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# Exporting America: The U.S. Information Centers and German Reconstruction

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EXPORTING AMERICA: THE U.S. INFORMATION CENTERS AND GERMAN  
RECONSTRUCTION

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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EXPORTING AMERICA: THE U.S. INFORMATION CENTERS AND GERMAN  
RECONSTRUCTION

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James R. Podesva

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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Jonathan S. Wiesen

This dissertation examines the establishment of United States Information Centers in West Germany immediately after the Second World War, and their role in securing the support of West German elites for American occupation policies, particularly democratic self-government. Located at the intersection of culture, economics, and American politics, the America Houses (Amerikahäuser) educated curious Germans about the United States, presenting a carefully curated vision of American life that minimized conflict and highlighted the material and cultural prosperity enjoyed by the mythical “average American.” The Americans contended that with the adoption of democracy and a reformed market economy, affluence was something West Germans could realistically aspire to. As a key transmitter of American information and ideas, the program was a means by which the United States attempted to change German resistance to American cultural products, and also served as a way to gauge German opinion. Often lumped together with the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe under the general heading of propaganda and receiving little academic scrutiny on its own merits, an examination of the U.S. Information Center program gives a more nuanced portrait of the forces shaping American efforts for the hearts and minds of newly-made West Germans.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Though almost unnoticed by the public, October 10, 2005 marked the end of an era in the relationship between Germany and the United States. On that day, in a formal ceremony befitting such an iconic symbol of the Cold War, the United States formally closed the massive Rhein-Main Air Force Base adjacent to Frankfurt International Airport and turned the property over to the German government. In his remarks, the American Ambassador, William Timken, Jr., stressed not just the practical value of the base to both the United States and NATO over the decades, but also the significant symbolic presence of the enormous American military base in the heart of Central Europe. Citing missions from the Cold War to the “War on Terror,” from the days of the Berlin Airlift, when the airfield supported more than 300,000 flights over a fifteen-month period, to NATO operations in Bosnia and Afghanistan, the Ambassador noted the often-unheralded centrality of the base to some of the most pivotal events in the postwar world.

For more than fifty years Rhein-Main served as the “gateway to Europe” for hundreds of thousands of Americans, with a sign above the main gate that proclaimed the fact in large letters. The first point of contact with the former West Germany of the Cold War, the base remained as “one of the most visible manifestations of American power” in the newly-unified German state.<sup>1</sup> More than an airport, Rhein-Main was a concrete expression of the political bonds between the United States and the former Federal Republic. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the focus of NATO was changing, and the American government saw the sprawling base as an expensive relic of the Cold War. Ambassador Timken reassured his

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Landler, “Rhein-Main Air Base Journal; After 60 Years, the Yanks Fly Out, Leaving Just the Ghosts,” *The New York Times*, October 21, 2005; William Timken Jr., “Closure of Rhein-Main Air Base,” n.d., <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/docs/timkenrheinmaine.htm>.

German audience that despite fall of the Berlin Wall, the disbanding of the Soviet Union, and the loss of the Warsaw Pact as a strategic focus, the closure of Rhein-Main Air Force Base did not signal any change in the transatlantic partnership between Germany and the United States. According to the Ambassador, the defense of freedom, the strengthening of democracy, and providing for “a stable climate in which prosperity can grow” were still the animating values in the relationship between Germany and the United States, as they had been since the end of the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> The closure of Rhein-Main Air Force Base was one of the more visible indicators of the changes in the relationship between Germany and the United States after the Cold War, but many more went unnoticed.

Almost a year later, in an equally unambiguous display of the new transatlantic political reality, Ambassador Timken presided over the closure of another parcel of American property that, like Rhein-Main, was once a physical and psychological fixture of the Cold War in Germany but now deemed superfluous: the last United States Information Center, or *Amerika Haus*. In retrospect, given the centrality of Berlin to the Cold War in Europe, it seems appropriate that the Berlin *Amerika Haus* on Hardenbergstraße was the last to close. In the 1950s the Americans planted their flag in what used to be the heart of West Berlin, across the street from the popular Zoo, as well as the main train station (with the one line running to and from East Berlin), and within walking distance of the glittering Kurfürstendamm shopping and entertainment district. This street, with its displays of conspicuous consumption, framed itself as a self-consciously “outrageous and provocative” reply to what was on offer in East Berlin.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Timken Jr., “Closure of Rhein-Main Air Base.”

<sup>3</sup> David Clay Large, *Berlin* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 481; Gary Bruce, *Through the Lion Gate: A History of the Berlin Zoo* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 210–21; James L. Bryan, *The Martial Imagination: Cultural Aspects of American Warfare* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013), 15–35.

Anchored by the grand department store Kaufhaus des Westens and the ruins of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, the area was the entertainment and commercial hub of West Berlin, and where the American efforts at the Information Center would reach the largest audience. By the time of closing of the last *Amerika Haus* though, the area seemed neglected in comparison to earlier decades, particularly after the main train station moved to the newly-reconstituted center of the city, and the eastern half of the city opened to economic development. In handing the building over to Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit, the Ambassador formally ended not just one of the longest-running programs in the history of American public diplomacy, but retired what once was “the crown jewel” of the American effort to create a democratic West Germany out of the wreckage of the Nazi state.<sup>4</sup> As was the case with the former Air Force Base, the fall of the Berlin Wall made the last *Amerika Haus* an institution without a mission.

As he did a year earlier, Ambassador Timken stressed the interpersonal connections between Germans and Americans constructed over the decades, this time through the medium of the local *Amerika Haus*. The mission of an Information Center was explicitly pedagogical, Timken recalled, but more so in the case of West Berlin where the political dynamics were heightened by the unique circumstances of the divided city. Regardless of where it was located in West Germany though, an *Amerika Haus*, according to the Ambassador, “...was designed so that we (the Americans) could reach out to the German people, to show them what America was like, how we lived, what we stood for.” But in the case of West Berlin the Americans wanted to show the Germans “what we imagined the future of this city could hold for all its citizens” and the

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 27.

