



Changing People's Minds? American Reorientation in Germany After World War II

by Harald Leder

RIJO wants to thank our old friend (not by age, but by knowing each other) Dr. phil. Harald Leder for the following superb treatise on American postwar politics in Germany. To us it is an honor to host such heavy weight scholarly work at our modest site.

Abstract

The author outlines the genesis and the success of American youth programs in Germany after the war with many examples from Nuremberg taken from his ground breaking dissertation "Americans and German Youth in Nuremberg, 1945-1956: A Study in Politics and Culture" (Louisiana State University, 1997).

Theses of the author:

- The American efforts towards the reeducation of an entire generation after World War II had beneficial long-range effects on West German society as well as its political culture.
- By maintaining their distance from the Americans, many politicians and people on the left of the political spectrum unwittingly may have contributed to maintaining some of the less desirable features of German political culture: A lack of pragmatism, flexibility, realism, and tolerance towards different political concepts and opinions above all others.
- Events throughout the life of the Federal Republic have constantly reminded us that by no means all old demons died in West Germany after the war. Vigilance and an active stance against any form of totalitarian thought and behavior, which rears its head in the most surprising disguises, is still in order in Germany today. And the United States may still serve as a place where one can look for answers for some of the most fundamental challenges German society is facing today.

Biographical note

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Changing People's Minds? American Reorientation in Germany After World War II

by Harald Leder ⁽¹⁾

Good relations between Germany and the United States became one of the axioms of the Cold War. They started with the Berlin Airlift. The destruction of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain that had divided Germany for forty years changed the nature of those relations, but they remain stable and friendly. While people today may regard these relations as something natural, the history of the first half of the century shows that the present state of affairs in fact is a total reversal from previous times. The Americans had to come twice to the aid of European allies to stem the tide of German aggression. After the widespread destruction of two world wars which included incomprehensible crimes such as the Holocaust which was committed in the name of Germany and by Germans, the current state of affairs can by no means be regarded as the logical course of events. Many historians explain this dramatic change in American policy after World War II with the necessities of the Cold War: According to them, the Americans gave up their attempts to get rid of German chauvinism, militarism, and National Socialist doctrine in exchange for the Federal Republic's loyalty in the developing conflict with the Soviet Union. Their denazification and re-education efforts led nowhere.⁽²⁾

This negative assessment of American efforts lets a less positive feature of modern Germany appear logical. Imagine this scene: A politician of a democratically elected political party is trying to make a speech, justifying an unpopular decision by the government of which he is a member. Mostly young and middle aged hecklers are trying to disrupt the event. They shout their political slogans and insults which have nothing to do with the issues at hand, but rather reflect their own very narrow and exclusive ideology. Discussion is impossible with these fanatics, some of whom begin to resort to violence. The thoughts of those who are interested in history wander immediately to the Weimar Republic and the National Socialists' successful attempts to undermine democratic discourse and procedure. In modern times one would expect Neo Nazis and people on the right and left fringes of the political system to behave in this manner. This event, however, took place on May 1, 1999, when young and middle aged men and women tried to prevent Rudolf Scharping from making a speech regarding the war and the German army's mission in Kosovo. Those who tried to stop him from delivering his speech were neither from the left nor from the right political fringes but rather came from the younger rank and file of the Social Democrats and the Green Party.

The pessimists may take these events as evidence that nothing really has changed in Germany. They overlook, however, that the last fifty years witnessed the successful establishment of a democratic system in Germany and the emergence of one of the most stable democratic systems in the world. Nevertheless the question remains: How is a resurgence of a trait in German politics that had not been prevalent in Germany for fifty years possible? And why did it manifest itself within the ranks and file of the moderate left, where one would least expect it because of its long standing democratic tradition? Is this behavior and some of the new, rather surprising rhetoric about a strong Germany in Social Democratic circles just an aberration, or does the real Germany rear its ugly head once again? This essay will demonstrate that behind the success of the Federal Republic lies indeed a profound transformation in thought and behavior of a large part of the generation that grew into positions of political responsibility in West Germany after World War II. This transformation has helped the Federal Republic until

now to remain one of the world's most stable democracies in the second half of the century. American soldiers, Military Government officers, or even reverends, played a key role in this development. The roots of the democratization and liberalization of young West Germans' thought and behavior after the war lie in fact in the streets of American occupied German cities and towns, where relations between victors and vanquished quickly developed their own, often unexpected dynamics. American men and women who were working with Germans on a daily basis after the war were the ones who laid the foundation for the solid relationship of mutual trust and respect between the United States and Germany, for a new, tolerant and democratic culture which occasional criticism or disagreement have not been able to undermine during the last five decades.

