

German-American Encounters After World War II and the Holocaust

Conference at the German Historical Institute (GHI) Washington, DC, September 26-28 2002

Conveners: Alexander Freund (GHI/AICGS/University of Winnipeg), Atina Grossmann (Cooper Union), Raimund Lammersdorf (GHI), Annette Puckhaber (GHI). Participants: Keith Allen (Corcoran College of Art and Design), Tobias Brinkmann (Simon-Dubnow-Institut für Jüdische Geschichte und Kultur, Leipzig), Gerhard Fürmetz (Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich), Laura J. Hilton (Muskingum College, New Concord, OH), Robert Gerald Livingston (GHI), Jeffrey M. Peck (AICGS/Canadian Centre for German and European Studies, Toronto), Johannes Platz (University of Trier), Steven Paul Remy (Brooklyn College - CUNY), Nils H. Roemer (University of Southampton), Timothy L. Schroer (George Mason University), Michael Schüring (Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften e.V., Berlin). Additional Participants: Kai Behrens (GHI), Caroline Galm (GHI), Janel B. Galvanek (GHI), Anna Held (GHI), Jeffrey Herf (University of Maryland), Dirk Schumann (GHI), Christoph Strupp (GHI), Birgit Zischke (World Bank, Washington, DC)

After 1945, Germans and Americans, both Jewish and gentile, encountered each other and had to deal with the past of the Second World War and the Holocaust in a variety of sites and situations in Germany and the United States. Most often, the encounters were located in and shaped by the transatlantic experiences of emigration, exile, occupation, return, exchange, and immigration. Gender and generation shaped these encounters as much as time and place, and they occurred as often in situations of everyday life as in more formal and institutionalized settings. Sixteen scholars from Germany, the United States, and Canada focused on such personal encounters in public and private and at different levels of society, and on the effects of these encounters on individuals and societies at large. The majority of papers examined encounters between Germans, Jews, and Americans in postwar West Germany and focused their attention on contemporary debates about Germans' ability to overcome Nazism. Other papers looked at more recent times or settings in the United States, exploring everyday encounters and constructions of memory, traditions, and sites of encounter.

In the opening panel, *Alexander Freund* examined how gentile Germans who had immigrated to the United States between the late 1940s and 1990s dealt with the Nazi past in an intercultural setting. For many post-1945 German immigrants, who Freund had interviewed in the past ten years, it was often the everyday encounters with Jewish Americans and Jewish immigrants from Europe (both prewar refugees and postwar Displaced Persons) that forced them to negotiate the personal and national past in ways that Germans in Germany did not experience. As exemplified in a number of case studies, however, there were substantial differences in the experiences of three generations of Germans who came to live in the United States since the late 1940s. These differences were parallel to, but, because of the significantly different position of Germans in each society, not identical to the different experiences of the same three generations in Germany. In the discussion that followed, Atina Grossmann and Jeff Peck pointed to the importance of gender and generation in the analysis, while Tobias Brinkmann pointed out that the avoidance of encounters with Jews, especially in the first generation of postwar German immigrants, was also a form of encounter. Gerhard Fürmetz and Annette Puckhaber encouraged more research into the role of the German government and German-American clubs in the immigrants' reactions.

In his study of American-Jewish organizations' encounters with postwar West Germany, *Karl-Heinz Füssl* placed the theme in a more specified time frame and institutionalized situation. Examining three such encounters between 1945 and 1960, Füssl revisited the debate over Germans' ability to overcome antidemocratic, anti-Semitic and antihumanitarian attitudes. A study of American-Jewish organizations' research on anti-Semitism and democratic values in West Germany between 1945 and 1960 showed that Germans' attitudes toward Nazi values changed only very slowly. Because of their research findings, the American Jewish Congress and B'nai B'rith continued to be skeptical of German society, in part because they struggled to find German partners for institutional programs. Yet, they continued their engagement in activities to make German society more democratic and rid it of its anti-Semitism. Strategies to fight anti-Semitism differed between Germans and Americans. German campaigns (including those by Jewish-German organizations and communities) were directed specifically at anti-Semitism, whereas Jewish-American organizations proposed a broader fight for the protection of universal human rights.