Information Center was the best way to demonstrate that vision.<sup>5</sup> However, the United States was not leaving the newly unified German capital, nor making itself less of a presence in the city. In the future, Timken stressed, the new U.S. embassy on Pariser Platz next to the Brandenburg Gate would be the most visible symbol of the United States in Berlin, and the Internet would replace many of the functions of a local *Amerika Haus*.<sup>6</sup> However, what the Ambassador failed to point out was that unlike the former *Amerika Haus* on Hardenbergstraße, the new embassy (along with the extraordinary collection of American art that it held) was closed to the public; the U.S. was effectively retreating from the core mission of the *Amerika Haus*, one of close engagement with the German public.

Rhein-Main Air Force Base in suburban Frankfurt may have been the metaphorical “gateway to Europe” as the Ambassador claimed, but it was a port of entry for a relatively small subset of Americans: military personnel and their families. Alternately, for millions of West Germans the *Amerikahäuser* across the Federal Republic were one-on-one introductions to the United States at the interpersonal level. Accommodating libraries, meeting rooms, performance spaces, and dedicated display areas, the *Amerikahäuser* were immersive, government-sanctioned and carefully curated expressions of American society, customs, and culture for the benefit of a German public seen by U.S. officials as desperately in need of democratic education.

In the years covered in this dissertation, 1945-1953, a local *Amerika Haus* was a cultural oasis amid the physical and spiritual desolation of postwar Germany. The centerpiece of the

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<sup>5</sup> “Amerika Haus Turnover Ceremony Ambassador William R. Timken, Jr.,” accessed April 20, 2015, [http://germany.usembassy.gov/germany/timken\\_09\\_25\\_06.html](http://germany.usembassy.gov/germany/timken_09_25_06.html).

<sup>6</sup> U. S. Embassy, “Ambassador Timken Hands over Amerika Haus Building to the Governing Mayor Wowereit (September 25, 2006),” accessed April 20, 2015, [http://germany.usembassy.gov/germany/ahberlin\\_returned.html](http://germany.usembassy.gov/germany/ahberlin_returned.html); Austilat Von Andreas, “Es War Einmal in Amerikahaus,” *Det Tagesspiegel*, June 29, 2008; Dorothee Schmid Von Eva, “Die USA Haben Die Wahl-Berlin Diskutiert,” *Berliner Zeitung*, September 29, 2008.

Information Center was the library with open stacks; being able to browse the shelves was almost completely novel to German librarians but extremely popular with German patrons. However, with all the other facilities on offer, the *Amerikahäuser* also became places to learn English, watch American movies, and to listen to music, specifically classical or jazz, but not rock and roll, which, tellingly, was not part of the American cultural panoply on offer at an Information Center. The crowds for rock concerts were too unpredictable, and the music not “serious,” while jazz had finally won bourgeois respectability after the war, due largely to the work of Americans broadcasting on the *Armed Forces Network*, *Radio Free Europe*, and in Berlin, *Radio in the American Sector* (RIAS). The Information Centers served as important nodes on the postwar German jazz network, disseminating music among an increasingly discerning audience. In doing so, Occupation authorities were giving tacit approval to an art form whose roots were solidly in the African-American experience, an acknowledgment rarely given to African-Americans or their cultural contributions back home in the United States. The Germans genuinely appreciated the diversion, for immediately after the war, the physical realities of urban life in Germany were often quite grim.

There were critical shortages of food, shelter, and transportation; a public health crisis encompassing both malnutrition and sexually transmitted infections; a worthless currency that virtually guaranteed a thriving black market; and the hyper-awareness of loss, whether temporary or permanent. Given these material and psychological conditions, the fact that Information Centers were always warm in winter at a time when few German buildings could match such a feat due to fuel and spare part shortages was significant. This fact, coupled with the modernist design that referenced the influential Bauhaus school of the Weimar period (influences were reflected in everything from the architecture to the furniture), made it likely that many Germans

would be at least curious to see what the Americans had to offer. For their part, the Americans made sure there was “no shortage of useful literature” to examine while thawing out or waiting for the streetcar.<sup>7</sup>

Before the Second World War, most Germans had neither met an American nor had sustained contact with American culture, and vice versa. As such, Occupation officials saw the opportunity that the Information Centers offered for contact between Germans and Americans as central to the democratic reconstruction of German society. In a visit to an *Amerika Haus*, West Germans could see in the carefully curated photographic exhibitions on American life, the judiciously chosen books on offer in the open stacks of the library, and the documentary films on American customs and culture that omitted the darker sides of American society, an overarching narrative of an American historical experience that equated democracy with high living standards, varied consumer choice, and harmonious labor relations, with the promise that the same benefits would come to West Germany if it sincerely adopted democratic reforms. An *Amerika Haus* was a tool with properties that allowed the United States to attempt nothing less than the wholesale reformation of West Germany, a monumental task that required U.S. intervention into every aspect of society, from the family to the workplace. The local Information Center, as a shop window for the “American way of life,” displayed American cultural and consumer innovations and tied them to the refashioning of German society along solidly democratic lines.