In May 1945, when German forces surrendered, the fate of Germany was hanging in the air. Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had held the presidency for an unprecedented 12 years, but had died suddenly in April 1945, had left no plan of action to his successor, Harry Truman. The lack of concrete planning did not mean, however, that he did not entertain some definite ideas regarding the post-war world. These ideas actually defined the basis on which American policy makers would operate after the war.⁽³⁾

Roosevelt's personal experiences in Germany were rather negative and held important lessons for him: First, the President was convinced that another retreat into isolationism would be disastrous for the United States and for the world. He felt that the American withdrawal from world affairs helped open the door for the dictatorships in Japan and Germany that started World War II. Second, he wanted to make sure that Germany would be completely defeated and that the German population this time would have to accept this fact and so would not have a chance to develop another stab-in-the-back myth.⁽⁴⁾ Therefore American troops would have to participate in an occupation of Germany. Third, Roosevelt also believed that the Great Depression had created an atmosphere of despair, which became yet another factor that had helped undemocratic forces in Germany and Japan to power. The United States would have to take up a leadership role in the economic realm as well.⁽⁵⁾

As far as the United States' specific role in Germany's postwar fate was concerned, the President never developed any definite plans. True to his political pragmatism he argued that the Allies needed to defeat the Axis powers before they could plan for the post war period. The constantly changing conditions in Europe made any definite planning futile as long as the fighting lasted. Roosevelt also did not want to burden the rather fragile alliance with the Soviet Union with talks that he knew would be difficult. Of course a controversial discussion of goals for post war Germany also was to be avoided within the United States, since 1944 was an election year and Roosevelt was running for an unprecedented fourth term.⁽⁶⁾

Other parts of the Washington establishment were less reluctant to make plans for the post war period. Roosevelt's refusal to deal with planning for Germany after the victory in Europe left the door open for the Department of State, the War Department and Secretary of Finance Henry Morgenthau's Department to develop strategies for the future. Although the State Department did not receive official orders to tackle the problem, planning there started as early as 1942. By 1943 official statements were in place. The State Department developed two axioms of American policy in Germany: First, it continued to consider Germany as one of the world's leading powers. Therefore the final goal of an American occupation would have to be to help the country return into the fold of the community of nations which it had abandoned under Hitler. To achieve this goal, the United States would have to develop and

implement a re-education program for the Germans. The State Department assumed that it would be able to find reform minded Germans who could carry such a program out. The task was daunting: The reformers were expected to eradicate all National Socialist, militaristic, and racist notions in addition to bringing criminals to justice and getting rid of National Socialists in politics and education.⁽⁷⁾

Henry Morgenthau became the most outspoken opponent to this reconstructionist approach. Morgenthau, one of Roosevelt's closest friends and his neighbor in New York, shared the President's dislike of the Germans. He furthermore maintained close contact with the Jewish community who alerted him as early as 1943 to the German attempts to eliminate all Jews in Europe. Morgenthau was deeply disturbed about the anti-Semitism of influential members of the State Department who constantly obstructed the process of issuing life saving visas to Jews in German occupied areas although they knew that their actions resulted in the loss of thousands of lives.⁽⁸⁾

Morgenthau considered the Germans as a hopeless case, incapable of changing their path of aggression and bloodshed. Consequently he developed and advocated a policy plan designed to ensure that Germany would never become a threat to the world again. The victors would deprive Germany of all its industry and divide it into several weak agrarian states.⁽⁹⁾

Roosevelt privately agreed with Morgenthau's views. At a conference in Quebec in September 1944 he and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill even initialed a policy statement submitted by Morgenthau, but the President quickly retreated from that position. A largely negative response to the Secretary's plan in the United States threatened to become a major political setback for Roosevelt just a few weeks before the elections. Once he had weathered the storm, the President refused to take such a potentially damaging issue up again until after the war. Morgenthau did not enjoy the privileged status he had held under Roosevelt in the Truman administration. His plan for Germany was never again even considered for discussion.⁽¹⁰⁾



one example from a series of satiric GI postcards, printed in 1945

The agency that mostly needed to make plans for the occupation of Germany was the War Department, since the Army would have to establish a military government to take over the administrative responsibilities from German authorities once the Americans had defeated the *Wehrmacht*. The military prepared for a possible occupation of Germany from 1941 on, even before Hitler officially declared war on the United States. It could look back on extensive experiences from the occupation of the South after the Civil War, from the Philippines at the turn of the century, and from the Rhineland after World War I. The main concern for the military planners was to ensure that military operations would not be hindered by unrest or a breakdown of the local administrations, and to prevent the outbreak of diseases in the occupied territories. Military government doctrine instructed soldiers to take care of the "welfare of the governed." This doctrine had far reaching practical consequences. It meant that the military would leave the existing administrative and personnel structures intact and interfere as little as possible with internal affairs. It obliged military government from the start to help whenever necessary to maintain order and to secure the necessary food supplies and health care for the civilian population.⁽¹¹⁾

All three approaches to post-war Germany shared the same outlook on the initial phase of the occupation: German society, which all experts believed had wholeheartedly embraced Hitler's world view and lust for conquest, would have to be thoroughly "denazified" and demilitarized

The soldiers were instructed accordingly. In view of the incredible sacrifices necessary to win the war and of the atrocities American GIs were discovering in German concentration camps, they were instructed to beware of the Germans and remain alert after the end of the fighting. Booklets and films depicted German history since 1871 as a path of "blood and iron" with an occasional "phony" period of peace in between them.⁽¹²⁾

The experts regarded young Germans as the greatest threat to peace and security. A documentary film which every American soldier in the European theater was required to see from February 1945 on, described the young generation in the following way:

These are the most dangerous: German Youth. Children, when the Nazi Party came into power. They know no other system than the one that poisoned their minds. They are soaked in it. Trained to win by cheating. Trained to pick on the weak. They have learned no free speech, read no free press. They were brought up on straight propaganda. Products of the worst educational crime of the entire history of the world. Practically everything you believe in, they have been trained to hate and destroy. They believe they were born to be masters, that we are inferiors, designed to be their slaves.⁽¹³⁾