In the second panel, *Laura J. Hilton* and *Atina Grossmann* juxtaposed everyday experiences with "official" or institutional responses. Examining the attitudes of the U.S. military and government toward Jewish Displaced Persons (DP's), Hilton concluded that they deteriorated dramatically as soon as the U.S. ground troops who had liberated the concentration camps were replaced by inexperienced troops, who saw Germans in a more favorable light and did not understand the background of Jewish DP camp life. With the emergence of the Cold War, moreover, the U.S. government shifted its focus from a fight against anti-Semitism to viewing West Germany as the new bulwark against Communism. What had been understood as an "honorable burden" came to be seen as "just a burden." This changing attitude led to an increase in German anti-Semitism in the immediate postwar years. It was especially young Germans who, receiving cues from the occupation forces, acted out their anti-Semitism.

How this and other changes in postwar Germany played out in everyday encounters between "defeated Germans and surviving Jews" was analyzed by Grossmann. The baby boom in DP camps led to innumerable relations between young Jewish mothers and German physicians, nurses, housekeepers, and nannies. Other sites of encounter were soccer matches, cafes, bars, dance-halls, weddings, administrative offices, and the camps themselves, which Germans entered both legally and illegally. Jews in postwar Germany established their visibility in German streets and their relations with Germans at least in part as a political act. Jews understood their showing Germans the rebirth of Jewish (political and personal) life as outright or symbolic revenge or justice. They achieved this in part by taking over former Nazi sites and redesignating them as Jewish spaces. In her gender analysis, Grossmann pointed out that the Jewish baby boom and Jewish-German sexual relations – phenomena that have hitherto been explained (away) as personal reactions – can be understood as such acts of resignification. The discussion that followed concentrated on the multitude of experiences of Displaced Persons in postwar Germany and reactions to them by the German population, the U.S. occupation forces, and the U.S. government.

The third panel took up the theme of everyday encounters and explored more specific case studies. *Timothy Schroer* examined relations between African-American men and German women in postwar West Germany. In the social context and the underlying dynamics of such relationships, race operated to "level the playing field" in the power relations between occupiers and occupied. The case of a German who prostituted his wife to an African-American GI in exchange for material goods illuminated how the power of whiteness could be used to counterbalance the power that the soldier had gained through his access to economic resources, his political power as a member of the occupying forces, and his masculine power. Yet, such interracial relationships did not undermine the racial divide, but strengthened it. Germans' anxieties over U.S. troops were expressed not only in morality debates about German women's relations with African-American GIs. As Maria Höhn argued in her study of the Rhineland-Palatinate, they were also expressed in moralized national discussions about Jewish bar owners who were alleged to facilitate such relationships. Bars in garrison towns con-

tinued to be segregated even after the U.S. military forces in Europe had been integrated in the early 1950s. Most bars catered to white GIs. Many of these bars were owned by Germans, who leased them to Jewish bar operators. Yet, German discourse focused on the bars catering to African-American GIs, the German “prostitutes” who had relationships with black GIs, and the Jewish bar owners. Germans felt they were not breaking the philo-Semitic code when attacking Jewish bar-owners, because they were not German Jews, but rather East European. In fact, some even argued that Jewish bar owners were in part to blame for continued anti-Semitism. In his film “Schwarzer Kies” (1960), Helmut Käutner attempted to criticize this anti-Semitism in a scene that depicted a German making anti-Semitic remarks about the Jewish bar owner. But the public outcry that followed forced Käutner to cut the controversial scene.

In the discussion that followed, Peck and Höhn pointed out that black men were eroticized in Western and German culture. Höhn also specified black GIs’ access to economic resources, pointing out that they often worked in the kitchen, giving them greater access to food. Karl-Heinz Füssl criticized the lack of historical contextualization, pointing to the Swing Youth and the *Edelweißpiraten* in Weimar and Nazi Germany. While the forum could not decide whether these groups were the same generation as those establishing relationships with GIs, Schroer pointed out that it was often former *Edelweißpiraten* who beat up U.S. soldiers having relationships with German women. Fürmetz added that the public outrage over German women’s relationships with GIs might have been caused in part by the violence that shaped many of these relationships. As several participants argued, race became a major issue in public debate, because racism and segregation were seen as detrimental in the context of the Cold War. At the same time, many black soldiers experienced Germany as a place of freedom where they faced less racism. As Herf emphasized, however, the great majority of German-American encounters were between white, conservative, small town people.

