

# Introduction

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In recent years, politicians as well as pundits in Washington and London have become frustrated with the Germans as partners because they are increasingly unwilling to follow their lead. After unification, Anglo-American leaders expected that the Federal Republic would become a normal Western country. But rejecting its militarist past, Germany turned pacifist, relying on soft power, and proved reluctant to engage in preventive wars like the second invasion of Iraq. In the recent financial meltdown, often mislabeled as the Euro crisis, Berlin has been critical of Anglo-American casino capitalism and insisted upon austerity as a condition of aid instead of adopting soft monetary policies. In the Edward Snowden scandal, Germans have objected to the tapping of Chancellor Merkel's telephone as well as other US efforts to spy on their NATO ally. Finally, in the Ukraine conflict, they have sought to keep communication lines with Vladimir Putin open in spite of Russian violations of international law. From across the American political spectrum, commentators are asking, "What is the matter with these Germans?"<sup>1</sup>

Because of the impact of World Wars I and II, Anglo-American public intellectuals have been little help in answering this question because many of them are trapped in a negative perception of the past, failing to appreciate the degree to which Germany changed after 1945. As exemplified by battlefield tourism in Flanders fields and on the coast of Normandy, memory culture views the Germans as enemies who twice in the first half of the twentieth century had to be stopped by military force at the cost of countless Anglo-American lives. While the Kaiser inspires ridicule rather than fear, Hitler and the Nazis have been a subject of endless fascination in the popular media, inspiring scores of movies and paperbacks. Going beyond the special concerns of the Jewish community, the Holocaust in particular

has developed into a universalized exemplar of human evil that inspires the current dedication to human rights, therefore playing a central role in fashioning liberal identities.<sup>2</sup> Compared with these widespread constructions of Germany as a perpetrator nation, other voices emphasizing German contributions to Western culture are few and far between.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to such elite skepticism, popular attitudes, based on personal contacts, military duty, tourist travel, and economic dealings have become increasingly positive, as public opinion surveys reveal. When Americans and Germans meet, they are often surprised how much they have in common and how well they get along. Most tourists experience Germany as a hospitable place that functions predictably and that makes them feel welcome. Many of the millions of veterans who served in Central Europe recall having a good time in contrast to more dangerous billings, preferring to be “back home in Germany” rather than in Vietnam. Businesspeople like to deal with German companies, since they produce excellent products, provide reliable service, and can be depended upon to fulfill their contracts, even if they charge higher prices.<sup>4</sup> Recent sports events such as the men’s and women’s World Cups have shown the country’s friendly and cosmopolitan face, since German fans were ready to cheer for the players of other nations as much as for their own team.

Though highly competent, Anglo-American scholars are having a difficult time in dealing with “the German problem” too, since their studies have also been affected by the crosscurrents of public sentiment after 1989 and September 11. Fortunately, the United States-based German Studies Association is a flourishing professional society with several thousand members and interesting annual conferences that bring together researchers from both sides of the Atlantic. But in high schools, the teaching of the German language is shrinking due to the popular shift toward Spanish, and even in colleges and universities, German studies departments are struggling to maintain their independence.<sup>5</sup> In the field of twentieth-century history, German topics still play a considerable role, but the number of positions is barely larger than that of Russia, remaining behind France and Britain as a specialty.<sup>6</sup> In the social sciences, investigations of the Federal Republic are often being subsumed by research in European studies or even wider transnational frameworks, thereby reducing their visibility. Ironically, interest in Germany is dependent upon crises, rising when there is a problem such as the tidal wave of refugees and subsiding when things are going well.<sup>7</sup>

Solving the German puzzle therefore requires a self-reflexive approach that is more conscious of its own agenda and better informed about recent developments. The traditional investigation of perceptions, such as the American picture of Germany and vice versa, can provide interesting quo-

tations, but lacks analytical rigor. Instead, postcolonial thought suggests that the process of “othering” is to a considerable degree a projection of one’s own preoccupations upon a foreign subject, much like the invention of “Orientalism” by the West to describe the inscrutable East.<sup>8</sup> The starting point for Americans to evaluate their familiar yet different German cousins must therefore be an examination of how internal American interests have conditioned perceptions of events in Germany. Another precondition for overcoming historical stereotyping is a closer scrutiny of recent developments, which are continually outpacing judgments based on past performance. Fortunately a younger generation of scholars, less weighted down by traditional baggage, is ready to step in. This volume presents some of their work.

## AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS

Even a cursory glance reveals that American perceptions of Germany have drastically changed over the past two centuries as a result of a contentious relationship that has fluctuated between cooperation and conflict. As immigrant societies interested in new settlers, the original seaboard colonies generally welcomed newcomers from Central Europe. The first, mostly positive impressions of Germans were formed by several waves of immigration, beginning in 1683 with the Moravians from Krefeld, intensifying in 1848 with the liberals exiled after the failed revolution, and peaking in the 1890s with farmers and industrial workers arriving by the hundreds of thousands. As a result, former German speakers are still one of the top ancestry groups in the United States due to their actual number and rate of reproduction during the initial generations. But as suggested by a carmaker’s name change from Kreisler to Chrysler, or the forebears of a president altering their surname from Eisenhauer to Eisenhower, many of these connections have in the meantime been forgotten by the public due to the successful assimilation of German immigrants.<sup>9</sup>

While developing its own higher education system, the United States sent thousands of students to the renowned German universities in order to learn at what were considered to be the leading institutions in the world in the nineteenth century. The country was seen as an attractive place due to its romantic movement, its literature and music, and—last but not least—its outstanding achievements in science. It was in Germany that the neohumanist spirit inspired the modern research imperative and the tradition of academic freedom, which were both eagerly copied by Americans. The import of the research seminar, the footnoted monograph, and the PhD

degree fundamentally transformed undergraduate colleges into graduate universities that were soon able to compete with the original.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Bismarck's revolutionary conservatism pioneered the development of the welfare state—a process of reforms that caught the attention of some Americans because they were lacking at home. The progressive movement in the United States found other aspects such as urban reform and infrastructure worth emulating as well.<sup>11</sup>

Owing to their imperial rivalry, American perceptions of Germany deteriorated at the turn of the twentieth century, reaching a first low point during World War I. Increasingly, commentators pointed to evidence of German authoritarianism and decried the vagaries of the unpredictable emperor William II. The conflict over unrestricted submarine warfare that led to the US entry into the war strained previously positive relations. Moreover, the venomous propaganda of the British media during World War I as well as the anti-German hysteria in the United States, fed by the Committee for Public Information, suppressed the German language and ruptured the hybrid German-American culture.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the American public gradually reversed its opinion and came to see Germans as enemies that needed to be defeated in order “to make the world safe for democracy.” Thereafter, reactions to Germany alternated between an earlier appreciation that continued to see positive cultural elements and a suspicion that construed the Germans as an authoritarian danger to what came to be called “Western Civilization.”<sup>13</sup>

Gratified by their reputation as the world's leading democracy, US observers greeted the progressive ferment of the Weimar Republic with hope, as it seemed to reflect Wilsonian ideals. Germans once again became acceptable, because they followed the American example when building upon their own liberal traditions. Resuming their earlier connections, US visitors like Gordon Craig were fascinated by Berlin's experimental culture including the expressionist movies, the epic theater, or the architectural innovations of the Bauhaus. Moreover, the massive loans from New York kept the first German democracy solvent, while American mediation eventually helped settle the noxious reparation issue. These connections also helped open doors for some Jewish academic or artistic refugees like Hans Rosenberg when they had to flee anti-Semitic persecution. The descent of the Weimar democracy into an authoritarian regime was therefore a profound disappointment that created deep doubts about whether the Germans might not, indeed, be incorrigible.<sup>14</sup>

Understanding themselves to be the chief defenders of Western values, liberal American politicians and intellectuals loathed the rise of the Nazi dictatorship, whose crimes permanently stained the German name. When

Germany succumbed to the longing for a charismatic *Führer* who would lead it out of defeat and depression, intellectual émigrés like Franz Neumann and Ernst Fraenkel provided critical analyses of the Nazi system. A close-knit group of German immigrants and Americans with experience in Germany called for US involvement in the fight against fascism in order to defend a democratic, rational Western culture. During the war, this intellectual network, centered in leading universities and the Office of Strategic Services, was instrumental in planning for reconstruction. Commentators argued essentially over whether the Germans were inherently dictatorial and therefore beyond help or merely temporarily misled, making it possible to reclaim them.<sup>15</sup> Though Allied propaganda was less vicious than during World War I, the liberation of the living skeletons and discovery of piles of corpses in the concentration camps confirmed the worst fears of crimes against humanity that would darken the German image forever.

Convinced of the superiority of their own capitalist democracy, American occupiers set out to reconstruct the Western zones in their own image after 1945. As joint preconditions of the victorious Grand Alliance, the Potsdam agreement insisted on a comprehensive demilitarization in order to prevent World War III, a thorough denazification so as to remove the party's control of public life and a broad-ranging decartelization for the sake of breaking up the military industrial complex. Despite the nonfraternization order, the practice of the occupation gradually revived the older pattern of German-American kinship as many close personal contacts developed. In spite of punitive pressure from home, the US occupation government combined reorientation with economic revival, extending the hand of the Marshall Plan to the western zones and supporting their transformation into the Federal Republic.<sup>16</sup> The success of physical and psychological rebuilding fed into a self-congratulatory pro-consul view that assigned most of the credit to Allied policy.