The film reminded soldiers further that they were not in Germany on an educational mission, but rather to guard an entire people. To do that would require a specific conduct. They would respect German property rights and customs. They would take the people seriously, but they would not become friendly with Germans. Soldiers were told not to accept public or private invitations:

Every German is a potential source of trouble; therefore, there must be no fraternization with any of the German people. Fraternization means making friends. The German people are not our friends. You will not associate yourself with German men, women or children.⁽¹⁴⁾

In spite of the hard fighting and the widely publicized atrocities during the Battle of the Bulge, the discovery of concentration camps, and the intense efforts of American officials to

portray Germans --especially the younger generation-- as monsters, American soldiers refused to obey the strict non-fraternization orders even while the fighting was still going on. Most GIs shared the attitude that they were fighting German soldiers, not women and children who quickly learned to appreciate Hershey's chocolate, American chewing gum or American rations. The first encounters between victors and vanquished generally were uneventful or even friendly, although some looting occurred.⁽¹⁵⁾ The Army quickly dealt with serious crimes, especially rape and murder.⁽¹⁶⁾



The benevolent behavior combat troops displayed towards young people continued into the occupation. Dwight D. Eisenhower, commanding General of the Allied forces during the war and in charge of the American troops after the surrender, recognized this and decided to lift the fraternization ban on children just one month after the end of hostilities. According to him, the soldiers in general observed the fraternization ban quite well, but "could not be stern and harsh with young children."⁽¹⁷⁾ Just a few months later *The Stars and Stripes*, the U.S. Army's own newspaper, commented on the phenomenon. Side by side with a story about the very bleak Christmas, Germans were facing in Frankfurt in 1945, the paper printed a cartoon which depicted two American soldiers. One of them had children sitting on both arms and his shoulders who obviously enjoyed his company while the other was running from an angry mob of youngsters. The caption read: "Out of Chewing Gum again, Bill?" Just a few days later another cartoon captured the conversation of two German women. The background showed a smiling and obviously good-natured American sentry at a car pool playing with children. One of the ladies envied the other for this new type of childcare: "You are lucky, we have to pay a girl to mind our kids."⁽¹⁸⁾

Chewing gum and candy, however, were just a symbol of much deeper relations which GIs and young Germans began to develop in 1945. Boys and girls often found the casual behavior of the soldiers attractive.

Children had to wait until the Americans' arrival to be able to get hands-on experiences with military equipment. Rides on jeeps were one of the most attractive features the occupiers introduced almost immediately after they were certain that no German soldiers were around.⁽¹⁹⁾ One girl who lived near by a former German military installation immediately recognized that a new era had begun just by watching how an American soldier did his sentry duty in front of that installation. Whereas the Germans always had displayed Prussian drill and discipline, the American leaned his rifle in a corner, got himself a chair, and put his feet with boots on a desk. Even officers who passed him could not disturb the soldier's tranquility and utterly unmilitary manners.⁽²⁰⁾

This uncomplicated and casual behavior of many American soldiers became their most important asset, and it helped to build bridges to the young Germans. As early as June 1945 GIs began to teach German children American games, such as baseball, basketball or American football. Under the headline "Germany Hears 'Play Ball' as Yanks teach U.S. Games" *Stars and Stripes* reported in November that many German children were learning American games from American soldiers. The GIs had no idea that they were actually introducing an entirely new concept of youth work to Germany. They welcomed everyone, regardless of social status. That policy had a lasting impact on the children who participated in the programs as well as on people who were thinking about new ways of taking care of the younger generation which for the most part refused to even consider participation in any new form of an official youth organization. In December *Stars and Stripes* reported the first numbers: 22,000 German boys and girls were taking part in the soldiers' programs under the guidance of Military Government education officers and Army chaplains.⁽²¹⁾

The US Army headquarters reacted fast to the soldiers' initiatives. The generals believed that working with young Germans benefitted both sides. It would keep GIs, who were otherwise idle, away from the black market and the opposite sex, and it would give young Germans, whose schools were closed, something positive to do as well. Lieutenant General Geoffrey Keyes, commander of the Seventh Army's western military district comprising Hesse and Wuerttemberg-Baden, announced in September 1945 to his field commanders that he expected them to take an active interest in organizing local youth activities. In lieu of a Military Government policy directive, Keyes issued his own. He pointed out that many young German remained idle and therefore became "susceptible to organization by subversive agencies". Keyes believed that officers and enlisted men would

[...] eagerly seize this opportunity to assist in the regeneration of German youth through the medium of acquainting them with the activities and interests normal to youths of their own age in our country. Woodcrafts and other interests which have been developed by the Boy Scout and Girl Scout movements at home, as well as athletics should [...] form the major interests in our organized youth activities.

The general also encouraged the troops to continue to develop their own initiatives. In a significant departure from official policy, Keyes established an important new component of American re-education efforts. He announced that he did not want GIs to "differentiate between children of Nazi parents and anti-Nazi, since we are definitely interested in the re-education of the Nazi youth."⁽²²⁾

Keyes' letter became the nucleus for the German Youth Activities Program the Army officially adopted in April 1946. Following the soldiers' lead US Army Headquarters officially adopted their philosophy to do something constructive for the German population that went beyond providing necessities. Young people were identified as the most needy, but

also as the most promising group for a re-education program. Those with a National Socialist background were targeted as the group most in need of American efforts.

