

Example of book review on imperial germany and the great war 1914, 1918 second ed...

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Book Review: Imperial Germany and the Great War 1914-1918

In Roger Chickering's *Imperial Germany and the Great War 1914-1918*, the reader gains a unique perspective on an oft-ignored component of World War I history; the impact of the war on Imperial Germany. The perspective of Germany on the First World War is comprehensive and detailed, offering social, political, military and civilian viewpoints on the conflict. In the book, one sees just how the war itself affected the home front, and is told just how important the war was to them. The effects of the war were pervasive and oppressive to civilian life, affecting everyone from farmers to city dwellers of every religion. The book offers new perspectives and scholarship that make it fundamental reading for those studying the First World War.

Chickering is an authoritative scholar of Wilhelmine Germany, and this authority shows deeply in this, one of the only English textbooks to cover this subject in depth. The book has a chronological structure, starting with an accessible and open account of pre-war Germany and the factors that led to war. Of particular interest in this section is the "spirit of 1914," the alleged joy that many Germans felt when World War I broke out - it is said that all of the political parties in the Reichstag supported war credits, and that the middle classes broke out in elation as Germany took its rightful place in Europe. However, the reality is extremely complicated, as Chickering writes, and there was much more apprehension in civilian eyes than implied before. "Germans of all stations were to be bound in a great common experience, which would recast fundamentally the dynamics of national life. The difficulty

was that this rhapsody on national unity offered no realistic formula for solving the problems that beset Germany in 1914, to say nothing of problems in the offing (p. 16). The problems of social and political inequities among those of different classes and political parties still remained, but the "spirit" was calculated to galvanize the people, at least temporarily, in the war effort.

One of Chickering's most brilliant and enlightening components to the textbook is the effect of World War I on the German home front. The social and political, not to mention economic, effects of the war as it raged became extremely important to Germany's future, yet has been sorely underexplored in academic works up to now. For instance, the sexual practices of the German soldiers and their effects back home were of particular interest to Chickering. Prostitution turned into a "massive industry" in France, Belgium and Poland, with hundreds of brothels and bordellos popping up in major cities in these countries (p. 118). This also increased venereal disease rates among the German military officers; these practices were not discouraged by German military superiors because they thought it was good for morale, but instead they regulated the practice. This drew fire from German women, who believed that it encouraged their husbands to become adulterous, but the morale of the troops was seen to eclipse those demands, due to traditional gender and sexual attitudes that considered German wives to be more likely to cheat than German husbands off at war.

It is these aspects of Germany's involvement in World War I that Chickering is most concerned with; he seeks to understand just how the specific

movements of the country during this event changed the country itself in every way. The formation of the " front generation," the ones who were actually adults during the War and who were bound by those experiences, actually led to rampant child neglect while their fathers ran off to fight; schooling was rare and malnourishment led to the following generation being shorter and somewhat weaker, with poor hygiene. These effects are part and parcel of Chickering's examination of the war; not only did World War I cost Germany its empire, it cost a generation as well.

In conclusion, Chickering's detailed look at Imperial Germany during World War I reveals many intriguing aspects of German culture, which changed during the war. The " spirit of 1914" was sold to the German people as the ideal, when the reality included infidelity, venereal diseases, changing social conditions for women and health/social disadvantages for children growing up in this time. As a result, Chickering provides these effects in great detail in this work.

References

Chickering, R. (2004). *Imperial Germany and the great war, 1914-1918*. Cambridge University Press.