Initially American observers were rather pleased with the “star-pupil syndrome” of the Federal Republic of Germany, because it showed that the Germans tried to Westernize themselves. They took satisfaction in the stability offered by Konrad Adenauer’s “chancellor democracy”; they were encouraged by Ludwig Erhard’s economic miracle; and they were able to point to the civic reliability of the new military, called Bundeswehr, providing much of the land force in the NATO alliance. Nonetheless, American social scientists like Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba continued to be skeptical about how deeply rooted democracy was in Germany.<sup>17</sup> One source of doubt was the reluctance to admit the atrocities that Nazis had perpetrated and to address the horror of the Holocaust. A second problem was the refugees’ refusal to recognize the Oder-Neisse-border with Poland

by claiming “a right to a homeland” within the frontiers of 1937. But the common effort against communism in the Cold War, cemented by the Berlin airlift in defense of this “outpost of freedom,” created a renewed sense of transatlantic harmony, with Germans now in a subordinate learning role.<sup>18</sup>

Eventually Washington grew frustrated when Bonn showed signs of emancipating itself from Anglo-American tutelage. While Adenauer’s flirtation with Gaullism annoyed American leaders, the TV pictures of brutality in Vietnam shocked German viewers. Though the student rebels drew upon nonviolent methods, pioneered in the American civil rights movement, and admired US popular culture, they embraced the critiques of organizations like the Students for a Democratic Society in rejecting Washington’s policies as capitalist imperialism. Moreover, the social-liberal coalition under Willy Brandt began to pursue an independent *Ostpolitik*, seeking reconciliation with the Soviet Union, its satellites, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The dramatic gesture of his kneeling at the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial was not understood by American leaders as a symbol of contrition and the independent course created much anxiety for German-born Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. These developments led to public criticism of US policies that in turn angered American observers, who inferred that the Germans were beginning to show too much political independence.<sup>19</sup> Washington was quick to resent any critique as anti-Americanism.

Once the United States began to have its own difficulties, the German reluctance to follow its lead became even more annoying to commentators. The Vietnam-caused deficit forced the Deutsche mark to be revalued upward, making it a harder currency than the dollar—a sacrilege for Wall Street. The oil shocks of the 1970s elicited divergent responses, because Germany began to turn toward conservation rather than military intervention in order to reduce its carbon footprint. Though the environmental movement had started in the United States, in the context of antinuclear *Angst*, it grew more radical in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Helmut Schmidt’s perceived arrogance offended Jimmy Carter, when he dared lecture the US president on how to get the economy out of stagflation. The American government viewed the signing of the Helsinki Accords in 1975 with some suspicion, because it feared that Bonn might drift into the Soviet orbit. While the second Cold War caused by the Afghanistan invasion and the NATO dual track decision once again increased cooperation, the massive peace movement in the FRG as well as the “community of responsibility” between Bonn and East Berlin raised eyebrows on the Potomac.<sup>20</sup>

With Washington’s endorsement of neoliberalism, the transatlantic tensions between the United States and Europe grew even stronger. While Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan embarked on a neoliberal economic

path, advocating deregulation, privatization, and tax cuts, German trade unions and many intellectuals rebelled in order to preserve the core of the welfare state. As a result of the rise of neoconservatism and the Christian Right, a substantial segment of the US public began to wage a culture war against the liberal-progressive currents and the mainstream media. Though Helmut Kohl also proclaimed a “moral-political turn” toward conservative values, the Federal Republic essentially remained a welfare state with a peaceful, multilateral foreign policy. Social Democratic majorities in the federal states permitted only a moderate neoliberal policy to be implemented, preventing more radical measures. The result was a growing divergence between American and German opinion regarding issues like the legitimacy of war, the need for gun control, the abolition of the death penalty, public funding of culture, and the maintenance of the welfare state.<sup>21</sup>

During the peaceful revolution of 1989–90, President George Bush’s support for unification temporarily bridged this gap in the common effort to promote the overthrow of communism. Made possible by Mikhail Gorbachev’s surprising liberalization, Bush’s careful advocacy of change in the Eastern Bloc facilitated the uprising against dictatorship and the national rejection of Soviet hegemony. Moreover, his resolute support of unification overcame British and French reluctance and eventually allowed united Germany to remain in the NATO alliance. Though the cooperation between Secretary of State James Baker, Chancellor Kohl, and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher was exemplary, paths diverged thereafter again: Washington crowed about winning the Cold War while Bonn set about reintegrating the divided country.<sup>22</sup> Tempers flared over the German refusal to participate in the Iraq wars and the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia. Aggravated by September 11 and international terrorism, Washington and Bonn chose alternate ways of responding to subsequent crises.

