

Reading Questions

Jarausch and Geyer, “A Struggle for Unity: Redefining National Identities”

1. The authors argue that examining the history of “German identity” is preferable to trying to figure out German “national character.” What is the difference, and what do they see as the advantages of their approach? (223-4)
2. Think back to the early weeks of the course and to the rival versions of German identity that were in play. How did these issues play out under the Second Empire (the *Kaiserreich*)--what were the Empire’s main conflicts over identity? (224-229; also 242)
3. Postwar versions of German identity were decisively shaped by a reaction against what the authors call “hypernationalism” or “integral nationalism.” What was this?
4. After 1945, the authors see a process of “denationalizing the Germans.” What do they mean by this? It took place in two very different ways in the Federal Republic (west) and German Democratic Republic (east). Explain each case and notice the differences. Pay special attention to what they say about “Westernization” (237) and “postnational identity” (241) in the Federal Republic.
5. Read the final paragraph carefully. In the final analysis, are Jarausch and Geyer optimistic or pessimistic about how contemporary Germany can handle its identity issues?