### **The *Amerikahäuser* and Americanization**

To say the United States was on a mission to establish economic and cultural hegemony over a helpless Germany is reductive, distilling a complex process of negotiation, rejection, and

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<sup>7</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 2009, 27.

acceptance of American cultural products and economic precepts, to the catchall term of “Americanization.” As such, it hardly describes the relationship between Americans and Germans immediately after the war, and consequently the term, and the ideas behind it, have fallen out of favor in place of a more nuanced description of the relationship of the United States to Western Europe.<sup>8</sup> Even though the relationship between U.S. officials and the German population under Occupation statutes was hardly one of equals, the United States frequently used the physical and intellectual spaces provided by local *Amerikahäuser* to negotiate with cultural and economic elites in an ongoing effort to gain an acceptance of American efforts at making a “new Germany.” The records of the *Amerikahäuser* reflect a process of give and take between the *Amerika Haus* and those who patronized it, with the *Häuser* staff exquisitely attuned to German public opinion through personal contact and extensive use of surveys.<sup>9</sup> Rather than “Americanization,” with an emphasis on the adoption of “lifestyles and production techniques” originating in the United States, the term “Westernization” is far more apt in describing the complex interactions between Germans and the attempted imposition of U.S. cultural and

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<sup>8</sup> Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire : America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*, 1st Harvard Univ. Press pbk. ed. (Cambridge, Mass. ; Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2006); Richard H. Pells, *Not Like Us : How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II*, 1st ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judd, eds., *Getting and Spending : European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century*, Publications of the German Historical Institute (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jan L. Logemann, *Trams or Tailfins? : Public and Private Prosperity in Postwar West Germany and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Ralph Willett, *The Americanization of Germany, 1945-1949*, Studies in Film, Television, and the Media (London ; New York: Routledge, 1989); Michael Ermarth, *America and the Shaping of German Society, 1945-1955* (Providence, R.I.: Berg, 1993); Alexander Stephan, *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism After 1945* (Berghahn Books, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Anna Merritt and Richard Merritt, eds., *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany: The OMGUS Surveys, 1945-1949* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970); Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merritt, eds., *Public Opinion in Semisovereign Germany : The HICOG Surveys, 1949-1955* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1980).

economic practices.<sup>10</sup> “Westernization,” an explanatory paradigm proposed by Holger Nehring and taken up Volker Berghahn, emphasizes the creation of a “transatlantic community of values” based on Enlightenment principles, rather than specifically American precepts; but with an emphasis on an ideology of human rights and individual freedoms, “and on the agencies through which it was transmitted” such as the *Amerikahäuser*. The term “Westernization” allows for the idea of a negotiated European response to postwar American ideological stimulus, rather than a “one-size fits all” solution to the question of the postwar Americanization of Germany.<sup>11</sup>

In the Information Centers, the Americans maintained that consumer choice reflected larger principles of individual liberty and free markets, and harmonious relationships between consumers, producers, labor, and government. The *Amerikahäuser* were a vital part of this effort at acquainting Germans with the American idea of “consensus liberalism.”<sup>12</sup> Arguably a “softer” version of classical liberalism, “consensus liberalism” differed in that it saw a positive role for government in problem solving while still supporting the principles of private property, free enterprise, political pluralism (with the exclusion of communist-affiliated parties), and respect for individual rights.<sup>13</sup> A conscious effort was made by those who ran the *Häuser* to set the United States as an example of the benefits of consensus liberalism. An explicit rejection of the politics of emotion and irrationality that had plagued Germany since the First World War, consensus liberalism sought to bring rationality back to both the public and private spheres in

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<sup>10</sup> Volker R. Berghahn, “The Debate on ‘Americanization’ Among Economic and Cultural Historians,” *Cold War History* 10, no. 1 (2010): 110.

<sup>11</sup> Holger Nehring, “‘Westernization’: A New Paradigm for Interpreting West European History in a Cold War Context,” *Cold War History* 4, no. 2 (2004): 176.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; Berghahn, “The Debate on ‘Americanization’ Among Economic and Cultural Historians,” 108–109.

<sup>13</sup> Nehring, “Westernization,” 176; Andrew Jewett, “Naturalizing Liberalism in the 1950s,” in *Professors and Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 191-216.

Germany. For the United States, the *Amerikahäuser* were one of the most visible, sustained attempts at effecting this return to reason.

This work is focused on how the Information Centers presented the United States to West German elites in the first years after the war. This focus on elites is unavoidable, for that was the target audience *Amerika Haus* staff worked hard to cultivate relationships with. Though always open to the general public, from the very start the *Amerikahäuser* sought support for Occupation policies, democratic institutions, and economic reform from those Germans thought the most influential, or to have future influence in West Germany: college students, journalists, members of the professions, and distinguished cultural figures.

*Häuser* staff and their opposite numbers at the Soviet Palaces of Culture spent a great amount of effort to entertain journalists whose reputations were not tainted by Nazism. Courting journalists made good sense in a West Germany that had a thriving print culture before the Second World War, for the supply of paper was scarce but the demand for news was high. It is estimated that each newspaper in Occupied Germany had at least four readers: the person who bought the newspaper, and at least three other people who then received it afterwards.<sup>14</sup> Cultivating existing outlets whenever possible, but not afraid to create new press organs such as the newspapers *Neue Zeitung* and *Heute*, American Military Government officers were not above using a carrot and stick approach, rewarding some and denying others the most crucial resources: money, paper, and a license to publish.<sup>15</sup> While the *Amerikahäuser*, with thousands of books, and

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<sup>14</sup> Christian L. Glossner, *Making of the German Post-War Economy: Political Communication and Public Reception of the Social Market Economy After World War Two* (I.B.Tauris, 2010), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Arthur W. Macmahon, *Memorandum on the Postwar International Information Program of the United States, Prepared by Dr. Arthur W. Macmahon* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Govt. Print. Off., 1945); Harold Zink, *American Military Government in Germany*

hundreds of magazines and newspapers, played a major role in the circulation of democratic ideas in the Occupation period, it also provided a physical space for journalists and authors to work together, hold conferences and entertain speakers, as well as meet with Occupation officials. Occupation officials used their local *Amerikahäuser* as a focal point in their efforts to cultivate and mobilize German opinion makers in support of democratic institutions, particularly in the divided city of Berlin.<sup>16</sup> As a result, the local *Amerika Haus* often provided the physical and intellectual space for an ongoing dialogue on press freedom and restraint. Ultimately, what the Americans wanted from the German intelligentsia was real support for the creation of democratic institutions in postwar Germany, and not a return of the so-called *Vernunftrepublikaner*, an intellectual whose support for the Weimar Republic was a matter of “cool rationalism,” not an emotional investment in the success of the Republic.<sup>17</sup> To that end, staff at the *Amerikahäuser* went out of their way to court German intellectuals, who despite their eminence, were as lost as every other German in making sense of their recent history.