American media representations of Germany therefore reflect changing internal US dynamics that create selective perceptions of actual developments in Germany.<sup>23</sup> On the one hand, conservative outlets like Fox News, talk radio, and Christian networks praise the traditional “secondary virtues” of German culture like hard work and discipline. But, particularly in the aftermath of September 11, journalists like Charles Krauthammer attacked German policies as dangerously pacifist, state-oriented, secular, and socialist due to Berlin’s reluctance to get involved in preventive wars. Left-leaning American media like the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and National Public Radio find German self-criticism generally sympathetic. But columnists like Paul Krugman have nonetheless criticized the Federal Republic’s fiscally conservative austerity policy during the Euro crisis. Moreover, they

are worried about bouts of anti-immigrant xenophobia. In their reporting, journalists draw on a whole range of historical images that are available as sediments of prior encounters, both positive and negative. These have created ambivalent stereotypes, laden with associations that call up a welter of contradictory feelings.<sup>24</sup>

A key problem for American commentators in explaining recurrent differences between Germans and Americans is the unconscious conditioning of their work by the reverberation of this repertoire of contradictory images. The continual changes in perception suggest that US scholars are not just disinterested observers, but rather participants in a transatlantic debate that constructs the other in the context of divergent interests. Their interpretative moves are interventions in a dialogue of mirrors in which each side seeks to discover something about the other, while at the same time interrogating itself. If used self-consciously, this dual perspective can be liberating, because it broadens the point of view from which observations are made. But as the all too brief allusions above suggest, such interpretations will only be productive, if they recognize their dialogic quality and do not just judge the other by the standards of their own identity, but are also willing to question themselves. In drawing conclusions, Anglo-American observers therefore need to keep this complicated record of German-American conflict and cooperation in mind in order to see those ambivalences as fertile ground for mutual dialogue.<sup>25</sup>

## POSTWAR TRANSFORMATIONS

The understandable dominance of past images in public perceptions is as problematic for policy decisions as for academic interpretations, because it obscures the extent to which Germans have transformed during the last half century. Of course war veterans and Holocaust victims have every right to emphasize their suffering, but their efforts have created a negative frame that has somewhat taken on a life of its own. Much of the problem is simply an information gap—reporting on Germany in leading US media is sporadic, and articles often use historic references in order to dramatize their messages. Among some scholars such as Daniel Goldhagen, there tends to be a curious disconnect between their research emphasis on past atrocities and a lack of reference to more recent positive signs of peacefulness and democracy that results in telling only half of the story.<sup>26</sup> While social scientists usually engage the current changes more openly, many cultural specialists or historians are still exploring the catastrophic aspects of the German record, thereby reinforcing older stereotypes in the public mind. A

second challenge for scholars is therefore the exploration of German transformations after Hitler.<sup>27</sup>

The joint American and German effort to establish a postwar democracy has, for instance, been an impressive success story that has silenced most internal and external critics. Of course, it was necessary to defeat national socialism militarily and to discredit its following in order to give the exiled and incarcerated democrats a second chance. Unlike the Soviet effort to impose a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” the policies of the Western allies were just the right mix of forceful intervention and liberal rehabilitation to effect regime change and to allow new institutions to take root. In contrast to other failed nation-building attempts, the eager collaboration of the minority of liberal Germans provided a necessary internal legitimacy for efforts at reorientation. No doubt, it took a combination of unusual circumstances such as the strong personalities of Adenauer or Heuss, the Cold War threat from the outside, the integration into the West as well as the rise in prosperity in order to convince skeptical Germans that democracy was superior. But in the end all right-wing efforts were beaten back and the Federal Republic became so stable as to be boring.<sup>28</sup>

Largely spared the cycles of hyperinflation and depression, the economic development of the Federal Republic has also been successful enough to become the envy of most of its neighbors. Though Nazi war production laid some of the groundwork, it was Allied intervention that broke up the cartels and American pressure that revived market competition by stopping the nationalization of enterprises. Even if Ludwig Erhard’s ordo-liberal gamble of the currency reform triggered the Berlin blockade, this risky policy ignited such rapid growth as to sweep all critics before it. Of course, American credit, notably in the Marshall Plan, as well as West European economic integration also helped the revival of the German economy. Moreover, the neocorporate consensus culture of Rhenish capitalism in which management and labor bargained in good faith also aided the continuation of the postwar boom into sustained growth. While most profits were initially reinvested in business, eventually the increase of exports also led to a rise in wages that generated an unprecedented prosperity, impressing even the citizens of the GDR.<sup>29</sup>

