

HOW TO SEE THE PAST WAS DECREED FROM ABOVE:
NAZISM AND THE NOTION OF AN ANTI-FASCIST
TRADITION IN THE GDR

Christiane Brenner

This contribution deals with the role the National-Socialist period played in the way the GDR officially saw itself and its past. Anti-fascism became the legitimating ideology of the GDR and made the founding of the state and the leading role of the party in it appear the only alternative to fascism, and a historical necessity. The GDR claimed to stem solely from the progressive traditions of the German history and, through the turnaround in the years 1945–49, to have definitely put an end to any fascist tendencies. The official version of its history, which blamed imperialism and capitalism for the appearance of Nazism, could be seen as relieving the people from guilt. What they had really done during the National-Socialist period was more and more forgotten. A more differentiated understanding of history could develop only from the 1970s onwards, when efforts were underway in the GDR aiming at contriving a broader historical basis for the “socialist German nation”. Topics that had hitherto been neglected, such as the non-communist resistance against Hitler and the history of the German Jews, were now taken up. The anti-fascist founding legend, however, remained untouched until the very end of the GDR.