit, not privilege, was the new internal enemy. Her overarching thesis is that poor consumers redefined expectations of the role of the state in German society, and Davis writes of a growing belief across the political spectrum “that only deeply interventionist measures by the state could return society to order” (p. 46).

While consumers rioted over butter and other fats in 1915 and began to demand a “food dictatorship” to enforce equitable distribution, the Berlin press reinforced consumers’ growing power by equating the “poor consumer” with “we Germans” and “the people” (p. 61). Davis is particularly good at noticing these linguistic nuances. Evidence that authorities were trying to comply with consumer demands comes in a surprising chapter on the failed mass feeding schemes of the midwar period. Mass feeding programs, either dine-in facilities or those that allowed patrons to take food home, might have ameliorated the food crisis in Berlin, but they met with stunning resistance. To explain this perplexing failure, Davis draws attention to the connections between food and class: the mass feeding facilities were tainted by the prewar stigma of charity. She maintains that eating a warm meal around the family table was both a part of a German “bourgeois ideal of national culture” and an important sign of dignity and respectability for the working classes (p. 142). Missing, however, from this otherwise splendid discussion of food and Germanness are the upper classes. What foods were wealthy Berliners eating, and what cultural meanings did they ascribe to them? Did restaurant fine dining, a very different kind of public feeding, continue during the war? Answers to these questions may be difficult to recover; after all, the well fed were likely far less vocal about their food experiences than the hungry.

The mass feeding schemes were exhausted by 1916. One contemporary explained of lower-middle-class women, “They would rather starve inside their own four walls than be seen going to a people’s kitchen” (p. 141). This raises an important but unanswered question: was there starvation in Berlin during World War I? Davis might have articulated more clearly the difference between hunger and starvation. The fact that so few Berliners (as few as 3 percent) visited the mass feeding facilities suggests that, at least in 1916, Berliners suffered from the former. The shocking statistic that about 700,000 German civilians “died directly from malnutrition during the war” (p. 184) needs to be explained, because from the *Starßenbild* of Berlin that Davis provides, there do not seem to be corpses in the streets. (At least not human corpses—there is a vivid description of the frantic, public dismembering of a horse).

Poor consumers continued in 1917 to rail against profit and to demand total, centralized control of foodstuffs. Davis sees in their demands, and in the state’s response, the new conception of the German state taking shape. It was to serve the people rather than be served by them. The establishment of new food agencies during the war—the Imperial Grain Authority, the War Food Office, the War Profiteering Office—suggests that authorities were trying to serve the vocal population. The picture we get of late-

war Berlin is of a city in free fall, with skyrocketing crime and consumers resorting to "self-help." Following a well-publicized jam scandal and other food exposés, Berliners had by 1918 lost faith in the ability of the state to meet its obligations to the people. Davis's reinterpretation of the existing literature on the end of World War I might be summarized as follows: urban Germans did not revolt against the total control of the hated war government; in the eyes of poor consumers, this government did not have enough control.

While Davis usefully hypothesizes about the legacy of this new understanding of state obligation to citizens in the Weimar period, this is really a study of World War I. Her focus on Berlin and not all of Germany is a welcome decision; whatever is sacrificed in generalization is made up for in the deep and multilayered understanding of, as she writes, "how politics worked" in Berlin. Many historians seem at present to be looking for new ways to write about politics and new definitions of "the political." This is a model study of how it can be done.

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Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans. By *Eric A. Johnson*. New York: Basic Books, 1999. Pp. xx + 636. \$35.00.

Current debates on the nature of Nazi Germany have produced a trend, perhaps epitomized by the work of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, that places the onus for the crimes committed by the regime on the willing complicity of the entire population, spreading culpability as widely as possible. In addition, there has been an increased interest in the precise workings of the instruments used by the Nazis to control civil society and enforce compliance with their policies. These studies, most notably by Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann, Robert Gellately, and Reinhard Mann, have shown that, contrary to much contemporary opinion, the Gestapo was neither all seeing nor all knowing and that limits on its manpower and resources meant that its success depended heavily on cooperation from and denunciations by the civilian population.

In this study, Eric A. Johnson attempts very successfully to redress the balance and moves the Gestapo and its functionaries back to center stage as perpetrators of many of the worst excesses of Nazi terror. In this thoughtful and balanced study, he examines in detail the Gestapo personnel and organization in the Rhineland municipalities of Cologne and Krefeld. Combining extensive archival research based on the surviving Gestapo, *Sondergericht* (special court), and other records with information gleaned from interviews and questionnaires sent to surviving perpetrators, bystanders, and victims in these districts, the author builds up a detailed picture of how the system of Nazi terror operated.

The book is divided into six sections. The first deals with the role of terror in the Nazi regime and the functions of the Gestapo. In this section, Johnson poses a series of pertinent questions that inform the rest of the book and also provides a detailed survey of the historiography on the subject to date. This attention to previous scholarship and its integration into the research and conclusions provided in each of the subsequent chapters are a hallmark of good writing and good scholarship. The next two sections examine how the Gestapo and other agencies carried out the terror campaigns against both racial and ideological opponents of the regime in the prewar era. Here again, the author strikes an excellent balance between analysis and letting the