

**Black, Monica. *Death in Berlin: From Weimar to Divided Germany*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.**

Every human culture addresses the relationship between the living and the dead, but not in the same way. Along with everyday life, death has found its place in historical scholarship; it, too, has a history. Monica Black's book is an elegantly written exploration of practices surrounding the treatment of death and the dead in the city of Berlin across much of the twentieth century.

Continually surprising and provocative, Black's book explores an array of sources that make readers reconsider what they thought they knew about Berliners and, more broadly, Germans in the twentieth century. Despite the book's seemingly narrow focus – on attitudes toward death, funerary rituals, and the treatment of bodies – Death in Berlin actually offers a new window into some profound questions of history. Black traces a story of stubborn but not invincible continuities in cults of the dead, such as care for graves and cultures of mourning and remembrance, in the face both of the enormous upheavals occasioned by two total wars and also of attempts by four different regimes to change, erase, or instrumentalize deaths and practices surrounding death. For example, the study yields new insights into relationships between the Nazi Party and various religious communities as these are shaped through both skirmishes over and syncretisms of death rituals. Black combines the anthropological focus of early scholarship on death with the political-historical perspective of more recent work on mass death in wartime, historical memory, and political culture more broadly. Moreover, the book is notably sensitive to questions of space and place; the reader is fully located in Berlin as the site of this history.

Black has found and deployed a wide range of archival and published sources, as well as some oral history that informs both her historical argument and her explication of research methods. Black found ways to probe with considerable skill, persistence, and cleverness a topic that is not that easy to “open up” to historical analysis. The interpretation is quite nuanced; Black tracks similarities and differences between time periods and across diverse subgroups (defined by confession, politics, class, and gender) of Berlin's population. Offering a wealth of telling and often surprising insights into the politics and culture of memory, memorialization, and mourning, Death in Berlin makes an original, thoughtful, and also imminently readable contribution to our understanding of the dynamic relationship between politics and the cultural construction of pivotal personal experiences in Germany and in Europe more broadly.

**Prize Committee:** Edward Ross Dickinson, Mary Lindemann, Mary Jo Maynes (chair)