

international partners rather than with the students. As Pugach shows, the students' experiences were constantly being shaped by external factors, foremost among them a mixture of social and political upheaval at home, including regime change, as well as shifts in global Cold War politics. This could impact their ability to enter, remain in, or leave the GDR. It could also create tensions within student groups, as Pugach illustrates through examining, among several examples, the fallout which the Biafran crisis had on Nigerian students.

Throughout the book, Pugach links the students' experiences to a longer history of racism and anti-Blackness in Germany. The GDR sought to present itself as an anti-racist, anti-imperialist state, while at the same time depicting the Federal Republic (FRG) as the inheritor of the Nazi past. Although commonplace, sex and mixed relationships in particular challenged the myth of the GDR's racial tolerance. Here, Pugach makes perceptive links to the experiences of African-American GIs in postwar West Germany. In both states, racialised images of oversexed Black men lingered on into the postwar period. Equally, in both states relationships were blamed on the supposed loose morals of the White German partners. Yet, in the GDR, in contrast to the FRG, children born out of such relationships were readily accepted as valuable citizens. This is one of many examples of the ambiguity, inconsistency, and complexity of East German ideas of race, as well as of GDR policy and practice towards people from the Global South, which Pugach weaves through the study.

It feels somewhat unfair to be critical of a study which already covers so much ground. Yet, missing to a degree, likely on account of the nature of the existing sources, is a sense of the friendship networks and social interactions students had with one another and with East Germans, beyond those picked up on in state documents. What of links to the church, sports clubs, and shared social spaces? These are hinted at rather than explored in detail. This is similarly the case with regards to students' post-exchange experiences, regardless of whether they remained in East Germany or returned home. In addition, interspersed throughout the book are eighteen striking images from both a private collection and the Bundesarchiv. These serve largely as decoration, and it feels like a missed opportunity that they are not discussed in any detail. These, however, are very minor criticisms.

Despite the multiplicity and complexity of the interwoven themes, Pugach uses her chapter introductions and conclusions very effectively to outline not just each chapter's key themes but also how these relate to the overall themes of the study. The book's epilogue expertly links the legacy of the student exchanges to issues facing contemporary Germany, with nuanced discussions of the rise of the right-wing movement Pegida and the political party the Alternative for Germany. Overall, this is an impressive, wonderfully constructed piece of transnational history, written in an engaging manner.

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## **Free Berlin: Art, Urban Politics, and Everyday Life**

**By Briana J. Smith. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2022. Pp. 328. Cloth \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0262047197.**

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It is perhaps unsurprising that this age of neoliberal market logic, digitally facilitated social alienation, and political polarization has produced a burst of scholarship invested in

studying both worlds that might have been and how those who imagined those worlds also imagined realizing them. The past decade has yielded considerable literature on German alternative cultures and subcultures of the late twentieth century, touching on, among other topics, punk (Jeffrey Hayton), heavy metal (Nikolai Okunew), squatting (Alex Vasudevan), queer activism (Samuel Huneke), Black activism (Tiffany Florvil), civic activism (Jenny Wüstenberg, Jennifer Allen), environmentalism (Julie Ault, Stephen Milder), and anti-consumerism (Alexander Sedlmaier). Briana J. Smith's *Free Berlin* fits nicely into this historiography.

Smith set out to uncover how visual artists in late twentieth-century Berlin – divided and reunified – attempted to create artworks that would serve as both catechisms for and tools of democratization. She foregrounds artists who situated their work within the spaces of everyday life, sometimes as site, sometimes as medium, always as a means to prompt participation in the enterprise of imagining new ways of inhabiting the world. Positioned against the hegemony of the market and exclusionary infrastructures of power, this visual culture, Smith argues, became an essential building block of Berlin's strong tradition of civic activism and popular protest. Her book presents this argument across two parts. The first, which spans the late Cold War, examines the rise of a style of art that invited its audience "to participate in the art's genesis" (78). After offering an overview of the 1970s art scenes in both Berlins, Smith devotes a chapter each to the particularity of experimental art in West and East Berlin. Despite different funding opportunities, different kinds of spaces in which they could work, and different constraints imposed by the state, artists in both Berlins used their art as an occasion to collaborate with their publics "to remake the shared space according to their own needs, interests, and fantasies" (140). They hoped that, by changing the contours of local spaces, they could also open up social and political possibilities within those spaces. The fourth chapter traces the evolution of participatory art in that interstitial period between the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and German reunification a scant year later. The book's second half takes up the fate of participatory art after the Wall. Chapter 5 follows artists' resistance to an increasingly commercialized Berlin that emerged after reunification, while chapter 6 reveals the ongoing relevance of the ambitions of these artists in the twenty-first century by following a series of adjacent citizens' initiatives and referenda to shore up popular agency over public space.