In the fourth panel, *Gerhard Fürmetz* examined the case of the Jewish-German Holocaust survivor Philipp Auerbach (1906-1952), whose rich correspondence, stored at the Bavarian State Archives in Munich, Fürmetz is currently organizing and describing for archival access. As the highest Bavarian official in charge of compensation and redress, Auerbach was deeply involved in the discussions and political practice of *Wiedergutmachung* (redress) between 1946 and 1951. His positions in both the government and Jewish organizations placed him at the “crossroads of encounter” between Germans, Jews, and Americans. In order to achieve his many political aims, including relief for Nazi victims and punishment of war criminals, he built up a network of personal contacts that he manipulated with great skill. This strategy and the increasing divergence between his and his political allies’ goals eventually isolated him. In judicial proceedings charged with anti-Semitism, he was arrested in early 1951 and charged with embezzlement and other felonies. Two days after being sentenced to prison he committed suicide.

Johannes Platz examined another institution in postwar West Germany – the military. More specifically, he analyzed the role and eventual failure of remigrated social scientists and former OMGUS officers in introducing new forms of personnel testing in the Bundeswehr’s formative years, 1950-57. Psychologists and social scientists, many of whom had returned from the United States, proposed to use an adapted form of a U.S. test to weed out recruits with an “authoritarian personality” or antidemocratic attitudes. Military officers, all of them former *Wehrmacht* officers, successfully rejected this method and reintroduced antiquated methods, although newer methods of testing were adopted in other respects. This opened the door to accepting more “modern” methods in the 1960s. In the discussion that followed, Grossmann emphasized the importance of Jewish *rémigrés* in postwar Germany and their changed positions in West German society after 1949. This was when they lost the protection of the U.S. government and international Jewish organizations, which ceased to condone Jews staying in Germany once the option of leaving was available. Remy pointed out that one has to differentiate among *rémigrés*, especially among those who had been pro-Nazi before their emigration and those who had not. Herf pointed out that by 1954 there was no further effort to bar war criminals

from the Bundeswehr, and Platz emphasized that by 1956, the West German military was no longer open to negotiating.

In the fifth panel, *Steven Remy* pursued the discussion of remigrants in postwar West Germany, focusing on German-Jewish emigrés and academic culture in the U.S. Zone of Occupation. Suggesting that this case was not unique, Remy analyzed the personal confrontation between Daniel Penham, who returned to Germany as a member of the U.S. Army's Counter Intelligence Corps, and Karl Heinrich Bauer, president of Heidelberg University. In 1945/46, when denazification in the U.S. Zone was reaching its climax and critics on the German and American sides were gaining ground, Penham described the University's faculty and student body as "Nazified to the core" and in need of thorough denazification. In his conclusion that universities in the U.S. Zone were filled with Nazis, Penham was backed by some of his colleagues and part of the U.S. press. But his call for a temporary closing of the university and a removal of Bauer, whom he saw as compromised by Nazism, was rejected not only by Bauer (backed by Karl Jaspers) and the University Senate, but also by his American superiors. Although Penham achieved the dismissal of 17 instructors, Penham's and many of his colleagues' efforts to denazify universities in the American zone failed.

Continuing the focus on academic culture, but bringing the site of German-American encounters back to the United States and thus connecting it to Freund's paper, Peck examined the complex network of migration and the transfer of academic culture in the discipline of *Germanistik*. The generation of German *Germanisten* born in the war years who received their doctorates at German universities and critically examined the Nazi past migrated to the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. There they were mentored by an earlier generation of German emigres, who had fled persecution in the 1930s and continued their education and careers in the United States. This encounter forced many to revisit the German past and the history of exile and loss of culture. In the 1970s and 1980s, this second generation became mentors to a third generation, that of American graduate students, many of whom were Jewish and who in turn were faced with questions of identity. Moving into professional positions in the 1980s and 1990s, this third generation of American-Jewish *Germanisten* has shaped the shift from the focus of *Germanistik* on literature to the "Americanized" interdisciplinary field of German Studies. As new generations of German students come to the United States to pursue graduate degrees and careers, this web of knowledge, culture, and personal relations is further complicated. In the discussion that followed, Remy and Herf recounted negative encounters with archivists in Germany. Peck argued that such stories showed the continuing experience of many scholars visiting Germany, where their Jewishness plays a greater part than in their daily lives in the United States. Schüring emphasized the importance of differentiating among generations, which led to a more general discussion about German professors' willingness or unwillingness to come to terms with the universities' Nazi involvement. In a critique of the archaic hierarchical university system in Germany, several discussants pointed out that those pointing to the Nazi past of universities and their professors continue to be marginalized.