After the Second World War, German intellectuals were at a crossroads. Going forward, they were going to have to come to terms with a new world, one in which the sacred tenets of German *Kultur* no longer held the power they once did. In 1945 German intellectuals were

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(New York: Macmillan, 1947), 161–164.; Hart, *Empire of Ideas : The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy*; Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War : The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2000); Stephan, *The Americanization of Europe*, 73; Glossner, *Making of the German Post-War Economy*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 109–16.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture : The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 2; Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2006); Gregory S. Parsons, “German Politics and the Burden of Kultur,” *Mann, Meinecke and the Psychology of the Vernunftrepublikaner in Early Weimar Germany*,” *UCLA Historical Journal* 16, no. 0 (January 1, 1996).; Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic : The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992); Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany : Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

presented with the same stark choices they faced in 1918: commitment to democracy, or heeding the call of Friedrich Meinecke, Julien Benda and the pre-democratic Thomas Mann before the war, disengagement from politics altogether.<sup>18</sup> Though the war had ended in 1945, they argued, German society was still under assault from all sides, but in the guise of reconstruction. As one of the most visible symbols of the United States in Occupation-era Germany, the *Amerikahäuser* was seen by Meinecke and other traditionalists as a Trojan Horse; it was the attractive vehicle by which the destructive force, American culture, was introduced into the very *Heimat*. In this defeated and paranoid conception, a U.S. Information Center was not a repository of American culture, but the delivery system for a weapon aimed squarely at German *Kultur*.

Those in charge of the Information Centers took great pains to reassure skeptical Germans that the United States respected German cultural achievements, particularly in symphonic music. At the same time, they were introducing jazz music, to a wider audience. It was not uncommon in the early years of the occupation to have a local *Amerika Haus* playing symphony records in one room, while a jazz club might meet and listen to the latest record imports in another room. And that, for many German cultural elites, was the problem. Through music, depending on cultural perspective, the *Amerikahäuser* were either subverting or restoring German culture, or doing both at the same time. The Americans were sending a message to their German visitors: the *Amerika Haus* was, like American society, was big enough to successfully weave tradition and innovation into the cultural fabric of the nation.

This work does not challenge existing historiography on the Information Centers as much as it refocuses scholarly attention on the *Amerikahäuser* as cultural and political actors in their

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<sup>18</sup> Julien Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007); Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, accessed September 10, 2015, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=946](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=946); Parsons, "German Politics and the Burden of Kultur."

own right. For an institution that lasted more than half a century, introduced millions of Germans to the United States, and cost billions of dollars over the decades, there is a real paucity of scholarship surrounding the *Amerikahäuser*. Two factors make the *Amerikahäuser* a challenging, but ultimately rewarding topic for extended examination. First, as alluded to above, is the lack of sustained scholarly attention aimed at the Information Centers in West Germany. The *Amerikahäuser* are conspicuous by their absence from the larger historiographies on the Cold War, cultural diplomacy, and the post-war “Americanization” of Europe. They have gone relatively unmentioned by American historians, subsumed into larger histories of the Cold War, diplomacy, and propaganda. Two examples are representative of the treatment of the Information Centers within larger works. Though authoritative, in *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, Nicholas Cull refers to the *Amerikahäuser* as the “crown jewels of the occupation” in Germany, but declines to address what made them so.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, in *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe*, Volker Berghahn notes that by the early 1950s more than a million Germans attended programming at an *Amerika Haus* every month, but he does not say why.<sup>20</sup> In the otherwise laudable *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War*, Laura Belmonte omits any mention of the *Häuser*, despite their centrality to postwar events in Germany. Likewise, they are missing from *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War*, the survey by Walter Hixson. The *Amerikahäuser* are also absent from larger discussions on consumption, the Americanization of Europe, and the presentation of American

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<sup>19</sup> Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 27.

<sup>20</sup> Volker Rolf Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe : Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, c2001.), 61.

race relations in Europe.<sup>21</sup> It is telling that *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War*, the work that covers the *Amerikahäuser* most directly, is a translation written over twenty years ago and set not in Germany, but in Austria.<sup>22</sup> However, German scholars, unsurprisingly, have turned their gaze to the *Häuser* in recent years, though the works tend to focus on individual aspects of the *Amerika Haus* phenomenon, such as attempts to change consumption patterns.<sup>23</sup> One of the most complete studies in German, *Orte für Amerika: Deutsch-Amerikanische Institute und Amerikahäuser seit der 1960er Jahren*, by Reinhild Kreis, focuses on the *Häuser* after they were well-established in Germany.<sup>24</sup> The other English-Language work that examines the Information Center is *Designing Democracy: Re-education and the America Houses, 1945-1961*, was published as part of a *Habilitation* by a degree-holder in Design at the University of Wuppertal,