Although Allied decisions also helped somewhat, the establishment of an elaborate welfare state was more of an indigenous German achievement, because it could draw on Bismarckian traditions. First Hitler’s “socialism of the fools” had to be discredited and the Nazi propaganda of the *Volks-gemeinschaft* proven fallacious. Then the more radical communist alternative to construct Stalinist socialism had to be rejected as well in order to allow more moderate reforms, modeled somewhat on the New Deal and Labour

Party legislation. But initiatives like the famous “Equalization of Burdens Law” that taxed those who had survived the war without damage in order to help the suffering veterans, widows, orphans, refugees, and prisoners of war (POWs) were exemplary German measures. While neighboring countries also developed a comprehensive system of pensions, unemployment insurance, and health benefits, the Federal Republic’s provisions, like the indexing of retirement pay in 1957, tended to be more generous.<sup>30</sup> By reducing class cleavages, this social safety net solidified both democracy and prosperity.

In the fundamental liberalization of West Germany, associated with the generational revolt of 1968, the United States played a dual role as positive and negative exemplar. Protesters borrowed the trappings of long hair, blue jeans, and rock music from Hollywood and also adopted the nonviolent methods of the civil rights movement. At the same time, they resolutely opposed Washington’s war in Vietnam, denounced the GIs’ atrocities, and polemicized against American imperialism, thereby signaling a growing emancipation from transatlantic tutelage.<sup>31</sup> In the German context, the youth rebellion gained a special edge, because its criticism of the older generation focused on their presumed complicity with Nazi crimes. In their rejection of the West, many of the protesters went overboard, embracing a vulgar Marxism, with some intellectuals supporting and others even becoming terrorists in the Red Army Faction. But the majority followed Willy Brandt’s call to “dare more democracy” and reintegrated itself in the system through the new social movements of environmentalism, feminism, and pacifism.<sup>32</sup>

When the Soviet Union reluctantly relinquished control with the help of American prodding, Germany was able to spread its Western achievements to the disadvantaged East through unification. The peaceful revolution of 1989 was an unexpected grassroots movement that first wanted to reform and then to overthrow the dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) altogether. The transformation from a planned economy to market competition and global capitalism has been painful, causing much deindustrialization, but the massive financial transfers have improved living standards noticeably. Moreover, the elaborate welfare system of the FRG has cushioned some of the social disruptions that dissolved communist institutions in favor of new civil society initiatives. In some ways, the cultural adjustment from collectivism to individualism has been most difficult because the unification shock had not been foreseen in the joy over the fall of the wall. Though many Western intellectuals had already become postnational, the accession of the five new states to the Federal Republic revived a chastened and democratized nation-state.<sup>33</sup>

United Germany is still struggling somewhat to find an appropriate role in Europe and the world. Initial fears of the rise of a Fourth Reich were proven wrong, because the Berlin Republic refused to join the Iraq wars and clung to its tradition of a pacifist foreign policy, developed under the US nuclear umbrella. Much to Washington's frustration, Helmut Kohl was only willing to provide funds for the first Gulf War, while Gerhard Schröder joined France, Russia, and China in opposing the second US intervention to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Nonetheless, the pressure of foreign expectations and the gradual redefinition of internal interests has led to a foreign area deployment of German military forces first in peace missions and then even in actual military combat. In the mid 1990s, the German Constitutional Court ratified this reinterpretation of the constitutional prohibition against war by insisting on UN or NATO sponsorship as well as parliamentary approval. The key change was Joschka Fischer's reinterpretation of the Auschwitz lesson from "never again war" to "never again dictatorship" in the face of the violence in Bosnia in 1995—which created the precedent for Germany's participation in NATO's Kosovo campaign some years later. Though clinging to its civilian tradition of multilateralism, united Germany has gradually assumed more international responsibility especially in the Euro crisis where it has acted, in the *Economist's* words, as "reluctant hegemon."<sup>34</sup>

Today, many Germans, especially the younger generation, are beginning to show a new pride in their country, stepping out of the shadows of the problematic past. In international comparisons, Germans have been consistently among those who showed the weakest identification with their state and the least amount of nationalism. Ironically, it took athletic competitions like the men's and women's World Cups in soccer to make a new civic pride public by both applauding the play of other nations' teams and rooting for their own. Having absorbed the painful lessons of the Holocaust and the wars in school and in visits to memorials, the young are less troubled by the burden of their past than their elders. No longer feeling personally responsible for Nazi atrocities, they compare the criminal actions during the first half with the successful rehabilitation of their country during the second half of the century. Even if they also criticize problems like overcrowded universities or rising resentment against immigrants, their wide-ranging travel and European outlook make them appreciate the ease and importance of the country they live in.<sup>35</sup>

If outside observers want to understand German reactions to international crises better, they ought to acknowledge these important changes more openly, especially since many are the result of beneficial American interventions. There is little danger of retrospective whitewashing

of German guilt, because the memory tourism of the World War sites as well as the establishment of a broad-based Holocaust memorialization will prevent any such amnesia. The interpretative challenge therefore consists of also recognizing the fundamental transformation of the Germans, which has forced them to learn bitter lessons from their catastrophic past in order to create a better future. Both sides of this Janus-faced coin are intimately related to each other, because it was the horrific impact of the Third Reich not only on its many victims but on the Germans themselves that made them pause and change directions.<sup>36</sup> In this effort, the United States played a crucial and constructive role—a reason for considerable satisfaction. But while grateful for such help, the Germans have in the meantime sought their own, somewhat different path.