Not even a year after the German capitulation the Army turned the initial voluntary work of the soldiers into a full fledged program, known as GYA, or German Youth Activities Program, with professional staff, its own budget, youth centers, transportation, and a wide range of activities. Headquarters of the United States Forces, European Theater (USFET) in Germany not just adopted but promoted the soldiers' youth program as a valuable addition to the efforts of the Military Government. A directive of April 15, 1946 defined the role which both OMGUS and tactical troops should play in the American re-education effort. The disease and unrest formula still provided the basis for the military's efforts. OMGUS programs and the tactical units' youth activities had proven their value during the past months by diminishing juvenile delinquency and should therefore be extended "by all practical means." The directive encouraged close cooperation between Military Government officials and tactical commands as essential for maximum efficiency. Since the Army had recreational facilities, equipment, and personnel at its disposal and the Germans were in dire need of them, it would concentrate its efforts in this area.⁽²³⁾

General McNarney who had succeeded Eisenhower, furthermore instructed the commands of all branches of the armed forces in Germany to assign "mature, qualified" officers full time to youth activities. These officers would be in charge of maintaining liaison with the appropriate Military Government authorities and Youth Committees, helping them correct any deficiencies and they would implement programs. The directive instructed unit commanders to survey the recreational facilities the Army had requisitioned and make them available at least part time to German youth committees. Furthermore the units would stop requisitioning recreational equipment from the German economy and could release items from captured German stocks they did not need to German youth groups. Army personnel should actively support young Germans if they were invited to do so. The directive set one hour per month aside for educating all soldiers about the program. It defined the different spheres of operation for OMGUS and tactical units. Military Government continued to be in charge of developing American policy and all aspects of appointing and supervising German officials and youth groups while tactical units would assess the needs of youth groups and share with them the facilities necessary to implement American policies. A considerable expansion of the existing activities was envisioned: GYA would establish reading rooms and adequate film programs. Apart from competing in sports, young Germans also should get the opportunity to attend trade and handicraft classes. Tactical units could further assist them in reconstruction and rehabilitation projects of youth centers and youth hostels. The directive encouraged soldiers to sponsor meetings in which young Germans would be able to learn about other democratic countries. To ensure compliance with regulations the directive established mandatory monthly reports.⁽²⁴⁾

As far as OMGUS was concerned, the directive made clear that young people were vital to all American reeducation efforts. For the first time that qualified officers or civilians were instructed to dedicate their full time to the development and implementation of OMGUS youth directives at headquarters as well as on the state levels.⁽²⁵⁾

The soldiers' initiatives in Germany had far reaching consequences. They did not just prod the Army into establishing a youth program but eventually shaped official American policy. In October 1946, just one month after the official inauguration of GYA, Washington began to

signal the German people that the United States were willing to reconsider their official hostile attitude. Secretary of State James Byrnes held his now famous speech in Stuttgart in which he offered some hope to the Germans. In the same month Lucius D. Clay, the American Military Governor for Germany, went a step further as far as young people were concerned. He launched a public relations campaign on behalf of German youth among the tactical units. Under the headline "'Fanatical' Nazi Youth Secretly Laughed at Hitler, Clay Asserts," *Stars and Stripes* brought an interview with the Military Governor. In this interview Clay replaced the previous official description of German youth with a new image. According to him, young Germans had not liked the drill and militaristic aspects of the Hitler Youth, but rather had joined because it gave them the opportunity to engage in many exciting activities. Whereas the Army information materials had depicted young people as the ones most affected by Nazi doctrine and therefore the most dangerous after the war, Clay now stated that these young people knew from their own personal experiences that militarism led to disaster. The Military Governor told the readers that the democratic leadership of Germany was quite old and tired and would have to be replenished with "some new blood". German youth were vigorous and they offered "the greatest hope for restoring Germany as a peaceful nation along democratic lines."⁽²⁶⁾



The Army made sure that the soldiers received the new message. New posters in all military installations replaced the old warnings about Germans and the dangers of fraternization. Some of the older catchwords survived, but were used in a different context. The posters still reminded soldiers that they had an important mission and needed to do their jobs well to justify the sacrifices of their fallen comrades in two wars and to avoid a third war. This time, however, their job description had changed. GIs now were admonished to "shun perverted fraternization" and to "associate with decent youth... not V.D. [venereal disease] pickups." The posters encouraged soldiers to go out and let young Germans show them that "not everything German is bad. Let German youth show you some of the good. [...] Study their ARTS and CRAFTS, learn their LANGUAGE and their SPORTS TOO." Initially planners for the occupation had not thought that GIs would be capable of playing a significant role in the

American re-education efforts and therefore advised them not to become involved in it, but that perception had changed as well: "Military Government *alone* cannot rehabilitate Germany. **Every American must help!**" "You have 2 Jobs: 1. Highest Performance of your primary military assignment. 2. Full participation in positive program for the rehabilitation of Germany."⁽²⁷⁾

During the next nine years GYA developed into the most visible and successful American effort to reach out to young Germans. In spite of constant criticism from Military Government and German authorities it made a valuable and long lasting contribution to youth work in general in the Federal Republic. GYA was instrumental in bringing about profound changes in the traditional and very selective structure of German youth work.