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<sup>21</sup> Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*; Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann, eds., *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology, and European Users* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009); Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire : America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*, (Cambridge, Mass. ; Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2006); Richard H. Pells, *Not Like Us : How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II*, (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights : Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War : The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Maritta Hein-Kremer, *Die Amerikanische Kulturoffensive : Gründung und Entwicklung der amerikanischen Information Centers in Westdeutschland und West-Berlin, 1945-1955* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1996); Inge Marssolek, Adelheid von Saldern, and Alf Lütke, eds., *Amerikanisierung : Traum Und Alptraum Im Deutschland Des 20. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 6, *Transatlantische Historische Studien* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Reinhild Kreis, *Orte Für Amerika: Deutsch-Amerikanische Institute Und Amerikahäuser in Der Bundesrepublik Seit Den 1960er Jahren*, *Transatlantische Historische Studien*, Band 44 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012).

and while well researched, takes the most obvious point for a thesis: that the Information Centers were a central part of the effort to re-educate Germans in the way of democracy.<sup>25</sup>

The other challenge facing the scholar of the *Amerikahäuser* is the fragmentary nature of primary source materials, most importantly the operating files of the various *Häuser* themselves. *Amerika Haus* personnel often destroyed records when Information Centers were closed or consolidated over the years, and particularly after the formal end of the program in 1996. Little regard was given to archival preservation, and often the documents that did survive were passed on to the *Stadtarchiv* of the various host cities. As a result, these record holdings are often incomplete, but nonetheless spread across Germany with few finding aids. For this project, I used the facilities of the Frankfurt and Berlin *Stadtarchiv*, the German Foreign Office Archives, the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* in Munich, and the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. At College Park, most of the materials for this project were found in Record Groups 59, *Records of the Department of State*; 208, *Records of Office of War Information*; and 306, *Records of the United States Information Agency*. Most of the Congressional hearing testimony can be found in the Subcommittees of the Committee on Appropriations, and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, of the 79<sup>th</sup> through 83<sup>rd</sup> Congresses. Additionally, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series was used.

### **Periodization**

In spring of 1947, the Reading Room in Bad Hamburg was closed, its contents moved approximately fifty kilometers southwest to Wiesbaden, and reopened as the first *Amerika Haus*

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<sup>25</sup> Kathleen R. Hooper, *Designing Democracy: Re-Education and the America Houses (1945-1961): The American Information Centers and Their Involvement in Democratic Re-Education in Western Germany and West Berlin from 1945 to 1961* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Edition, 2014), 23.

that July.<sup>26</sup> This begins the formal story of the *Amerikahäuser*, a story of cultural transfer that ended with Ambassador Timken handing over the keys to the Berlin *Amerika Haus* nearly fifty years later. However, rather than an institutional history, this work focuses on the period of formal military occupation, which ended with the adoption of the Paris Agreements in 1954. By that time, a profound change in orientation on the part of the United States toward the former German state had occurred: the ideological threat was now Communism, not a resurgent Nazism.

The Korean War had a profound effect on the Federal Republic in that it facilitated the growth of West German export industries, as well shortening the path to regaining sovereignty, an act given the force of law in the 1954 Paris Agreements. These accords solidified West Germany as a bulwark of anti-Communism, providing not just for sovereignty but rearmament and membership in NATO. However, this was not the original orientation of the *Amerikahäuser*. Rather, preventing a reoccurrence of Nazism, or the political conditions that allowed it to flourish, were the original goals for the *Häuser*, but as time passed and Soviet behavior became more obstreperous in the eyes of the Americans, the orientation of the local *Amerika Haus* changed to reflect the new state of affairs. By the time the U.S. ended the formal military occupation of West Germany in 1953, anti-Nazism had been replaced by anti-Communism as the organizing principle for U.S. public diplomacy efforts in West Germany. Of course, the East German state next door gave particular urgency and focus to U.S. efforts, particularly in that “showplace of the West,” divided Berlin. A more prosaic reason for ending this study in 1953 is that Dwight Eisenhower and the Republican Party took control of the White House and Congress, running on promises of cutting taxes and expenditures, and restoring efficiency to

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<sup>26</sup> Henry Pilgert, *The History of the Development of Information Services through Information Centers and Documentary Films* (Historical Division, Office of the Executive Secretary, Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, 1951), 77.

government. One way these goals were realized was by cutting the number of *Amerikahäuser* and consolidating them under the civilian control of the newly created United States Information Agency. The *Amerika Haus* program reached a peak in 1953, with more than thirty *Häuser* in operation across West Germany.<sup>27</sup>

My work attempts to fill this lacuna in the existing scholarship by restoring the *Amerikahäuser* to a central position in U.S. efforts to reconstruct German society. Looking at the *Amerikahäuser* gives us a better way to understand not just American concerns about the future of Germany, but also the concerns Americans had over the position of the United States in the world. Through the vehicle of the *Amerikahäuser*, both Germans and Americans were able to help define themselves and create a new narrative for both nations.

### **Chapter Outlines**

Chapter one examines the reverence with which bourgeois Germans held matters of culture (*Kultur*), and how the Americans—in part through the American Houses-- attempted to leverage German cultural self-regard into gaining greater access to the cohort of educated elites that both American and Soviet Occupation authorities sought so hard to entertain. The Americans found themselves caught between two opposing ideas regarding the relationship of culture to politics. On the one hand was a significant segment of the “population of influence” (*Einflussgemeinschaft*) who, taking their cue from nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, believed that democratic politics, with the necessary compromises and appeals to the public, was fundamentally incompatible with matters of *Kultur*.

Conversely, there were those Germans who linked matters of culture to nationalism. German culture helped unite the bourgeoisie before the failed revolution of 1848, as well as after

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 76–78.

the unification of Germany in 1871, and the Americans attempted to use culture to stimulate a “healthy” nationalism among the occupied German population. As a counter to the toxic nationalism of the National Socialist period, they looked to the historical examples of Weimar classicism, the open-minded Germany of Beethoven, Goethe, and Schiller as examples of the fusion of *Kultur* and politics.

