



*The Betrayal: The Nuremberg Trials and German Divergence* by Kim Christian Priemel.

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Do we really need another book on the Nuremberg Trials? Historian Kim Christian Priemel (Univ. of Oslo) was repeatedly asked this question as he worked on *The Betrayal: The Nuremberg Trials and German Divergence*.<sup>1</sup> He has, in fact, demonstrated that, despite the wealth of existing works on the trials, there is yet much to be learned from a comprehensive study of the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg (1945-46) and the subsequent trials conducted by American, British, and French authorities. Priemel uses materials from forty archives in five countries to establish that the Allied powers not only prosecuted German war criminals, but also clarified a change in the trajectory of German history.

The first half of *The Betrayal* (chaps. 1-5) concerns the creation and procedures of the IMT. The author begins with a review of the scholarly debate over Germany's "otherness" and "betrayal" of Western values. These influenced the Allies' approach to the war crimes trials, as the victors concluded that "Germany had actually been part of the West but had knowingly deviated from its ethics and standards, removing itself from this community" (59). If Germany were ever to be reincorporated into the Western world, the defeated nation would require rehabilitation.

The formulation of the IMT Charter was fraught with disagreements among Allied legal teams and entailed painstaking research and a will to compromise and cooperate. Although dishonorable aspects of their own histories were not at issue in Nuremberg, the Allies agreed there must be no question of the trials' legitimacy. In the end, Priemel maintains, the charter created a trial structure that gave the accused "a fighting chance" (98).

Prosecutors at the IMT argued that Germany had diverged from Western standards of civilization. Defense lawyers strove to shift the blame from their frankly nondescript-appearing clients to the masterminds of Germany's crimes—Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, and others who were conveniently dead. Prosecutors stressed the horrors of the Holocaust to show just how far the German people had strayed. But Priemel confirms the finding of earlier studies that the IMT was never meant to be a "Holocaust Trial." Nonetheless, the unveiling of the systematic murder of the Jews made the complicity of German society as a whole indisputable. The Tribunal's judges convicted all but three of the twenty-four defendants, but the prosecution failed at this point to expose a German "special path" (*Sonderweg*) that departed from Western values.

*The Betrayal's* later chapters (6-10), on the successor trials of German war criminals, set it apart from earlier works on Nuremberg. At the Nuremberg Military Tribunal (1946-49), a "motley crew" (159) of American prosecutors, led by Chief Counsel, Brig. Gen. Telford Taylor, explained the disastrous arc of twentieth-century German history by identifying the country's leading industrial family, Krupp, "and the German militarists ... [as] the indestructible common denominator of Germany's murderous and obstinately repeated lunges at the world's throat" (185).

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1. The book was his Habilitation thesis at Humboldt University Berlin (2016).

By Taylor's logic, if his legal team could establish that Prussian militarism was the mainspring of the Third Reich's aggression, the German people might yet be able to alter their course. In his view, German capitalism had "forsaken its free-market, pluralist, and democratic roots and had joined hands with the forces of nationalism, militarism, and *étatisme*" (239). Requiring less creativity, research, and historical consciousness, the prosecution of SS officials was straightforward and required few resources. After all, Priemel reminds us, the IMT had already proven in detail the criminality of the SS and a host of other Nazi organizations.

The book's final two chapters survey efforts to prove the barbarous, non-Western character of German warfare and suggest a rationale for the German military's ultimate reintegration into the West. Germany's generals strongly resisted efforts to defame the military establishment and its traditions. Their defense attorneys countered prosecution claims of German exceptionalism by pointing to similar Allied policies and actions. Though the German commanders did little to separate themselves from the Third Reich's racist ideology, as the Cold War loomed, Western authorities were more concerned with future security than past wartime atrocities: "Thus, the German military elite re-emerged from the Wehrmacht trials at Nuremberg and Hamburg with at least one foot in the Western camp" (351). The postwar world required a new, *Soviet*, "Other." The western Allies who had once been determined to expose a history of German military, industrial, and economic perversion now sought to align West Germany with the western world against the Soviet Bloc. This meant backpedaling from earlier criticisms of the German military and portraying it as an honorable institution. By 1955, these efforts had resulted in the Bundesrepublik's participation in NATO and concomitant recognition as a defender of Western values.

Kim Christian Priemel's revealing new analysis should inspire historians to carefully reassess the Nuremberg Trials, their consequences and limitations. His deep knowledge of the pertinent legal scholarship on Nuremberg and Germany's putative Special Path inform throughout this unique history of a touchstone in international law. *The Betrayal* is not a book for the casual reader, but serious students will overlook it at their peril—it has set the standard for the next generation of scholars of the Nuremberg Trials.