



The German Right, 1860-1920: Political Limits of the Authoritarian Imagination (German and European Studies)

James Retallack

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Before the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, Germany was undergoing convulsive socioeconomic and political change. With unification as a nation state under Bismarck in 1871, Germany experienced the advent of mass politics, based on the principle of one man, one vote. The dynamic, diverse political culture that emerged challenged the adaptability of the 'interlocking directorate of the Right.' To serve as a bulwark of the authoritarian state, the Right needed to exploit traditional sources of power while mobilizing new political recruits, but until Emperor Wilhelm II's abdication in 1918 these aims could not easily be reconciled.

In The German Right, 1860-1920, James Retallack examines how the authoritarian imagination inspired the Right and how political pragmatism constrained it. He explores the Right's regional and ideological diversity, and refuses to privilege the 1890s as the tipping point when the traditional politics of notables gave way to mass politics. Retallack also challenges the assumption that, if Imperial Germany was modern, it could not also have been authoritarian. Written with clear, persuasive prose, this wide-ranging analysis draws together threads of reasoning from German and Anglo-American scholars over the past 30 years and points the way for future research into unexplored areas.

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