Chapter Two looks at the portion of the Information Center most popular with the West German visitors, the library. Until the introduction of the *Amerikahäuser* libraries, the relatively scarce German public libraries were librarian-centered, instead of being focused on the patron and the circulation of materials. In this context the librarian was a gatekeeper, restricting and granting access to cultural products through a criteria based on educational status and personal wealth. The shelves in the Information Center libraries were open to patrons because the emphasis at an *Amerika Haus* was on the expression of civil liberties, and the Americans placed great symbolic value in the open stacks and curtain wall of floor-to-ceiling windows in the library.

The emphasis in the library on one-on-one contact with American culture reflected a sentiment that privileged American engagement with West Germans, not segregation, and drew a direct connection between democracy and education. Drawing heavily from Progressive-Era thought, the American organizing the Information Centers, particularly the libraries, were engaged in nation-building, and that saw their work in quasi-messianic terms. The emphasis in the libraries was on the free exchange of ideas and information, a policy that was sorely tested when anti-communist crusader Senator Joseph McCarthy turned his attention to the books on the shelves in the Information Center libraries.

This third chapter surveys the *Amerikahäuser* and their furnishings not just as physical objects, but as a complete sensory experience approaching the “total work of art” (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) that German intellectuals prized so highly. From the premium building materials to the modernist architecture and furniture that bore the clear influence of the Bauhaus, the Information Center was designed to entice as well as impress the West German visitor. The wealth and cultural sophistication of the United States was on display in an *Amerikahaus*, made even more evident from the relative poverty of their surroundings. During the years surveyed in this work, 1945-1953, many German cities were still reconstituting themselves after wartime devastation, and from the moment the visitor saw it from the street, the modernist *Amerika Haus* was a clear statement of American affluence.

### **American Public Diplomacy: From the American Revolution to the America Houses**

The remainder of this introduction lays the groundwork for the following chapters, in part by surveying earlier attempts by the United States at public diplomacy. Previous American experiences with propaganda, particularly in the twentieth century, informed the creation of the U.S. Information Centers program after the Second World War, and by placing the Information Centers within a larger historical context of U.S. public diplomacy we will see how the *Amerikahäuser* represented a substantive break with existing American diplomatic custom and practice. The creation of the Information Centers in West Germany reflected the unique historical circumstances of postwar American economic prosperity, while the portrait of the United States presented in the Centers was in turn fashioned by the political pressures brought to bear against the State Department and Military Government alike. To better understand the phenomenon of the early Information Centers, it is necessary to examine the debates that influenced the American posture towards occupied Germany immediately after the war, and how

those conflicts were reflected in the efforts to create a coherent national narrative for export to the German public through the Information Centers.

In an essay in the February 1941 issue of *Life Magazine*, less than a year before American entry into the Second World War, publisher Henry Luce declared the twentieth century to be “The American Century.” In his essay, a thinly described “plea for Americans to take up a global mission,” Luce wrote a passionate, if vaguely worded, call for the United States to assume a position of global leadership.<sup>28</sup> Luce called for “...a vision of America as a world power which is authentically American,” and saw the conflicts in Europe as the crucible for refining the image of the United States abroad:

And as we come now to the great test, it may yet turn out that in all our trials and tribulations of spirit during the first part to this century we as a people have been painfully apprehending the meaning of our time and now in this moment of testing there may come clear at last the vision which will guides us to the authentic creation of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century- our Century.<sup>29</sup>

With characteristically bombastic prose, Luce chastised the political leadership of the United States, a nation “conceived in adventure and dedicated to the progress of man,” for what he saw as a lack of American leadership in world affairs after the First World War.<sup>30</sup> Worse still, Luce declared, was that the lack of American global leadership was a conscious decision not “to rise to the opportunities of leadership in the world,” and to instead acquiesce to European hegemony in global politics and trade.<sup>31</sup> Luce believed that horrific as it might be, the coming war also presented the United States with it the opportunity to fill the inevitable vacuum in power left by the decline of Europe. “Like most great creative opportunities,” Luce wrote, “it is an opportunity

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<sup>28</sup> Mary Nolan, “Rethinking Transatlantic Relations in the First Cold War Decades,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, Publications of the German Historical Institute, 54, no. 10 (2014): 22.

<sup>29</sup> Henry R. Luce, “The American Century,” *Life Magazine*, February 17, 1941, 64.

<sup>30</sup> Luce, 63.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

enveloped in stupendous difficulties and dangers. If we don't want it, if we refuse to take it, the responsibility of refusal is also ours, and ours alone."<sup>32</sup>

By the end of the Second World War it was undeniable to even the most hardened isolationist that the position of the United States relative to the rest of the world had been radically altered, and American efforts at self-presentation abroad were no longer a luxury, but a necessity, particularly in occupied Germany where fears ran high of recidivist Nazism and the omnipresent challenge posed by the existence of the East German state. Problematizing the issue was that when State Department and Occupation officials reviewed previous American attempts at public diplomacy, they found the result very mixed at best.

The *Amerikahäuser* did not represent the first American attempts at presenting the “aims and policies of the United States government” to Germany.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it is worth noting that since the American Revolution, Germany and German-speaking peoples have been central to debates over how the United States should present itself to the world. During the American Revolution, Hessian mercenaries, essential to British military efforts in North America, found themselves the targets of not just bullets and bayonets; they also faced appeals from fellow German-speakers to surrender and join the Americans, where they could make new lives for themselves after the Revolution.<sup>34</sup> During the American Civil War, the Philadelphia Union Society published a tract written in German, *Lincoln or McClellan, an Appeal to the Germans (ein Appell an die Deutschen)*, in which support for the Democratic Party was likened to self-bondage: “If you would have masters set up over you, on this principle, vote for McClellan. Would you retain

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> “Executive Orders Harry S. Truman 1945-1953,” 2014, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/executiveorders/index.php?pid=785&st=&st1=>.

