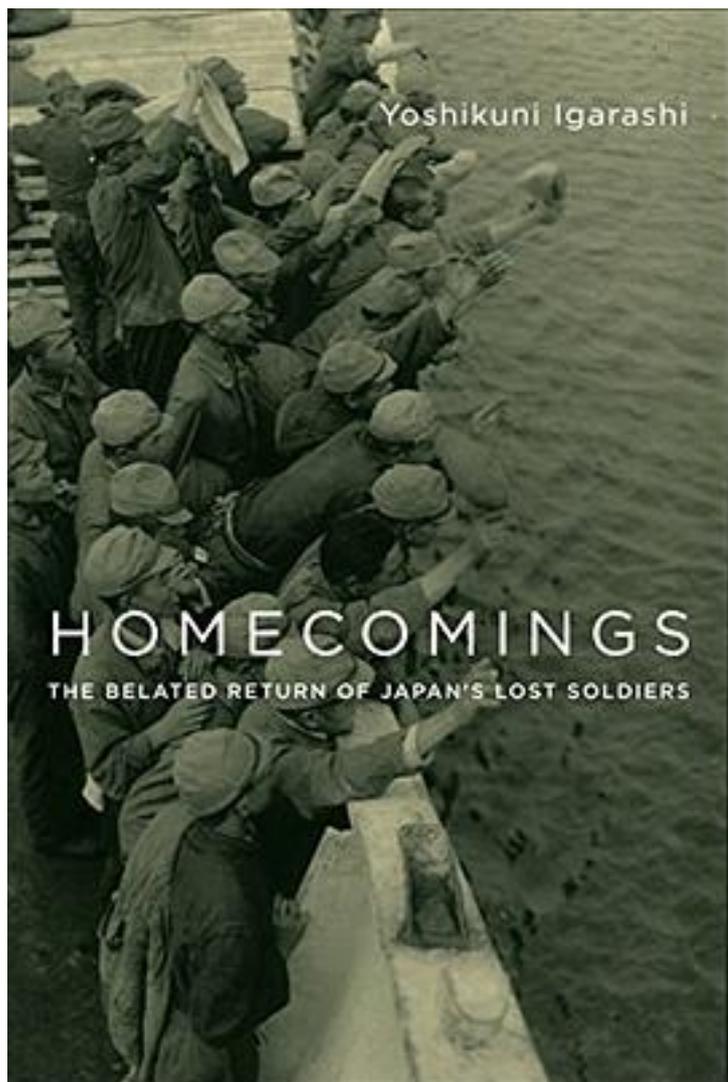


Homecomings



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This book focuses on one of the most visible and important consequences of total defeat in postwar Germany: the return to East and West Germany of the two million German soldiers and POWs who spent an extended period in Soviet captivity. These former prisoners made up a unique segment of German society. They were both soldiers in the war of racial annihilation on the Eastern front and then suffered extensive hardship and deprivation themselves as prisoners of war. The book examines the lingering consequences of the soldiers' return and explores returnees' own responses to a radically changed and divided homeland. Historian Frank Biess traces the origins of the postwar period to the last years of the war, when ordinary Germans began to face the prospect of impending defeat. He then demonstrates parallel East and West German efforts to overcome the German loss by transforming returning POWs into ideal post-totalitarian or antifascist citizens. By exploring returnees' troubled adjustment to the more private spheres of the workplace and the family, the book stresses the limitations of these East and West German attempts to move beyond the war. Based on a wide array of primary and secondary sources, "Homecomings" combines the political history of reconstruction with the social history of returnees and the cultural history of war memories and gender identities. It unearths important structural and functional similarities between German postwar societies, which remained infused with the aftereffects of unprecedented violence, loss, and mass death long after the war was over.

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