Mediating between the past memories and the present images requires staying abreast of recent developments by using recent technological developments in an intelligent fashion. Transatlantic travel has become much easier with airplanes, overcoming long distances in a few hours rather than taking days like ships, even if it leaves a nasty jet lag that inhibits clear thinking. Moreover, the Internet and other real-time media may have made it easier to access all types of information—whether these be newspaper articles, TV debates, video documentations, or movies. Electronic connectivity functions instantaneously and with less effort than the printing of a North American edition of *Die Zeit* or *Der Spiegel* that once took days to arrive by mail.<sup>37</sup> But in substituting for personal communication and firsthand experience, the growing selectivity and partiality of electronic media have made the acquisition of a thoroughly grounded knowledge of contemporary affairs more precarious for citizens, journalists, and academics alike. Therefore staying abreast of current developments such as the effort to cope with the refugee crisis and the exit of Great Britain from the EU still requires a considerable commitment of time.

## NEW SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS

In navigating between traditional American perspectives and recent German developments, the essays in this volume intend to illustrate the transatlantic difference as well as the diversity of Central European experiences. They have been written by a younger generation of North American scholars who are exploring new areas beyond the established political master narrative of catastrophe and redemption that tends to focus on Prussia and the Reich to the detriment of southwestern or Catholic history.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, their research projects were conceived after the collapse of com-

munism, presupposing the revival of a German national state, and after the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center, hastening an American turn away from Europe.<sup>39</sup> The historical essays begin with the nineteenth century, extend to Weimar, explore the immediate postwar period, and then follow the Federal Republic and the GDR after 1945. Because the murderous policies of Hitler's Third Reich are already well-known to Anglo-American readers through a burgeoning Holocaust literature, the editors decided not to include any chapters on the Nazi dictatorship. Meanwhile, the contributions from social scientists deal with the postwar development of a new German model and its response to various crises closer to the present. The volume concludes with a series of cultural retrospectives that raise painful issues of collective memory.

These essays address some of the key questions of Germany's recent historical trajectory in fresh ways by pointing to aspects that foreigners have found interesting. Yet unaware of the disasters that were to come, American visitors considered Imperial Germany quite modern, full of potential solutions to common problems. In his exploration of a dozen accounts ranging from Mark Twain to Theodore Dreiser, Scott Krause establishes what struck such travelers as positive and which points they subjected to criticism.<sup>40</sup> Outside commentators were also drawn by the romantic allure of the German woods celebrated in poems and songs. Presenting some arguments from his recent book on the German forest, Jeffrey Wilson contrasts volkish initiatives with progressive efforts to preserve green space in rapidly growing Berlin as recreation resource.<sup>41</sup> Many visitors have also commented on the dual training system of apprenticeship that provided not only higher education but also trained skilled craftsmen. Hal Hansen investigates the manner in which trade school instruction transformed artisans into machine operators, laying the basis for later engineering excellence.<sup>42</sup> Finally, German medicine also enjoyed a high reputation around the turn of the century, inspiring the reform of medical education in the United States. Spelling out some ideas from her recent monograph, Annette Timm demonstrates that the Weimar Republic led the field in providing public health benefits, seeking to improve longevity through preventative medicine.<sup>43</sup> Even if visitors also commented on some of the Reich's authoritarian features, Imperial Germany and then the Weimar Republic set the international standard in numerous other areas such as higher education or urban reform.