Presentation of GYA Bayreuth's "Community Service Project" winners, March 1952

(source: GYA newspaper "The Young World", volume 6, no. 3)

The GYA at Nuremberg and the surrounding area reveals its success. The man in charge of the Nuremberg Military Post's GYA activities between 1947 and 1952, Colonel Mark T. Selsor embodies the quality of American efforts. He became one of the best known and most respected Americans in the region. Even almost fifty years after his and his family's departure, Nuremberg's youth benefits from the organizational foundations he laid. In addition to his organizational talents Selsor and his wife brought a human dimension to the task at hand that made a deep impression on the young people with whom they worked, but also on many Germans who were active in youth work.

Former GYA members have very special memories of their activities and the Selsor family. Those who worked and participated in the GYA programs learned lessons in open-mindedness, tolerance and democratic procedure which they never forgot.⁽²⁸⁾

The GYA youth homes in Nuremberg were open to everybody and did not charge membership dues. Together with the tactical units GYA provided most of the transportation for young people who wanted to leave the city for excursions. Summer camps were the only possibility to give undernourished young people the opportunity to recharge their batteries, to forget the ruins in the cities and the rather bleak outlook into the future for a while and to gain weight. GYA and the Army provided almost all logistic support for the German camps and organized camps for those children who did not belong to organizations or were unable to afford even the modest fees others charged.



Two players of the "Nuremberg Tigers" Army football team welcoming their little German supporters after a game in December 1950

(source: GYA newspaper "The Young World", volume 4, no. 12)

GYA reached out to those who most needed help in many other areas as well: it established day care centers for single mothers, rehabilitation programs for seriously undernourished children, entertainment and visiting programs for hospitalized children, and parent teacher organizations at schools. GYA supported the establishment of the *Friedensdorf* on the premises of the former Nazi Party rally grounds. This was a unique self-help institution for young people who had nowhere else to go. It offered not just living accommodations but also the opportunity to learn a trade to homeless young Germans. In all its activities GYA further taught young people to operate responsibly in a democratic environment.

To help with their education volunteers collected books for youth libraries and reading rooms as well as many other essentials for young people. Soap box derbies originated in Nuremberg, spread over all three western zones and drew thousands of spectators. Basketball clubs, which are still active today, started out as GYA activities.

Hundreds of thousands of young people visited the GYA's film hour which introduced them not just to Mickey Mouse, but also to serious productions. Those who could not reach Nuremberg or one of the many GYA centers in the region, received books and films through book and film mobiles, the predecessors of Germany's modern book buses. GYA organized the *Meistersinger* contest which proved to be a stepping stone for many aspiring singers, the most famous of them the late Herman Prey. Nuremberg's youth center number one had to endure many political battles and physical relocations until it ended up with a former GYA employee as director at Nuremberg's old fortress as part of the city's endeavor to establish its own youth houses which closely followed the model GYA had established and were open to everyone. Not many of the GYA club houses initially survived, however. German authorities at the time did not show much interest in young people or the rather revolutionary ideas the Army advocated, but the concept remained intact and resurfaced later.⁽²⁹⁾

Although GYA was the most visible re-education project for young Germans, the Army also became involved in the reorientation effort in other, not entirely intended ways. Its radio station, the American Forces Network, or AFN, from the start had a large German following.

While German radio stations were still very official affairs, the Americans introduced young Germans to Benny Goodman or Glen Miller. The easy going style of American disc jockeys, but also the way in which the Americans presented the news served as a model for the entire German radio culture after the war. German stations became aware of the phenomenal success of AFN and often simply copied what the Americans were doing.⁽³⁰⁾

Military Government did not want to be outdone by the Army. With very different means at its disposal it also developed initiatives in many fields of youth work and in the educational sector from 1945 on. Contrary to conventional wisdom many of these initiatives proved to be successful. Even in conservative Bavaria Americans were able to introduce new schoolbooks, better curricula and to reform the training of elementary school teachers.⁽³¹⁾ OMGUS supported reform-minded teachers in 15 education centers located throughout the American Zone of Occupation. Germans could find advice, the latest in pedagogical literature, and had opportunities to participate in research in those centers. The Nuremberg facility did groundbreaking work in the field of educational radio broadcasting. Its research went hand in hand with making radio sets available to schools and educating teachers about the possibilities the new medium offered for classrooms. Progressive educators were welcome to meet there and the staff also brought in American guests to speak to German teachers. The Office of the High Commissioner in Germany --the civilian successor of Military Government after 1949-- scaled the American program down in 1951, but at the same time supported new German ventures such as the Munich Test Institute or the Institute for International Educational Research in Wiesbaden.⁽³²⁾

Amerika Hauser were one of the most visible Military Government sponsored reorientation efforts in West Germany and Berlin. Libraries for US military personnel opened in Germany immediately after the end of hostilities. Military Government soon discovered their value for introducing American culture to the German population. By the end of 1945 libraries in three cities were opened to the German public. Eight more so called Information Centers followed in 1946.⁽³³⁾



Library bus in front of the Nuremberg "Amerikahaus", approx. 1950

(source: DAI Nuremberg)

During the next three years the American efforts in this field expanded dramatically and also spread to the English and French zones of occupation. The region around Nuremberg alone witnessed the opening of *Amerika Haeuser* in Coburg, Hof, Erlangen, Regensburg, and Nuremberg. The libraries remained the heart of these centers, but they also offered film hours, discussion evenings, English courses, exhibitions of all kinds, and concerts that ranged from modern American music to the European classics. Especially young people found their way into the libraries and programs.

