

Preface

The first spark of recognition that we were engaged in similar quests to puzzle out the ongoing relevance of “race” in the wake of Nazi defeat and postwar democratization came in an elevator on the campus of the University of Illinois in the fall of 2003. Two of us, Rita and Heide, had just become acquainted at the Midwest German History Workshop and, in discussing our current research interests, realized we shared compatible assessments—and frustrations—regarding the historiography of the postwar period and the absence of attention to issues of “race.” Over the next few years, while completing our individual projects, we began collaborating and recruited our coauthors, Atina Grossmann and Geoff Eley, for a panel on the subject at the German Studies Association in 2004. Their expertise has substantially broadened and deepened the comparative analysis we agree is so sorely needed for exploring connections between notions of “difference” and practices of democracy in the postwar German and European context and has greatly enriched our collective understanding.

What has emerged from our ongoing collaboration is a rather odd species of book. It is neither a synthetic narrative of the evolution of “race” after 1945 nor an edited collection that presents the full range of topics, and historians, this theme could encompass. Rather, it offers a brief critical analysis of certain key debates and developments in German and European history since 1945. Each of us has authored a separate chapter, connected to our expertise and research interests; the introduction and chapter 4 are coauthored. Taken together, the essays aspire to make a spirited historiographical intervention on behalf of establishing the continued salience of notions and practices of “race” both for the post-1945 period and for contemporary German and European society more generally. The introduction lays out the theoretical and historiographical ambitions of our collaboration in more detail.

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