

uality” itself, not to mention the whiplash-inducing descent in the early 1930s from what was arguably the high point of early-twentieth-century LGBTQ history (the Weimar Republic’s vibrant queer scene) to what was undeniably its low point (the brutal Nazi persecution of homosexuals). Clayton J. Whisnant’s thoroughly engaging *Queer Identities and Politics in Germany: A History, 1880–1945* balances a clear narrative of this period with frequent historiographical summaries and highlights questions that still await scholarly investigation. In particular, his synthesis makes the important findings of a generation of German scholars on this subject available to an English-language audience, often for the first time.

Isolation and a sense of confusion haunted queer people everywhere at the turn of the century, but Germany gave rise to two developments at this time that countered those tendencies: the academic study of same-sex desire, and the earliest efforts both to organize people who shared those desires and to advocate on their behalf. Whisnant carefully traces the impact of several late-nineteenth-century figures on these developments, including Adolf Brand and Richard von Krafft-Ebing, but Magnus Hirschfeld emerges as the central figure. Hirschfeld pursued science as a tool for fighting the injustices leveled against sexual minorities, and his 1897 Scientific-Humanitarian Committee launched a concerted lobbying effort to repeal Germany’s Paragraph 175, the law criminalizing male homosexual sex acts. At the same time, Hirschfeld’s linking of homosexuality to “gender inversion,” his political alliance with women’s organizations, and his insistence on sexuality as an inborn trait alienated an entire subset of this coalescing queer community, the so-called “masculinists,” who mobilized around Brand. Hirschfeld’s belief in the innate nature of homosexual attraction evoked strong disagreement from his fellow researchers as well, especially Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytic school. Whisnant masterfully weaves these intra-movement divisions and ongoing scientific debates about the cause of same-sex attraction as a leitmotif throughout the book.

A second leitmotif of the book concerns the cooperation and interplay between gay men and gay women, as well as between both groups and the much larger women’s movement that had taken shape in the decades before World War I. While Brand’s movement was exclusively male, Hirschfeld’s organization gradually reached out to women, especially after several high-profile scandals in the early 1900s threatened to erode the position of homosexuals in society still further. Hirschfeld formed a political alliance with the feminist Helene Stöcker that lasted until 1933, and lesbian activists Johanna Elberskirchen and Anna Rüling became important conduits between the gay movement and the women’s movement. At the same time, as Whisnant shows, lesbians often faced marginalization by both gay men and moderate women’s-rights advocates, a pattern that would recur throughout the century.

Building on those prewar organizational foundations, a full-blown gay and lesbian scene emerged in Germany by the 1920s. Berlin, Hamburg, and other big cities hosted

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Even the most cursory study of modern gay history quickly takes one to Germany, which gave rise to the first activists and periodicals, as well as to the term “homosex-

nightclubs that appealed to every type and stripe; a gay press flourished throughout the country, with twenty different publications appearing at one time or another; and a nationwide network of gay associations linked up under the leadership of Friedrich Radszuweit. Whisnant evokes the lived experience of being gay at this time through contemporaries' descriptions of the bars, parties, and public cruising that formed an increasingly visible part of Germany's urban scene. The heady days of the Weimar Republic did indeed usher in greater freedom, but Whisnant cautions against exaggerating this period's permissiveness. Arrests of gay men actually increased in the 1920s, compared to the period before World War I—for reasons that are not entirely clear—and the availability of gay and lesbian periodicals ebbed and flowed according to the changing legal and political circumstances. Nevertheless, police gathered evidence and made arrests in strict accordance with the law. "How important these basic assumptions were to the operation of the gay scenes," Whisnant writes, "is demonstrated by what happened when they could no longer be counted on under the Nazis" (106).

Just as the Weimar Republic's toleration fluctuated year by year, the Nazi period's repression did as well, depending on who was in or out of power and on the exigencies of war. The 1934 purge of Ernst Röhm, the openly gay and very high-ranking Nazi official, marked a key turning point, since it occasioned both Heinrich Himmler's assertion of expanded police powers and a ramped-up propaganda campaign against homosexuality. Although the Nazi regime targeted gay men for a number of reasons—a reaction against Weimar liberalism, an emphasis on masculine strength and feminine maternity, a desire to cleanse the "Aryan race" of degenerative elements, an association between gay men and Germany's post-1918 emasculation—Whisnant repeatedly quotes Himmler's personal attacks against homosexuality in this section of the book and sees Himmler's role as central to understanding the subsequent brutal persecution. "Most important," he writes, "after 1934, as the country's many institutions of policing were gradually integrated and concentrated under the power of the SS chief Heinrich Himmler, homosexuality became the focus for new mechanisms of legal enforcement" (214). Whisnant adds, though, that the SS favored the "reeducation" and eventual release of homosexuals in most cases to their physical annihilation, which marked a stark contrast between this persecution and that of the Jews.

The book concludes with an illuminating epilogue on gay and lesbian life after 1945 that suggests the ways in which queer life in the postwar Germanys gradually reconnected with the trajectory of increasing visibility and social tolerance suggested by the Weimar Republic. It brings to a close a remarkable work of history that manages both comprehensiveness and concision, sophistication and readability. Whisnant's panoramic treatment of this topic will reward scholars and students of the history of sexuality and of German history alike.

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