<sup>34</sup> Lyman H. Butterfield, “Psychological Warfare in 1776: The Jefferson-Franklin Plan to Cause Hessian Desertions,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 94, no. 3 (June 20, 1950): 233–41.

your equal rights as the citizens of a free country, vote for Lincoln, who has been an honest working man like yourselves.”<sup>35</sup> Of course, in the twentieth century it was war with Germany that forced the United States to try to come up with a coherent plan for how it presented itself to the larger world. The First World War raised the question of American national self-presentation; the Second World War demanded an answer.

Though still separated from Europe and Asia by two oceans, by the beginning of the twentieth century the United States was no longer on the periphery of global affairs. Despite the economic depression of 1893, American business expanded into global markets, and aided by a lopsided victory in the Spanish-American war, the U.S. was an emerging colonial power. While neither their economic or cultural equal, the United States was seen by the European powers as a legitimate player on the world stage with sharply defined spheres of influence.<sup>36</sup> The mood of the United States before the First World War reflected a growing sense of American exceptionalism, marked by the “belief that other nations could and should replicate America’s own developmental experience,” and the support for free enterprise.<sup>37</sup>

Two particular cultural events give an indication of the tenor of the times in the United States. *The Influence of Sea Power on History* cited examples from antiquity to Trafalgar in an attempt to push the United States into global leadership on the back of a large navy.<sup>38</sup> Three years later, in a speech before the American Historical Association, Frederick Jackson Turner

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<sup>35</sup> Frank Freidel, “The Loyal Publication Society: A Pro-Union Propaganda Society,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 26, no. 3 (December 1939): 373.

<sup>36</sup> Nolan, “Rethinking Transatlantic Relations in the First Cold War Decades,” 20.

<sup>37</sup> Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream : American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (Hill and Wang, 1982), 7; Frederick Jackson Turner, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner : The Significance of the Frontier in American History, and Other Essays*, ed. John Faragher (New York: H. Holt, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> Alfred Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 2003).

spoke on *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, in which he declared the American drive for geographic and economic expansion as nothing less than the “manifest destiny” of the nation. Despite this growing belief by many in the United States that their political institutions were both exemplary and exportable, neither the U.S. government had plans, informal or formal, regarding how it presented itself to the world, nor was there much of a call for them on the part of the American public.

German actions in the First World War forced the United States, in spite of itself, to address the task of presenting itself to the world. The “Committee on Public Information,” a public/private partnership under the energetic leadership of George Creel, had the mission of selling American involvement in the First World War to both domestic, as well as foreign audiences.

A firm believer not just in the rightness of U.S. entry into the war, but the rightness of the American institutions and culture in general, Creel had the zeal of a missionary and framed his work in explicitly religious terms. Prone to grandiosity, Creel had no doubt about the importance of his task and saw the creation of the CPI as a “splendid opportunity to preach the history, aims, and ideals of America,” and saw the Great War as nothing less than a “fight for the mind of mankind.”<sup>39</sup> President Wilson, squeamish over the domestic use of propaganda, was assured by Creel that the work he envisioned would not be propaganda, “as the Germans defined it, but propaganda in the true sense of the word, meaning the 'propagation of faith.’”<sup>40</sup>

Presumably, Creel meant faith in U.S. motives and war aims, and in the civic religion of

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<sup>39</sup> George Creel, *How We Advertised America; the First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information That Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe* (New York,: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 349; Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 2009, 9.

<sup>40</sup> George Creel, *Rebel at Large; Recollections of Fifty Crowded Years*. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1947),148.

“Americanism.” This mixture of Babbitry and religiosity was neatly summed up in the title of his wartime recollections: *How We Advertised America: the First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information That Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe*. The CPI employed print, radio, and film to generate support for the war to a public that still cherished the idea of the United States as culturally and economically unattached to the rest of the world.

Creel and his office attempted to reach every American, through every means possible, focusing on “the importance of public opinion in building domestic unity, on the multiplicity of information channels, on capitalizing upon American pluralism, and on the possibilities for using ‘truth’ as a weapon against enemies that told only ‘lies.’”<sup>41</sup> For the members of the CPI, propaganda equaled lies. As did the staff of the *Amerikahäuser* who came after them, CPI personnel considered themselves to be in the business of providing information, not engaging in propaganda; in both cases, the CPI and the *Amerikahäuser* drew the line between “information” and “propaganda” so thinly as to be invisible.

Responsible for creating a coordinated propaganda campaign using every available means, including print, radio, and film, the CPI had a long reach and a heavy hand. Indeed, the hand of the CPI was so heavy, and the reach so long, memories of the CPI fueled domestic suspicion of U.S. public diplomacy efforts for decades.<sup>42</sup> Creel and his committee had what most today would consider a shocking amount of latitude in carrying out the mission of generating support for American involvement in the First World War and had access to every means of communication. The CPI had the full backing of all three branches of government, and

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<sup>41</sup> Hart, *Empire of Ideas*, 76.

<sup>42</sup> Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream : Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 6.

insinuated itself into international business as well, controlling the distribution of American films overseas. However, the CPI was interested not just in distributing films, but their content as well, going so far as to prosecute film producer Robert Goldstein under the Espionage Act for his patently anti-British picture, *The Spirit of '76*.<sup>43</sup> The film, which featured British soldiers committing acts of sexual violence and theft, was deemed as detrimental to the war effort. For his efforts though, Goldstein received a sentence of ten years, though he served only one.<sup>44</sup> The heavy-handedness of the CPI was recalled in the following decades, with many in Congress leery of funding public diplomacy through Information Centers and broadcasting. Though given little of the latitude of the CPI, the overarching message put out by Occupation officials after the Second World War was strikingly similar to the one used by officials during the First World War: The United States reluctantly entered the war in order to create a better, more democratic world. There was one huge difference between the two examples, though: after the Second World War, the United States remained in Europe.