After horrors of the Third Reich and World War II, many foreign observers marveled at the surprisingly rapid recovery of democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany. The Swiss journalist Fritz René Allemann therefore concluded already by the mid 1950s that "Bonn is not Weimar."<sup>44</sup>

One important contributor to the repudiation of the authoritarian legacy was the ideology of antifascism, before it hardened into an apology for communist rule. Drawing on her dissertation, Clara Oberle presents case studies of youth appeals and housing redistribution in postwar Berlin to show how a victimization narrative reinforced the repudiation of the Nazi legacy.<sup>45</sup> Another factor was the adoption of democratic reforms within the Western schools which acquainted pupils with self-government and press freedom. Exploring some issues raised in his book, Brian Puaca suggests that beyond the retention of the tripartite school structure, important reforms occurred in teacher training, lesson content, and pupil self-government.<sup>46</sup> During the Cold War competition, the SED-regime claimed to represent the “better Germany” that had broken completely with fascism. However, Sarah Pugach argues in her chapter that in the GDR’s socialist development policy toward Africa, considerable traces of racism survived unchanged.<sup>47</sup> Yet another element was the gradual turn to human rights for legitimizing protests that led to the peaceful revolution. Comparing the instrumentalization of the concept during East-West conflict, Ned Richardson-Little asserts that in the end, the communists proved less responsive and therefore lost the competition.<sup>48</sup> This external pressure and internal rethinking produced a collective learning process that eventually led to rehabilitation after prior transgression.

Yet another dimension that has drawn international interest is the success of the West German model in achieving political stability, economic prosperity, and social solidarity. Belying critics of its neocorporatism, the Federal Republic of Germany weathered not only the student revolt, but also coped with the challenge of reunification while providing a high standard of living and an extensive social safety net. Supported by a vocal antinuclear protest movement, Germany has become a leader in renewable energy development by shutting down its reactors. In a suggestive case study, Carol Hager demonstrates that grassroots pressure broadened the neocorporative governance of the Federal Republic to include a participatory dimension that successfully pushed for alternate energy sources.<sup>49</sup> Based on a quantitative content analysis of responses to the financial crisis of 2008, Mark Cassell argues that the difference in political culture between inflation fears and market speculation made the Federal Republic seek to restore public trust in banking rather than focus on tighter regulation like the United States.<sup>50</sup> Because Germany had increased its global competitiveness through outsourcing and wage restraint, the solidarity of the social market economy became a counter model to Anglo-American speculative excesses. In a sensitive exploration of one postmigrant play staged in Berlin, Jeffrey Jurgens demonstrates the pluralization of German memories as a result of Turkish

immigration. By his close reading of a key text, he addresses the cultural challenge of including migrants in the dominant conceptions of the German past that requires breaking the ethnic mold of identity narratives. While coping with Islam remains a work in progress, the presence of multicultural migrants has forced the Federal Republic to broaden its definitions of what it means to be German.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, some peculiarities of German culture have also achieved global renown by inspiring debate elsewhere. No doubt, the presence of the German language and of cultural products from Germany is now smaller than during the “flight of the muses” that brought Weimar innovations like the Bauhaus architecture or the cultural criticism of the Frankfurt School to British and American shores.<sup>52</sup> But there has been something of a revival of interest in German cinema, leading even to some movie scripts to be refashioned and rereleased as Hollywood films. In her transnational essay, Sara F Hall shows how the propaganda uses of film during World War I led to the establishment of the German Ufa movie conglomerate whose products rivaled Hollywood’s in the 1920s.<sup>53</sup> What makes contemporary German culture so interesting is also its confrontation with the dark past from a perspective that seeks to derive constructive lessons from its calamities. Drawing on the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Matthew Miller addresses the literary intervention of Alexander Kluge’s short stories as well as Jürgen Habermas’s memorandum in order to spell out European criticism of the invasion in Iraq.<sup>54</sup> After the Holocaust came into public eye, the key challenge has therefore been to come to terms with the implications of genocide for postwar culture. In line with his prize-winning book on the German and Polish confrontation with Jewish spaces, Michael Meng argues that even well-intentioned contrition can become a hollow ritual, if it serves to prevent genuine admission of guilt.<sup>55</sup> In contrast to Wilhelminian arrogance, it is now the self-critical exploration of Germany’s own failings that has become exemplary.

These examples of current academic work show a more differentiated appreciation of the German experience than the stereotypical references that often dominate the media. The increasing temporal distance from the horrors of the Holocaust is making it possible to explore the multiple continuities of the German past—some of which led to heinous crimes, while others also inspired fascinating creativity. Not intending to replace the accepted political narrative, the historical essays explore neglected older traditions and contribute to a fuller understanding of the contradictions in postwar German development that continue to fascinate new generations of scholars. Without glossing over some of the unresolved problems, the social science chapters also reveal some aspects of the German model that

might provide clues to the comparative success of the Berlin Republic in coping with current challenges. Precisely by addressing the tension between initial catastrophe and ensuing recovery of civility, the cultural reflections open a window into a rich realm of artistic creativity and moral reflection. Escaping some of the wartime baggage, which has constrained an older generation, these fresh looks reveal the degree to which Germany once was and has again become part of the West, albeit with a distinctive voice, both exchanging with but also competing against the Anglo-American world.<sup>56</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS FOR GERMAN STUDIES

