

12-1-2009

Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past, by Neil Gregor

Gavriel D. Rosenfeld
Fairfield University, grosenfeld@fairfield.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/history-facultypubs>

© 2009 by Cambridge University Press. Original published version can be found at DOI:
10.1017/S0008938909991294

Peer Reviewed

Repository Citation

Rosenfeld, Gavriel D., "Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past, by Neil Gregor" (2009). *History Faculty Publications*. 15.

<https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/history-facultypubs/15>

Published Citation

Rosenfeld, Gavriel. "Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past, by Neil Gregor." *Central European History* 42.4 (Dec 2009): 791-794.

This item has been accepted for inclusion in DigitalCommons@Fairfield by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It is brought to you by DigitalCommons@Fairfield with permission from the rights-holder(s) and is protected by copyright and/or related rights. **You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses, you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.** For more information, please contact digitalcommons@fairfield.edu.

doi:10.1017/S0008938909991294

Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past. By Neil Gregor. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 2007. Pp. 390. Cloth \$45.00. ISBN 9780300101072.

Thanks to the flood of recent studies on the Germans' confrontation with the Nazi past, a rough consensus now exists on the phases and underlying dynamics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the postwar Federal Republic. The transition from early evasiveness to later confrontation, the role of political and generational factors in that transition, the tension between official memories and counter-memories, the rise and fall of discourses on victimization and perpetration—all of these factors have been explored in depth. One area of research that is still in its infancy, by contrast, is the connection between coming to terms with the past at the national and local level. Neil Gregor's impressive new book is a welcome addition to a growing body of local studies on the German confrontation with the Nazi past, focusing on the efforts of the former *Stadt der Reichsparteitage* (City of the Reich Party Rallies) to deal with the legacy of the Third Reich during the first three decades of the postwar period.

Gregor examines the city from the perspective of a social historian. He is more interested in Nuremberg's social groups and their relations with one another than on their views toward the city's physical spaces, though he skillfully incorporates them at various junctures into his analysis. He chiefly examines what he calls "communities of remembrance" and the development of an "urban memory culture" in Nuremberg. Arguing persuasively that different social groups' wartime and postwar experiences molded local memory, Gregor challenges the scholarly view that Germans during the Adenauer era largely agreed in their approach to the Nazi period. In fact, he empirically demonstrates that major divisions existed among different groups—the middle class and working class, indigenous residents and newly arrived refugees, Christians and Jews—and their views of the past. He argues that the chief challenge of the early postwar period was for city leaders and local citizens to forge a central narrative that could bridge the different experiences of the city's constituent groups. The narrative that they selected, and the one that remained remarkably unchallenged for much of the early postwar era, was one of local collective victimization during the Nazi years.

The first section of *Haunted City* examines the birth of this victimization discourse. It describes the hardships experienced by ordinary Germans during the years 1945 to 1950—hunger, homelessness, and poverty—and explains how their experiences led them to focus on their own sufferings rather than those of the Nazis' non-German victims. Not all Germans suffered equally, however. There were major rifts between local evacuees and eastern refugees,

for example, because of their different historical experiences (the former having left Nuremberg temporarily for the countryside, the latter having been permanently driven from their homes by the Soviets). There were also divisions between veterans, Germans with missing relatives, returning POWs, self-proclaimed victims of denazification, foreign displaced persons, and Jews. Local politicians struggled for a time to fashion narratives that would appeal to all these groups and learned the hard way, after attempts to lecture the citizenry about their culpability went over badly, that they had to cater to the dominant majority's desire to privilege their own suffering. This process, Gregor argues, was "the precondition for the re-establishment of a functioning civil society" (p. 132), a claim that echoes Hermann Lübke's famous thesis about German democratization being predicated upon selective remembrance.

Haunted City's second section discusses how the agendas of lobbying organizations representing different social groups succeeded in imposing their views of the Nazi era on the local cityscape. Groups representing veterans, POWs, expellees, and self-proclaimed victims of the occupation (mainly ex-Nazis) successfully lobbied Nuremberg officials to erect memorials marking their respective experiences. Gregor astutely describes the silences of these memorials, such as the one erected in 1953 at the Luitpoldhain Ehrenhalle to the dead of World War I and World War II (which elided the conflicts' vastly different origins and consequences), as well as to other memorials dedicated to POWs and expellees. He also analyzes the speeches delivered at these memorials' unveiling to show the emphasis on local suffering instead of guilt. The selectivity of local memory is underscored by the city's use of stones from the demolished synagogue on Hans-Sachs-Platz to build a memorial to civilian air-raid victims (1955–1959)—a memorial that ignores the city's persecution of its Jewish population. "These silences," Gregor stresses, were "the necessary price for the . . . integration into a workable democratic polity of political opposites whose knowledge of the recent past must otherwise incline them to mutual, paralysing hatred" (p. 189). Even if the dominant SPD city leadership would have preferred to pursue a "confrontational memory politics" against its conservative CSU opponents, it embraced reconciliation and adhered to the strategy of emphasizing collective victimization because it knew that "the bulk of the population had supported Nazism in one way or another" (p. 186).