All of the larger institutions supported reading rooms in smaller communities. Book and film mobiles reached out even to the smallest villages, where they were always welcome. It was not uncommon for entire village populations to gather in front of the big screen in a guesthouse or even in open air and enjoy American documentaries, preceded by newsreels and followed by discussions about the topics.

A steady stream of visitors to all events and facilities that on many occasions reached impressive proportions amply documents many people's desire to find out more about the wide world and especially about the United States after twelve years of isolation and oppression under Hitler.⁽³⁴⁾

The *Amerika Haeuser* survived the end of Military Government in 1949. Clearly one of the pillars of the continuing American commitment to reorientation, the program maintained an impressive presence in Germany, even after a consolidation phase. In 1953 forty-seven *Amerika Haeuser* with fifty-seven American and 961 German employees had a budget of three million dollars at their disposition. Their operations included twenty bookmobiles and the support of 115 German-American libraries.⁽³⁵⁾ Although their number steadily declined, the end for most of the remaining houses did not come until after the fall of the Berlin Wall when the State Department no longer considered them useful.

Military Government pursued its reorientation goals in many other ways: American authorities in Nuremberg, for example, cooperated closely with the German city administration and often initiated projects which are still in place today. Americans ordered the formation of youth committees on the local and state levels as a means to coordinate youth activities, but also to open the way for more self-determination and finding new venues of bringing young people together.⁽³⁶⁾ They took great interest in the training of democratic minded youth leaders and established schools for leadership training throughout their zone.⁽³⁷⁾ OMGUS initiated exchange programs in 1947 that enabled thousands of youth leaders, young people, students, and other Germans from all walks of life to travel to the United States. These programs continued until they were absorbed into an official exchange agreement between the Federal Republic and the United States which John McCloy and Konrad Adenauer signed in 1952. American officials targeted people who had the potential to become multipliers, but in the selection process they never lost sight of their re-education goals. Even after the emergence of the Cold War the Americans in Germany clearly recognized that it was unnecessary to instill anti-communism in the Germans who so recently had attacked bolshevism and the Soviet Union and carried that fight to the very end. The Americans continued to perceive the eradication of National Socialist doctrine as their main challenge. John McCloy explained in 1952 that Americans did not "need internationalists on the Exchange Program as much as we do nationalists; it might cure them."⁽³⁸⁾

Just as the information center program, exchanges were remarkably free of efforts to force ideas on young Germans. Generally Americans followed the advice of Senator William Fulbright, the mastermind of the largest and most successful American exchange initiative:

My belief in the program is based on the assumption that when foreigners come to our shores what they see will be good. In spite of our occasional strange aberrations, I believe that America is a great country, that its virtues outweigh its faults. If the people of the world can understand us, they will throw their lots with us.⁽³⁹⁾

The success of the exchange programs can hardly be overestimated. Once again a look at the community level reveals their deep and long lasting impact. People from the entire political spectrum, all generations, and every social and vocational group had something positive to say about their journeys after their return. As the Americans had hoped, the participants made their experiences publicly known. Many tried to implement ideas they had developed while they were away.⁽⁴⁰⁾

American initiatives lived on even after the end of the High Commission in Germany. Nuremberg still maintains a number of "homes of the open door," all of which either started as GYA facilities or were erected with funds from the High Commission.⁽⁴¹⁾ The city's school of social work was founded explicitly on principles imported from the United States. Its first director was trained in the United States. Her successor was the first German who received an academic degree in the United States after World War II. This team successfully introduced an entirely new approach to social work. The school's alumni found employment throughout the Federal Republic. The school itself served as a model for similar ventures.⁽⁴²⁾

Even the most conservative groups in Germany such as the Lutheran church in Bavaria, established contact with the United States. Although church leaders carefully avoided any cooperation with military authorities, they found their own ways to get in contact with their brethren in the New World. And even in this realm material help went hand in hand with reorientation. American reverends who came to Germany were able to introduce new approaches to youth work and to plant democratic ideas and concepts with their German colleagues. These were much more limited in scope but also successfully aimed at more democratic behavior and an opening towards the world. The reverend who was in charge of the Bavarian Lutheran Church's youth work, for example, had American colleagues at his side between 1947 and 1955 who came with the explicit mission to introduce ecumenical work. One of these reverends led a youth group from Nuremberg which British and American bombers had targeted so frequently to a congregation in a part of London that German air raids and *Vergeltungswaffen* had hit equally hard.⁽⁴³⁾

The example of Nuremberg also reveals that one group remained notably absent from the American efforts. In sharp contrast to trade unionists many members of the city's Social Democratic leadership maintained their distance from the occupiers. Neither Nuremberg's long time Lord Mayor nor his wife found it necessary to participate in bodies specifically designed to bring Germans and Americans together, while other high ranking officials such as the President of Middle Franconia or leading business men like Quelle founder Gustav Schickedanz maintained leading roles in those ventures for many years.⁽⁴⁴⁾

The American efforts towards the reeducation of an entire generation after World War II had beneficial long-range effects on West German society as well as its political culture. The occupiers managed to influence an important part of the young generation in post-war Germany. Even when tensions with the Soviet Union escalated, Military Government and its successor, the High Commission, clearly recognized the already existing strong sentiment against Communism which made it unnecessary to abandon their re-education course. To them, the real threat never changed: Totalitarian thought and actions in general, but above all

the ghosts of National Socialism, chauvinism, intolerance, and militarism continued to be the enemies they needed to fight among young and old people. Aware of the failure of denazification and the return of old Nazis into influential positions in politics, the economy, and the legal system, the Americans in Germany increasingly concentrated their re-education efforts on the young generation. Americans who lived and worked in West Germany's communities developed concepts which headquarters in Berlin and Washington picked up and adopted. During the next decades American efforts slowed down, but never were abandoned: *Amerika Hauser* continued to exist, and the Armed Forces cultivated official good relations in the communities in which they were stationed although they did not always find a warm response from local German authorities.

