GRMN 351H.01: German Culture - Beginnings to Romanticism

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Introduction: “Looking for the Good German”

I. German-American Relationships, Problems in German Historiography
   A. 58 million Americans of German descent
   B. Germans’ claim to have saved “Western Civilization” over centuries
   C. Over much of postwar period, “discussion began and ended with Hitler”
      1. “History Channel” often dubbed the “Hitler Channel”
   D. “New generation of historians telling longer, more complex history”
   E. Post-unification “promised emergence of a normal Germany”
   F. Caricatured effort to offer long-term perspective: “Tacitus hypothesis”

   A. Issue of “liberating” in addition to telling, explaining
   B. Gordon Craig: Prussian-German Empire evolved into “land of obedience”
   C. Argument of German “political backwardness” vs. revolutionary politics of US and France
   D. Important role of intense cultural and technological modernization in 19th century, time of German unification (1871)
      1. Between 1850 – 1870 1.7 million Germans emigrated to US
   E. Historical critiques of weak, conservative German middle class, unable to replace nobility, estates
   F. The “Good Burgher”, Ozment: German middle class more than just “pushovers”
      1. Historical development of middle class liberalism, institutions: “Road to National Socialism” not inevitable

III. Thomas Nipperdey (1927 – 1992)
   A. Controversial historian, aimed to resituate idea of modern Germany as beginning in early 19th century rather than Nazi era
      1. National Socialism the novelty, not the result of something inevitable
      2. 14 of 25 European democracies between 1919 – 1938 had fallen
   B. Historiographic debates in Germany particularly polarized
   C. Debates with Richard J. Evans, British historian: Can Germans be “exculpated” from responsibility of what led to and what was carried out by National Socialism

IV. Both East and West Germany sought to establish themselves as definitive anti-fascist states:
   East Germany = socialism, West Germany = liberal democracy
   A. Role of the “nine’s” and the “Good Germany”: 1849: German National Assembly, 1919: Establishment of Weimar Republic, 1949: Establishment of German Democratic Republic (East Germany), Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), 1989: Fall of Berlin Wall

V. “Tacitus Challenge”
   A. Haunting legacy of label of “barbarian”: Roman legacy, recent legacy of Nazi experience and world’s perceptions
   B. “New guild of social historians”: Conflicts between perceived historic “land of obedience” with modern “penitential state” with “idealized egalitarian democracy”
   C. Ozment argues: “Historical experience has...left Germans more fearful of anarchy than of tyranny....” Ozment takes on the “Tacitus challenge” to examine 2,000 years of Germany history to interpret how this came to be.