Sunday, 15 September 2013
5:00—7:00 pm • UNC Institute for the Arts and Humanities • Hyde Hall

J. FRANKLIN WILLIAMSON
(University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

Myth, Memory and War Experience:
German Public Mourning after Defeat, 1918 and 1945

In the wake of both world wars, Germans faced the task of mourning enormous losses while also reordering their defeated societies and discredited governments. Scholars have long noted the relationship between these two periods of collective memorialization and the Third Reich that separated them. Yet while many historians credit a “myth of the war experience” for Weimar Germans’ eventual enthusiasm toward the Nazis, few accounts also explain West Germans’ efforts to enact memorial traditions after 1945 that were inspired by these problematic earlier precedents. This paper will survey public mourning ceremonies in each context, arguing that beneath similarities in appearance, Germans’ discussions of war and the wartime dead were characterized by important changes over time.

JAMES FRANKLIN WILLIAMSON is a PhD Candidate in European History at UNC-Chapel Hill. His dissertation, “No clear way to respond: Publicly Mourning the War Dead in Germany, 1945-1972,” examines the history of official memorial ceremonies for the wartime dead in West- and East Germany following the Second World War.

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