The history of those who avoided contact with Americans and their ideas may help explain the current negative political phenomenon mentioned above. By maintaining their distance from the Americans, many politicians and people on the left of the political spectrum unwittingly may have contributed to maintaining some of the less desirable features of German political culture: A lack of pragmatism, flexibility, realism, and tolerance towards different political concepts and opinions above all others. Such a lack of open-mindedness can easily lead to the assumption that the political position of one group has to be forced on everyone else within Germany, within Europe, or even around the world, regardless of practical considerations, political or economic feasibility, or the wishes of other people. The current discussion over abandoning the use nuclear power illustrates this point. Such an assumption, however, already had disastrous consequences for Germany and the rest of the world twice in the twentieth century.

With the end of the Cold War, the closing of many American institutions, and the return of most American soldiers to the United States, the question about the long term success or failure of American policies after World War II resurfaces. Intolerance and narrow-mindedness, paired with arrogance and righteousness, no matter in which political camp they rear their heads, are not desirable traits in Germany at the start of the new century. Fair discussion and an ability to listen seem to be on the decline in Germany's political landscape. Those parts of the American democratic system that deserve attention especially in Germany, such as pragmatism and tolerance, a healthier approach towards multi-culturalism and a more honest and open-minded discussion of Germany's history in this century are too often ignored or no longer considered necessary. The democratic track record of the Federal Republic is used to justify this attitude, but those who argue in this way do not seem to be aware of the profound impact that the American presence and policy during the Cold War had on influential parts of the generation who is presently in the process of retiring. It is now up to the Germans themselves, especially to this older generation to teach the youth tolerance, political fairness, and democratic thought. If history is any indicator, maintaining close ties with other democratic countries, especially the United States, at all social levels should be an integral part of such an effort. The success of American activities between 1945 and 1955 suggests that it is possible to change minds without force and indoctrination, even under the most trying circumstances. Events throughout the life of the Federal Republic have constantly reminded us that by no means all old demons died in West Germany after the war. Vigilance and an active stance against any form of totalitarian thought and behavior, which rears its head in the most surprising disguises, is still in order in Germany today. And the United States may still serve as a place where one can look for answers for some of the most fundamental challenges German society is facing today.

Footnotes

- (1) This essay is based on a presentation given at the University of Mainz at Gernersheim on May 10, 1999.
- (2) On denazification in Germany see Lutz Niethammer, *Die Mitläuferfabrik: Entnazifizierung am Beispiel Bayerns* (Berlin, 1982). James Tent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American Occupied Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) is only one of many examples for the thesis of the alleged American failure in Germany.
- (3) David Schoenbaum, "Deutschland in der amerikanischen Nachkriegsplanung," *Westdeutschland 1945-1955: Unterwerfung, Kontrolle, Integration*, ed. Ludolf Herbst (Muenchen: Oldenbourg, 1986) 33-34. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1972) 8-12. Paul Y. Hammond, "Directives for the Occupation of Germany: The Washington Controversy," *American Civil-Military Decisions: A Book of Case Studies*, ed. Harold Stein (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1963) 311-464. Hammond provides the best summary of the policy making process during the war.
- (4) Nationalists and conservatives successfully discredited democratic forces in Germany after World War I by stating that the armed forces were undefeated in the field to the very end of World War I, but had been stabbed in the back by democrats in Germany who forced them to seek an armistice in 1918.
- (5) Gaddis, 3-12.
- (6) Earl F. Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany 1944-1946*, Army Historical Series (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1975) 12-18, 100, 105; Hammond, 315, 324, 377-79.
- (7) Tent, *Mission* 17-29.
- (8) Richard Breitman and Allan M. Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987) chap. 9. For a more balanced evaluation of Washington's policy towards Jews see Thomas Allan Schwartz, *America's Germany: John McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992) 17.
- (9) Hammond 348-78; Ziemke 102-105.
- (10) Ibid.
- (11) Hammond 319, 324-26; Klaus-Dietmar Henke, *Die amerikanische Besetzung Deutschlands*, Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte herausgegeben vom Institut fuer Zeitgeschichte 27 (Muenchen: Oldenbourg, 1995) 96-102.
- (12) See, for example the Army's film *Your Job in Germany* by Frank Capra which the Army made mandatory viewing for every soldier in the European Theater and David Culbert's discussion of it ("American Film Policy in the Re-education of Germany after 1945," *The Political Re-education of Germany & her Allies after World War II*, eds. Nicholas Pronay and Keith Wilson (London, Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985) 175-176, 180-185). See also U.S. Army, *Pocket Guide to Germany*, which is discussed in detail in Willy Ulsamer, *Bewegte Tage in einer kleinen Stadt vor und nach dem Einmarsch der Amerikaner 1945* (Spalt: n.p.1987) 66-71.
- (13) *Your Job in Germany*. See also David Culbert's transcript of the same passage (201).
- (14) *Your Job in Germany*.
- (15) For a detailed account of these first encounters see Harald Leder, "Americans and German Youth in Nuremberg, 1945-1956: A Study in Politics and Culture," (diss., Louisiana State University, 1997) 70-97.
- (16) Hans Woller (*Gesellschaft und Politik in der amerikanischen Besatzungszone: Die Region Ansbach und Fuerth*, Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte, herausgegeben vom Institut fuer Zeitgeschichte 25 (Muenchen: Oldenbourg, 1986)) states that during 1945 only about 1000 rapes were reported in the entire region