The book's strengths are multiple. Although Smith offers the volume as a project in *Verflechtungsgeschichte* – an intertwined German-German history that refuses the knee-jerk reinforcement of Cold War borders – its greatest value lies in its treatment of East German alternative artists. Using a novel cache of oral histories and private archival collections, Smith has uncovered a community of artists, largely forgotten or ignored by historians, whose work played a role in helping East German citizens imagine more just, more responsive, more open expressions of socialism. Importantly, as Smith highlights, in this enterprise, these artists did not hide from the state. They did not form an underground movement or withdraw into what the West German journalist Günter Gaus famously described as the GDR's "niche society." Instead, pushing the bounds of scholarship on East German private life, Smith describes these artists as having "retreated *from* the private" (6) rather than into it.

Smith also excels in her analysis of efforts to extract art from the clutches of the market. Criticism of the constraints imposed by the gallery space on art and its viewers has occupied art critics and historians since Brian O'Doherty's 1976 essays took a hatchet to the practices of the "white cube." Though O'Doherty himself is strangely absent from Smith's discussion, she nevertheless persuasively outlines the many ways artists resisted the rules not only of galleries but also of art curators, art collectors, and art critics, by choosing techniques and display spaces that evaded easy control. Through this circumvention, artists demanded the valuation of art's social contributions, not just commercial ones.

Offsetting the book's strengths, however, are a handful of deficiencies. Most conspicuous is the thinness of Smith's citations. That whole paragraphs – often full of robust evidence – pass

without attribution considerably tempers the study's utility for scholars interested in following Smith's lead. So too does her weak engagement with the historiographical context necessary to ground the book's analysis. Major works on the dissolution of the East German state, on the peculiarity of Berlin's scarred topography, or on West Germany's persistent culture of localism in the late twentieth century, for example, are missing from her notes. She thus leaves the reader uncertain where the book's precise intervention lies. This remove from the existing historiography also leads Smith to overstate her argument at important junctures. She claims, in one instance, that a series of grassroots urban development campaigns in the late 1990s "marked a departure from the socially engaged work of the 1980s, which was largely limited to artist circles" (219). Here, Smith ignores the contributions of that broad swath of activism since the 1970s subsumed under the banner of the "new social movements." The peace movement, the anti-nuclear movement, the environmental movement, the women's movement (including the Afro-German women's movement), and the queer movement, among others, each expressed similar social investments and engaged both similar publics and similar methods to the artists whose work Smith analyzes. Smith missed an important opportunity to contextualize those similarities and to assess the degree to which these artists simply participated in larger trends or, rather, played an instrumental role in creating the vernaculars, imaginaries, and conditions of possibility that structured the activism of the late twentieth century and, indeed, the new Germany that emerged from it.

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## Haunted Laughter: Representations of Adolf Hitler, the Third Reich, and the Holocaust in Comedic Film and Television

**By Jonathan C. Friedman. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022. Pp. 233. Hardcover \$105.00. ISBN: 978-1793640154.**

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Jonathan C. Friedman's new book offers another way into the current conversation about Holocaust humor. Ferne Pearlstein's 2016 documentary film *The Last Laugh* ignited new interest within humor studies about the growth of Holocaust humor. Although comedic representations of Hitler and the Nazis have existed (as Friedman demonstrates) since the war, the twenty-first century has seen a rise in humor about the Holocaust itself, or its victims, in ways that were once considered taboo. Comedy such as the 2004 episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* called "The Survivor" or the 2010 final episode of *The Sarah Silverman Program* titled "Wowschwitz" (both of which Friedman discusses) signaled a change in the way comedians approached the question of whether it was still "too soon" regarding Holocaust humor. Friedman's book, therefore, stands alongside other recent works such as *Laughter After* (edited by David Slucki, Avinoam Patt, and Gabriel Finder [2020]) and *Is it Okay to Laugh About It?* (Liat Steir-Livny [2020]) in wading into the theoretical discussion surrounding the uptick in examples of Holocaust humor.

To some extent, that uptick and Friedman's apparent interest in it make his opening question seem out of step with the aims of the book. Friedman begins by stating that, "the