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How did a state as small and backward as Prussia in 1700 transform itself to compete successfully in war against states with far greater human and financial resources? Richard Gawthrop finds the answer to this perennial question in the creation of a unique political culture, in which service to the Prussian state took precedence over all other relationships and commitments.

This characteristically Prussian ethos first crystallized and gained widespread acceptance during the reign of Frederick William I (1713–1740). The implications of this revolutionary cultural change were far broader, moreover, than simply an immediate increase in state power. The intensive use of every available socializing institution to inculcate this state-service ideology had a profound social and cultural impact that laid the basis for the subsequent influence of “Prussianism” on the development of modern Germany.

This ideological campaign can best be understood in terms of the history of German ascetic Protestantism, especially the Lutheran Pietist movement. Strongly influenced by English Puritanism, the spirituality of Pietism emphasized a “born-again” conversion, followed by a highly disciplined life centered around “doing good for others.” How the Prussian state came to embody the values of this activist form of Christianity is the subject of this book.

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*This book is dedicated to my family*

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## *Preface*

This book is intended to provide both an explanation for the rapid increase of Prussian power in the early eighteenth century and an analysis of the formation of the Prussian political culture. Accounting for Prussia's ability by 1740 to compete militarily against states with far greater human and financial resources has long been considered one of the classic problems in European historiography. Perhaps an equally compelling justification for writing such a book at this time is, however, the need for a more adequate conceptualization of the broader significance of Frederician Prussia. Prussia's historical connections with the pre-eighteenth-century German past, with the particular path of development pursued in the "West," with the "German catastrophe," and with modernity in general – all seem to require further consideration.

The approach taken in this study is to reexamine the origins of the characteristically Prussian institutions and corporate spirit in such a way as to illuminate the nature of precisely these relationships. I shall do so by synthesizing the often told tale of Prussian state building with the story of Lutheran Pietism, a German form of ascetic Protestantism. The resulting stress on the importance of Pietism is not meant, any more than was the case with the Weber thesis, to validate some form of idealist reductionism. The intent is, rather, to bring to the fore a hitherto underestimated cultural factor, without which the Hohenzollerns' administrative initiatives could never have achieved such startling results. Once the causal role played by Pietist norms in the creation of eighteenth-century Prussia has been established, moreover, the possibilities for viewing the Prussian legacy from a larger perspective are greatly enhanced. For Pietism was intimately related to a number of early modern Protestant and Catholic movements, all of which had a significant impact on the transition to modernity in their respective societies.

This book, therefore, is based on the assumption that the context within which the Prussian political culture took shape was the common effort on the part of all the post-Reformation Christian confessions to inculcate discipline, morality, and knowledge of the faith into the population at large. While normally campaigns of this nature were limited in their immediate effects by the resistance of the traditional society, including the monarchical power, such was not the case in early eighteenth-century Prussia. As a result of the far from inevitable series of events described below, the accession of Frederick William I to the Prussian throne in 1713 initiated something in the Hohenzollern lands that would occur elsewhere only at a later time and under different ideological auspices. This momentous development was the emergence of the Prussian state as *itself* the vehicle through which the imperatives generated by an activist, ascetic Christianity could be put into operation.

Although I use the term “cultural revolution” to describe this change, I do not mean to evoke thereby the image of an ideological tide that swept all before it. For despite a yet to be determined degree of social transformation, eighteenth-century Prussian society remained permeated by attitudes, customs, and institutions handed down from preceding centuries. Nor is my purpose one of emphasizing the modernity of Frederician Prussia in order to defend the cause of the old Prussian “virtues.” By focusing on the elements of discontinuity introduced during the reign of Frederick William I, I am simply seeking to convey the sense in which eighteenth-century Prussia constituted the principal bridge from the essentially traditional German world of the seventeenth century to the power-oriented nation of modern times.

I would like to acknowledge here the assistance I have received toward the completion of this project. Early financial support came from the Council of European Studies and from the Institute of German Studies at Indiana University. In its characteristically generous fashion, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) sponsored a year of research in Göttingen and Berlin, while a summer grant from the University of South Carolina enabled me to do additional work in the British Library. A research grant from the American Philosophical Society for work at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel assisted me in the final stage of manuscript preparation.

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My greatest debt is to my wife, Jane, who assisted with the editing but who, more importantly, gave so much of herself to this book and inspired whatever is best about it. Finally, I would like to give thanks for our daughter, Elisabeth, who has given a new meaning to the precept that “a little child shall lead them.”