Panel six continued the focus on education as a site of German-American encounters. *Michael Schüring* examined the role of the Max Planck Society (MPS) in reestablishing contacts with emigre scientists in the United States. The myth of an untainted past of the MPS's predecessor, the Kaiser Wilhelm Society (KWS), has only recently been debunked. Indeed, the KWS's strategy of protecting only its most distinguished Jewish members from the Nazis was continued by the MPS, when it contacted only the most prominent emigre scientists after 1945 and ignored former KWS members' claims for compensation, referring them to German state authorities. Hence, in establishing its reputation as an important research institution, the MPS had to rely on emigre scientists who were reminders of the institute's complicity with Nazism. The emigre scientists who were asked to rejoin the MPS found themselves in a dilemma as well. On the one hand, membership in an elite scientific institution was integral to their identity as accomplished scientists. On the other hand, they had to accept the MPS's rejecting responsibility for any injustice done under the Nazis. In the discussion that followed, Schüring explained the personal dilemma emigre scientists faced by pointing out the impoverished

lives most of them lived in exile, which may explain why many showed more loyalty to the scientific community than resentment over their discrimination by the KWS. Herf framed this in the notion of self-respect versus career interest and mentioned strategic self-censorship. Discussants pointed to the concept of the transnationalization of Holocaust memory as a context of the MPS study and also to the fact that an increasing number of scientific institutions as well as corporations have begun to investigate their Nazi past, in part because, as Schüring said about the MPS project, “they could not afford not to study it.”

Annette Puckhaber examined the early German student exchange programs, particularly the exchange of high-school students organized by the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) after 1948. These were organized in the general effort of reeducation and reorientation, which the United States saw as important in turning German society into a democracy. Understanding religion as a common bond between former enemies, the NCWC praised the high-school exchange program as most effective. While the NCWC was convinced of the general success of the program and the positive impact German students had in the United States and in Germany upon their return, evaluations of returning students did not demonstrate any basic democratization. Instead, it seemed that students living the “American way of life” were more attracted by the material riches of the American economy than by democratic values. Many experienced the return to Germany as a greater “culture shock” than life in America. In the discussion that followed, Puckhaber, in response to Höhn, explained that parents were not concerned about the “American way of life,” in part because the students could support their families in Germany. Füssl and Fürmetz emphasized the impact of the material wealth, but Puckhaber pointed out the link between an attraction to wealth and to democratic ideas. Responding to Höhn and Remy, Puckhaber explained that interviews with students in early exchanges showed that the Nazi past was less a topic of debate than communism, and that there were concerns about students’ “misperceptions” of the United States if they lived in the segregated American south.

Panel seven brought the discussion of German-American encounters into the more recent past by looking at public, touristic places in Germany as sites of encounters. The Berlin Scheunenviertel is such a site of encounters between Jewish-American and German gentile and German-Jewish visitors. But, as Tobias Brinkmann showed in his paper, it is a complicated and complex site that is less real than it seems. Revived since the early 1980s by a non-Jewish public interested in the Holocaust’s victims and promoted more recently as the “Jewish Berlin” by the Berlin tourism agency, it is part of a larger phenomenon of “virtual Jewish culture.” While this neighborhood possesses a number of Jewish community institutions, few Jews actually live there. Moreover, even at the height of its Jewish population in the Weimar Republic, the Scheunenviertel never had the cultural significance of Jewish neighborhoods such as New York City’s Lower East Side. Yet, in the 1990s the Scheunenviertel was recreated for mostly non-Jewish visitors, based in part on traditions invented and nostalgia invoked by non-Jewish Berliners. The artist Shimon Attie and others, however, have focused attention on the Scheunenviertel as a Holocaust memorial, pointing to the loss of culture rather than to any existing or previously existing culture. Other neighborhoods, especially Berlin’s Bayerisches Viertel, have employed more subtle means and memorials to point visitors to the neighborhoods’ Jewish history.

