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Germany: Yesterday and Tomorrow

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Merkl, Peter H. *Germany: Yesterday and Tomorrow*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965. 366 p.

Among the feverish hours of activity that characterize life in the Federal Republic of Germany today, there are, for thoughtful individuals, moments of recollection, moments of remorse, moments when the crimes of the Hitler era are almost tangibly present. West Germans call this malady the "undigested part." Efforts to digest, or understand, the Hitler era have caused difficulties alike for Germans and non-Germans. This book goes far toward placing that period in perspective. In addition, it traces events, political forces, parties, and personalities that have shaped the Federal Republic, and assesses the prospects for democracy in Germany. "Have the Germans really changed?" is a serious question for students of international affairs. The author approaches an answer by interweaving strands of economic, human, and political development theories in readable fashion. He sees Germany fitting well the stages of economic growth proposed by W.W. Rostow (a theory rejected by some economists). At the same time, Merkl finds Germany between two world wars exhibiting the rebellious traits of an adolescent human. Undergoing economic and quasi-human growing pains, Germany groped also toward political maturity in Weimar Republic days, but was prevented from achieving it by the coming of the Third Reich. The author comes closer to providing a background within which the rise to power of Hitler is understandable than does any other within the limited knowledge of this reviewer. Following the defeat of Hitler, West Germany had to rebuild on all fronts. Many speak of her "economic miracle," but Merkl sees less of the miraculous in the economic than in the social changes of postwar Germany. These social changes he believes to be permanent and tending toward political stability. His answer is that the Germans have indeed changed and that they have an "understanding of themselves that is distinctly Western and democratic." The comprehensive development of present political forces and parties in West Germany, together with the overall excellence of the historical treatment of Germany since 1850, mark this book as outstanding reading for one who would understand the Federal Republic of Germany.

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