the Americans had occupied. According to Woller (59-60), forty four soldiers were executed because of sex related crimes, several hundred were sentenced to years of forced labor. Henke (200-201) arrives at the same conclusions, although his numbers are slightly higher.

(17) For a history of the short life of non-fraternization see Ziemke 321-27. Since the author only based his account of the fraternization on court martial documents, he completely misjudged the real extent of the contact between soldiers and children. Eyewitness accounts by former GIs and Germans set the record straight. See Leder 70-97, 168-183. For the perspectives and attitudes of American soldiers during the first year of the occupation see Leon Standifer, *Binding up the Wounds* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

(18) *Stars and Stripes* [Altdorf], 3 Dec. 1945: 2. In the interviews I conducted the GIs' generosity was one of the most frequent associations German interviewees had when I asked them about their first encounters with Americans.

(19) Gerhard Springer, personal interview, 01 August 1995; Winfried Bluemel, personal Interview, 28 July 1994.

(20) Marga Guthmann, personal interview, 08 August 1994.

(21) Charles Campbell, *German Youth Activities and the United States Army* (Frankfurt/Main: United States Army, Office of the Chief Historian, European Command, 1947) 4-5. *Stars and Stripes*, 16 Nov. 1945: 3; 8 Dec. 45: 2. Many of the most successful basketball clubs during the nineteen sixties and seventies actually did not come from big cities, but rather from towns with large army bases, such as Heidelberg, Bamberg, Rosenheim etc.

(22) Headquarters Seventh Army, Western Military District, 14 September 1945, letter from Geoffrey Keyes, Commanding General to Corps, Division, Regional Military Government Commanders, and Separate Unit Commanders, in Campbell 31-32, Appendix I.

(23) Headquarters, U.S. Forces, European Theater, 15 April 1946, AG-353.8 GCT-AGO, subject: Army Assistance to German Youth Activities, US Zone. National Archives [hereinafter NA], Record Group [hereinafter RG] 260 Office of Military Government, Bavaria [hereinafter OMGBY], Education & Cultural Relations Division [hereinafter E&CRD], Group Activities Branch, Box 36, 10/43-1/8.

(24) *Ibid.*

(25) *Ibid.*

(26) *Stars and Stripes* 24 Oct. 1946: 1.

(27) Posters issued by the US Army [1946]. NA RG 260 OMGBY, E&CRD, Group Activities Branch, Box 43, 10/44-1/9.

(28) Leder, 438-47, 485-572.

(29) *Ibid.*

(30) Leder 422-426.

(31) Winfried Mueller, *Schulpolitik in Bayern im Spannungsfeld von Kulturbuerokratie und Besatzungsmacht 1945-49*, Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte, herausgegeben vom Institut fuer Zeitgeschichte 36 (Muenchen: Oldenbourg, 1995). For an older and more negative evaluation of American efforts see Tent, *Mission on the Rhine*.

(32) Henry P. Pilgert, *The History of the Development of Information Services through Information Centers and Documentary Films* ([Bad Godesberg]: Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, Office of the Executive Secretary, Historical Division, 1953) 40-53. Leder 452-53.

(33) Leder 283-84. For the most recent scholarly history of the Information Centers see Maritta Hein-Kremer, *Die amerikanische Kulturoffensive: Gruendung und Entwicklung der Information Centers in Westdeutschland und West-Berlin 1945-1955* (Koeln: Boehlau, 1996).

(34) Leder 456-476.

(35) Leder 477-79.

(36) Leder 387-92.

(37) Leder 286, 306,398-400, 528-31, 655-57.

(38) Memorandum John McCloy to Shepard Stone, Mr. Burns, January 29, 1952; NA, RG 466, High Commissioner of Germany, Central Classified Records, Box 36, D (52) 281.

(39) Quoted in Tristram Coffin, *Senator Fulbright: Portrait of a Public Philosopher* (New York: E.P. Dutton ' Co., 1966) 86. See also Henry Kellermann, *Cultural Relations as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy: The Educational Exchange Program between the United States and Germany 1945-1954*, International Information and Cultural Series 114 (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 1978).

(40) Leder 630-646. Leder took a sample only of people in Nuremberg who were involved in youth work. Many more Nurembergers actually benefited from an extended stay in the United States.

(41) Leder 707-19.

(42) Leder 678-90.

(43) Leder 95-96, 316-19, 394-96, 409-10, 621-36.

(44) Leder, 667-68. Conversation with Dr. Renate Proepper, one of the founding members of the German-American Women's Club, July 1995.

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