Nils Roemer pointed to Worms as a tourism site that features the presence of the absence of a Jewish cultural heritage. Non-Jews’ reconstruction of Worms as a Jewish space in spite of Jews’ absence from this space began in the late 1940s as a result of personal encounters with Jewish-American visitors. By 1950, as Hannah Arendt noted, Worms had become “a shrine of Jewish pilgrimage.” Surrounded by much controversy, the Worms synagogue was rebuilt in 1961. While Worms was emphatically embraced by Germans as a new beginning and pushed by the German National Tourist Office since the early 1990s as a “must” for Jewish tourists, Jews around the world have remained skeptical. Although Worms draws thousands of Jewish visitors each year, others have stayed away. Still others have given it new meaning, constructing it as a point for Jews to connect with pre-Holocaust Jewish history. Nevertheless, most Jewish visitors experience Worms in ambivalent ways, as a place that connects them to the past before the Holocaust and to the Holocaust itself. They see the syna-

gogue, but also its emptiness. In the discussion that followed, Peck stated that it is interesting to see the rising interest in and awareness of Jewish culture and studies in Germany, but that it is also suspicious. Schüring pointed out that many Jewish-American visitors to the Scheunenviertel notice the strong police presence first. Roemer noted that while Worms may not be typical, it does represent a major part of German society and history and has been an important place to visit for European and American travellers.

In the last panel, *Robert Gerald Livingston* and *Raimund Lammersdorf* revisited Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl's infamous 1985 Bitburg visit. While Livingston recounted the fascinating details of the politics and politicking in the highest echelons on both sides of the Atlantic, Lammersdorf looked at the politics of memory. Livingston contended that official German-American political relations were influenced by American-Jewish organizations exactly twice: In the early 1950s, on the question of NATO membership and reparations to Israel, and in 1985, on the question of the President's and German Chancellor's visit to the cemetery that contained graves of members of the Waffen-SS. But Bitburg did not change the Cold War relations between West Germany and United States. Kohl, much like his successor Gerhard Schröder, attempted to reinvigorate German pride. Lammersdorf discussed the politics of memory surrounding the incident, which both insulted the values U.S. troops had fought and died for and validated the sacrifices of German troops. This pointed to different conceptions of victimhood on both sides of the Atlantic, which are ultimately irreconcilable. The case study of Bitburg supports the thesis Lammersdorf proposes in a larger comparative study, namely that the differences between the political cultures in the United States and Germany are greater than they are usually perceived. While not pursuing a strategy of nationalization, Kohl represented a larger national feeling. Like many Germans, he conflated all victims of World War II as the same victims. While controversial, such an interpretation has recently become more accepted.

The conference's concluding discussion attempted to synthesize the many topics and approaches and to outline areas and methods of further research. Discussants proposed a number of themes that would help focus various research strategies and topics. Peck outlined four such themes: the author's position in research (the idea of "being implicated"), the concepts of exchange and movement (travelling, working abroad, etc.), the notion of ambivalence about the reestablishment of a Jewish community in Germany and its meanings, and the role of the Holocaust in German-American-Jewish relations and the question of "normalization" in such relations. Grossmann noted the response to the conference's call for papers, which attracted mainly papers on German-Jewish relations and on cultural and social relations, but few papers by women and on gender. Some of Peck's and Grossmann's points were taken up by Freund, who argued for the concept of transnationalism to analyze processes such as normalcy and migration and for methods of "bottom up history." Grossmann further emphasized the role Jews have played as interpreters of German society and politics for Americans. She also suggested using Frank Stern's concept of the "historic triangle" of German-American-Jewish relations to investigate how these relations worked at different times and places. Roemer advocated expanding and thus complicating the historical triangle to include Israel and Great Britain. Peck supported this idea, noting the importance of Israeli-German relations. Livingston, however, wondered whether the Jewish focus in work on German-American encounters was disproportionate. This was echoed by Platz and Schüring. Other topics of further research that were suggested included the enigmas of German victimhood and West German society's successful democratization (Grossmann). Livingston pointed to the role of economics to explain the latter. Schroer emphasized the significance of generation in the actual research process and the perceived marginalization of younger historians at the conference and in the transatlantic research community at large. The discussion ended with a plea to continue the cooperative working relationships and the proposal that the focus of research should shift to the third generation of postwar Germans. Grossmann also encouraged the formation of transatlantic study teams to research large projects such as the history of displaced persons and referred to the role of the United States as an accommodating site for Germans to reflect on their history. Over-

all, the conference succeeded in spite and because of the great diversity of topics, and because of its interdisciplinarity and intergenerational form.

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