the decline of the GDR. Perhaps its only weakness is that he barely acknowledges recent German research that might have strengthened his arguments. (The long lead time of American publishers takes it toll.) But that hardly alters the fact that Steven Pfaff's analysis of the Fall Revolution of 1989 in East Germany is a masterpiece of historical sociology and the study of communism.

Jens Gieseke
Research Department of the Federal
Commissioner for the Stasi Records, Berlin

DOI: 10.1017/S0008938907001021

Five Germanys I Have Known. By Fritz Stern. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2006. Pp. xi + 546. $30.00. ISBN-13 978-0-374-15540-7.

This book is a superb example of the recently popular sub-genre of historical writing that might be called autobiography-cum-narrative history. Fritz Stern is particularly well qualified to write such a book. His life is devoted not only to scholarship, but Stern also played and continues to play a role in public life. Few historians are asked to serve as "senior advisor" at an American embassy. In 1993 Stern held such an appointment in Bonn. As he noted with his customary understatement and self-depreciation, his role in Bonn demonstrated that "historians do have their usefulness in practical life" (p. 499). But Stern also experienced the limits of the historian's influence on public figures. In February 1990, he was part of a group of five historians whom the British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, invited to Checkers to advise her on the nature of the emerging reunited Germany. The prime minister not only rejected the advice of the historians, but falsified their conclusions in the communiqué that her secretary issued after the conference.

In this superbly written book Stern sets out early the principles that came to guide his professional and public life. With his early life in Weimar and Nazi Germany firmly in mind, he developed a life-long concern about the "fragility of freedom" (p. 422). He experienced firsthand freedom's destruction in Germany, but Stern is under no illusions that Germany is a unique case. The turn to the right in America that began with the Reagan administration deeply troubles the author, and he has repeatedly come out to warn both America's historians and political leaders about the dangers of assigning liberty a subordinate role in the country's value system.

Stern was born in 1926 in what was then Breslau in German Silesia and is now Wroclaw in Poland. His family was an assimilated German-Jewish family of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938907001021 Published online by Cambridge University Press

considerable distinction. Stern's father was a well-known physician and his mother an innovative educator. The family and its friends sound like a Who's Who of the German professional and scientific elite in the early years of the twentieth century. Stern was named for his godfather, the Nobel Laureate Fritz Haber. Among the most poignant and charming parts of the book are Stern's nostalgic descriptions of the comfortable, yet challenging home life of the German *Bildungsbürger* in the early years of the twentieth century.

Stern became aware of politics as the Weimar Republic entered its final years. I thought he was a little too hard on the Weimar Social Democrats, although Stern does provide a quite positive portrait of the long-time Prussian prime minister, Otto Braun. After the Nazis came to power, the young Stern suffered a series of humiliations at school, where he was the only Jewish student, while his father was subjected to a variety of Nazi professional discriminations. Fortunately for the family, Stern's parents recognized early on that there was no future for them in Nazi Germany. They pursued a variety of exile possibilities, and in the end managed to escape to New York literally just weeks ahead of the *Reichskristallnacht*.

Stern provides vivid descriptions of the difficulties that he and his family faced in their new country. Finances were tight at least until Stern's father could establish his own practice in America. Stern did his part by working at a variety of jobs and also doing much of the cooking at home. (Incidentally, the book is much more detailed in Stern's family life while he was a teenager and college student than after he established his own household.) Stern was fortunate in obtaining a number of fellowships, including one to Columbia University, the institution that was to be his professional and intellectual home for almost his entire career.

The author is scrupulously honest about his political emotions in the 1940s. The Nazis' hatred of the Jews engendered in him a counter "consuming hatred" of all things German. He remembers feeling no sympathy for the victims of the Dresden and Hamburg firestorms; he did not even feel sorry for those who died in the *Hindenburg* airship disaster. In 1945 Stern was an enthusiastic American and European (he provides loving portraits of Paris and Prague), but he had no interest in developing a positive relationship with whatever new Germany might emerge.

That this changed very rapidly in the 1950s must be credited in equal measure to the author's intellectual honesty and to the West Germans, their political leaders, and the new generation of German historians. (Stern was an effective and vocal defender of Fritz Fischer against the historical establishment led by Gerhard Ritter.) Although Stern is not blind to the problems of the new West German society, including the truncated de-Nazification, he calls the Federal Republic a "political miracle" (p. 196). Moreover, unlike many American historians he gives more credit to the German politicians than to the Allies for creating a successful democracy in West Germany.

In time Stern became a regular visitor to Germany, but he always remained a public historian who did not limit his contacts to his professional colleagues.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938907001021 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Some of the most enjoyable passages in the book are the vivid and insightful portraits of West Germany's political and media leaders after World War II. Stern's portrayal of Helmut Schmidt (he was tempted by Schmidt's request that he write the chancellor's biography) and his adoring portrait of Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, the long-time editor of *Die Zeit* who became the author's close friend, are masterful examples of Stern's feel for people in high places.

Beginning in the 1980s, Germany and Poland lavished a series of well-deserved honors on the American historian. He became a member of the Order Pour le Mérite, received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, and was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Wroclaw. Undoubtedly the most poignant and personal honor came in 1987 when Stern was asked to deliver the annual address at the Bundestag commemorating the East German uprising on June 17, 1953. Stern stressed that the uprising was primarily a demand for freedom and democracy, not reunification (that part of the speech met with some criticism), and at the end of the speech he joined the delegates in singing the German national anthem. Stern and Germany had traveled a long way since the 1940s.

Is there anything to criticize in this splendid and exceedingly well-written book? Very little, although there are a few factual errors, mostly in the chapter on the GDR, the part of the book that I found to be a bit one dimensional. Stern repeats the by-now discredited claim that the East German army took part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Actually, the NVA was mobilized, but did not cross the border. Also, the initiative for the ouster of Walter Ulbricht came from Erich Honecker and his fellow *frondeurs* on the Politburo, not Leonid Brezhnev. But these are very minor matters that should not detract from the value of this outstanding book.

If I may, I should like to close this review on a personal note. Stern's book began as a lecture at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS), an institution that the author justly praises. It was at NIAS that I first met Stern in person. In 2002 I was a "regular fellow" at NIAS, while Stern was a "special fellow" as a guest of the rector, Henk Wesseling. Although Stern was by all accounts a more distinguished fellow than the rest of us, he became an active member of the fellows congregation from the day he arrived in Wassenaar. He showed all of the qualities that made him the distinguished public historian he is: he was interested in our work, listened well, and offered insightful and helpful opinions on a variety of topics.

Dietrich Orlow
Boston University

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938907001021 Published online by Cambridge University Press