In the third section of his book, Gregor explains how an increasingly self-critical memory culture willing to confront the Holocaust nevertheless took shape in Nuremberg. He identifies several factors in explaining this development: the dying-off of older Germans (the "generation of 1890"), which removed constraints on what could be said about the Nazi era in public; the full arrival of prosperity after the mid-1950s, which tempered the previous sense of German suffering; the return of the last POWs, which nullified a key source of the victim discourse; and, most importantly, the Eichmann and

Auschwitz trials, which reminded Germans of the Nazis' crimes against people other than themselves. These are familiar factors that shaped West Germany's memory culture at the national level. But Gregor astutely shows how they manifested themselves locally. He describes how they prompted new efforts in the 1960s by trade union, religious organizations (*Aktion Sühnezeichen*), and educational groups to increase awareness of the Third Reich's crimes. And he singles out the efforts of SPD officials, such as the head of the city's Schools and Culture office, Hermann Glaser, who organized exhibits on the Warsaw ghetto and Auschwitz in the early 1960s, and who a few years later sponsored the "Nuremberg conversations," which brought together major German academics and journalists to discuss aspects of the Nazi past. This new openness was not a radical breakthrough, Gregor cautions, and cannot be described by a shift "from 'evasion' to 'confrontation'" (p. 295). Realizing that they were "acting in the face of resistance," the promoters of the new memory culture maintained certain silences and refrained from overthrowing the dominant local discourse of collective victimization.

The persistence of older nationalistic views on the Nazi era in the face of an increasingly self-critical perspective constitutes the book's last section. Local groups representing veterans and expellees succeeded in erecting new memorials to their pet causes, but Gregor shows how the problems that accompanied them (financial and otherwise) reveal them to be last gasps of organizations that were declining in relevance. The decreasing frequency with which commemorative events were held in the 1960s, such as the *Volkstrauertag* and anniversary ceremonies marking the city's aerial destruction in January 1945, also reflected the slow decline of Nuremberg's early postwar mnemonic consensus. The city's willingness to create a memorial acknowledging the mass graves of Soviet POWs and foreign slave laborers in 1963 was a tangible example of changing times. So, too, was the increasing—albeit tentative—inclusion of references to Jews in commemorative speeches made by politicians. These trends represented progress; yet, for Gregor, Nuremberg's memory culture remained strikingly self-centered, if not "narcissistic," through the end of the decade (p. 376).

Haunted City is a persuasive book whose only weakness is that it leaves readers wanting more. As its nearly 400-page narrative barely breaks into the decade of the 1970s, we learn nothing about how the city confronted its Nazi past at a time in which debates over the Third Reich were intensifying at the national level. This is not meant as a criticism, for Gregor deals masterfully with the material he presents. Covering another three decades of the city's approach to Vergangenheitsbewältigung would be a daunting task. But one wonders how Gregor would describe the evolution of Nuremberg's collective victimization discourse through the Brandt, Kohl, and Schroeder eras. Did it ever disappear? Does it persist today? Gregor might have contemplated these matters in his short conclusion, for there is much to suggest that the city's memory culture did

eventually change. In his penultimate chapter, he discusses—a bit too briefly—the city's pragmatic treatment of the remnants of the Reich Party Rally Grounds, describing it as further proof of Nuremberg's inability to see its links to the Nazi perpetrators. But visitors to the site today know that it has since been transformed into a major documentation center that directly confronts the city's connections to the Nazi regime. When and why the city leaders and citizens made this about-face would be important to know. What it might say about the city's early postwar attitudes would be equally important. These suggestions notwithstanding, *Haunted City* is a splendid work that enriches our understanding of how a city deeply implicated in the Third Reich's criminality began the tortuous process of confronting the truth of its actions. With any luck, future scholars will apply his approach to other German cities and further deepen our understanding of urban Vergangenheitsbewältigung.

GAVRIEL D. ROSENFELD
FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY

doi:10.1017/S0008938909991300

Seduced by Secrets: Inside the Stasi's Spy-Tech World. By Kristie Macrakis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2008.
Pp. xv +370. Cloth \$28.00. ISBN 978-0-521-88747-2.

Specialists in intelligence history will find much of interest in Professor Kristie Macrakis' new study of the East German Ministry for State Security (MfS) also known as the Stasi. Macrakis, a professor of the history of science at Michigan State University, explains in the preface that her interest in this subject grew out of a long-ago year spent as a student in divided Berlin. After the Wall came down, she was amazed to discover how much espionage had been going on around her and decided to make it the focus of intensive historical research. This long-standing personal familiarity with her subject is evident and helps to enliven her text.

Seduced by Secrets is the result of her detailed investigations into the archive of the Stasi over a number of research visits to Germany. Using its files, Macrakis reconstructs a number of episodes and events from Cold-War history. As an expert in modern science—she is also the author of *Science under Socialism* (1999)—she has chosen in particular to focus on the Stasi's attitudes toward technology, what practical use the MfS made of it, and how it sought to acquire more.

Many of the events she describes are very interesting, such as that of Werner Stiller, a case officer in the MfS's Sector for Science and Technology, described in