

The Shortest History of Germany: From Julius Caesar to Angela Merkel—A Retelling for Our Times

James Hawes

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James Hawes condenses two millennia into a zippy 256 pages in *The Shortest History of Germany*. Breezy yet knowledgeable, the book provides a thorough grounding in the major historical events and religious and regional differences that shaped the country at the very heart of Europe.

Hawes emphasizes that Julius Caesar's establishment of military boundaries and the demarcation of Germanic peoples east and west of the River Elbe profoundly influenced the country's political development, even into the present day. While one may disagree with his contention that Prussia/East Germany's disproportionate influence on German political rule was the overriding cause of its deviance during the World Wars, it's a lively summation of the evolution of Germany as a European and global power.

Hawes also analyzes how Germany was shaped into a country that is famous for its exquisite achievements in the arts, theology, philosophy, and science yet infamous for its moral decay into Nazism and the Third Reich.

Sometimes, this breakdown is heavy-handed, as when it casts East Germans and Protestants as chief villains and gives the Catholic hierarchy and the large Catholic populace a pass during Germany's modern era. This historical distillation is most effective when describing the intricate, continuously shifting alliances that the country made with imperial powers and peoples along its borders from Charlemagne through the nineteenth century. The Protestant/Catholic and East/West splits are neatly explained in the text and visually anchored with many maps, illustrations, photos, and Hawes's elegant bubble diagrams, which pare down the complex factors underpinning all of the tumult. Sidebars about historical figures and cultural movements uncover illuminating tidbits and are good launching points for further exploration.

The Shortest History of Germany is an easily digested introduction to German history. It is a stimulating and informative preparation for those who may be traveling or relocating to Germany or as a guide to deeper study of this intriguing and important country.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (March/April 2019)

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