Transatlantic German Studies therefore face the challenge of coming to terms with the fundamental ambivalence of the German record that contains the extremes of both genocide and humanity. To begin with, such an effort needs to address the horrible atrocities of the Third Reich as well as the pervasive repression of the GDR. But focusing on the negative dimensions of the two dictatorships alone merely reinforces prevailing transatlantic stereotypes, doing injustice both to the complexity of the German past and ignoring the problematic nature of the Anglo-American present. Much of the actual research already addresses constructive aspects of the German experience before 1933 and after 1945—but the framework within which it is placed remains generally condemnatory. No doubt, the critical approach captures the descent from the hothouse of the Weimar Republic into the racist repression of the Third Reich and the communist dictatorship of the GDR. But such a perspective fails to account for the learning processes that established democracy in the West after 1945 and made the peaceful revolution of 1989 possible in the East.<sup>57</sup> It is therefore time that these latter developments also receive their interpretative due.

Such a rethinking also requires a greater awareness of the factors at play in the Anglo-American interest in the German case. It is important to recall that the United Kingdom and the United States were not merely uninvolved spectators, able to pass disinterested judgment, but key combatants in both World Wars who developed elaborate justifications for fighting the Germans. Elements of this moralistic Western civilization rhetoric continue to linger in college survey courses and public attitudes. Exploring the German case just to prove the superiority of the West is problematic, because it misses an opportunity for interrogating some of the shortcomings of the Anglo-American record. Undoubtedly the Holocaust must remain the universal standard of absolute evil that will always be associated with German crimes. But reflection on Nazi atrocities should rather inspire one

to reject racism, imperialism, economic exploitation, and male chauvinism not just in Central Europe but everywhere in the world.<sup>58</sup> As Paul Nolte points out in a recent volume, it would therefore be more productive to talk about “transatlantic ambivalences” in which both sides have criticized and learned from each other with different degrees of success.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time, a more equitable reconsideration would involve greater attention to the postwar rehabilitation of Germany which set the country on a more constructive course with American help. As mentioned earlier, after World War II, the occupying US forces used just the right mixture of compulsion and leniency to reorient a dispirited and defeated Germany. Moreover, many Germans were eager to Americanize themselves in style and content in order to be accepted into the Western community. But since then, the welfare state of the Federal Republic has become more elaborate, the health insurance provision more equitable, public funding of culture more extensive, and attitudes toward violence more humane, while the willingness to go to war has declined considerably. Moreover, the halting process of European integration appears to be a more constructive response than the American neoconservative unilateralism in trying to make the world peaceful and livable.<sup>60</sup> In these and other areas, the Germans have recovered so much as to provide some positive counterexamples that should be considered when seeking to assess current Anglo-American policies.

A more self-reflexive approach to the hidden subtexts of interpretative frameworks will yield a more complex understanding of the contradictions of the German past and present. Already in his famous 1945 lecture on “Germany and the Germans” in which he reflected in American exile on what had gone wrong in his home country, Thomas Mann concluded that the tendency toward “inwardness” showed that “there are not two Germanys, a good one and a bad one, but only one, whose best turned evil through the devil’s cunning. The bad Germany is the good one gone astray.”<sup>61</sup> If this assessment is correct, the intellectual challenge of dealing with the German case consists of exploring the deep entanglement of its positive and negative aspects with each other. Revealing divergent trajectories, such a perspective stresses the paradoxical commonality in basic values but considerable variance in implementation between the United States and Germany. Moreover, the recognition of such a plurality creates space for appreciating the enormous diversity of regional, religious, class, and gender identities within Germany itself. Acknowledgement of this double difference is therefore crucial for reconstructing the full range of German experiences during the past two centuries.

In many ways, the interaction between Germans and Americans can be interpreted as the encounter of two related but competing modernities.

While the imperial Germans sought to combine a strong state, bureaucracy and military with scientific advancement, urban reform, and social welfare, the dynamic Americans were more liberal, market-driven, individualistic, and therefore also democratic. When facing similar problems such as technological changes, rapid urbanization, and claims for political participation, both sides found different solutions that often influenced each other. The German version of modernization failed during World War I, and after the breathtaking innovation of Weimar politics and culture, it led into a racist dictatorship, another World War, and the Holocaust.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the communist utopia, installed by the Soviet Union in the GDR, also proved repressive and unsuccessful. After the defeat in World War II, the United States helped pave the way to a modern democracy for the Western sectors, and after the failure of communism, it advocated a reunification of both Germanies. Despite this helpful influence, Germany has not simply joined America's path of modernization, but sought to claim a certain independence by maintaining its own traditions such as the welfare state.<sup>63</sup> That this transatlantic difference was not just a deviance from the correct path but rather a fascinating story of mutual encounter is the central message of this volume.

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