Thanks mainly to the actions of the CPI, by the end of the war American attitudes were hardening against the use of propaganda, regardless of the target audience. The end of the war gave the isolationist wings of both parties in Congress the opening they were looking for, cutting funding for the CPI altogether in 1919. Alleging that the U.S. was duped into entering the war by British and French atrocity propaganda designed to seduce naïve Americans into supporting a war that was beneficial only to Europeans, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, one of the leaders of the isolationist wing in Congress, railed against “the poison gas of propaganda” as an impediment in

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<sup>43</sup> G.P. Harleman, “Spirit of '76 Confiscated by Government,” *Moving Picture World*, December 22, 1917.

<sup>44</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 7–8.

determining the proper role of the U.S. in world events.<sup>45</sup> The Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry, commonly referred to as the Nye Committee, followed this line, arguing that bankers and munitions manufacturers, the “merchants of death,” led the United States into World War One in search of profits.<sup>46</sup> Congress wanted it both ways after the war, with political sentiment in the interwar period vacillating between “economic engagement via loans, exports and investments,” and attempts to distance itself “from individual countries and new international institutions, the League of Nations above all.”<sup>47</sup> The isolationists had their day, rejecting membership in the League of Nations and securing the passage of the various Neutrality Acts of the 1930s.<sup>48</sup> However, in rejecting what Senator Lodge described as the “mongrel banner” of the League of Nations, the Senate also rejected the opportunity to present a coordinated picture of the United States to the world.<sup>49</sup>

Again Germany, this time under National Socialism, forced the United States to engage with the larger world, and use culture as formal tool of diplomacy. It was the German designs in Latin America that in 1938 led to the creation of the Division of Cultural Relations within the State Department. By 1941, it had morphed into to the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs.<sup>50</sup> Led by Nelson Rockefeller at the personal request of the President, Inter-American Affairs supported cultural interaction through touring art exhibitions and musical

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<sup>45</sup> F. H. Hodder, “Propaganda as a Source of American History,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 1922, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Hart, *Empire of Ideas*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Nolan, “Rethinking Transatlantic Relations in the First Cold War Decades,” 21.

<sup>48</sup> James W. Garner, “Recent American Neutrality Legislation,” *International Affairs* 16, no. 6 (November 1, 1937): 853–69.

<sup>49</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge, *Speech, Treaty of Peace with Germany : Speech of Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts in the Senate of the United States, Tuesday, August 12, 1919*. (Washington : U.S. G.P.O., 1919).

<sup>50</sup> Frank A. Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas : U.S. Foreign Policy and Cultural Relations, 1938-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 18–19; Hart, *Empire of Ideas*, 15–41.

performances in Latin America and South America. It also launched a Spanish- language newspaper, *En Guardia*, and shortwave radio broadcasts to Latin America.<sup>51</sup> Rockefeller took his job of maintaining U.S. hegemony in Latin America seriously, declaring, “regardless of whether the outcome of the war is a German or Allied victory, the United States must protect its international position... it must take economic measures at once to secure economic prosperity in Central and South America.”<sup>52</sup> Congress allowed President Roosevelt to conduct much more extensive bilateral diplomacy in Latin America than he was ever allowed to with European nations; in the case of German diplomatic moves in South America, proximity and the Monroe Doctrine superseded Congressional reticence for American involvement in the affairs of other nations. Nazism in Europe was one thing, but Nazi overtures to Buenos Aires was completely unacceptable to both Congress and the White House.<sup>53</sup> This parochial vision would, out of necessity, be broadened, but not until after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

The Second World War necessitated new approaches to American public diplomacy. Unfortunately for the Americans, the United States had little experience with public diplomacy, and furthermore the experience it had gained through the Committee on Public Information was at the expense of public support. A realization had set in that both the war and what would come after it required “a new conception of diplomacy,” one not so “exclusively preoccupied with the

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<sup>51</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 12; Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 1; See also Volker Rolf Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe : Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2001.); Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas : The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2013); Yale Richmond, *Practicing Public Diplomacy : A Cold War Odyssey*, Explorations in Culture and International History Series: V. 5 (New York : Berghahn Books, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> *History of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1947), 279–280.

<sup>53</sup> Hart, *Empire of Ideas*, 20.

legal and commercial problems of its traditional field of action but is fully alive to... the cultural problems of peoples living in dangerous and difficult times.”<sup>54</sup> The war catapulted the United States into global preeminence, and the need to explain itself before the world had never been greater.

In issuing Executive Order 9312, President Roosevelt created the Office of Wartime Information in order to “plan, develop, and execute all phases of the Federal program of radio, press, publication, and related foreign propaganda activities involving the dissemination of information.”<sup>55</sup> Led by Rhodes scholar and Peabody Award-winning journalist Elmer Davis, the OWI had a wide brief. It published books and magazines for occupied areas, and produced thousands of short films on topics that ranged from American agricultural practices, to the popular *Autobiography of a Jeep*.<sup>56</sup> The growth of the OWI was proportionate to U.S. involvement in the war; so much so that by the end of the conflict, the OWI had become a global media operation engaged in every aspect of film, radio, and print production and distribution. Though other agencies such as the Office of Strategic Services also dealt with propaganda and public affairs during the war, it was the experience garnered by Office of Wartime Information personnel that was put to work in Occupied Germany through the *Amerikahäuser*.<sup>57</sup> Many of

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<sup>54</sup> Nelson Rockefeller, “Report to the President,” n.d., RG 229.2, General Records of the Office of Inter-American Affairs and its Predecessors, Box 455, Entry 1, National Archives 2.

<sup>55</sup> Franklin Roosevelt, “Executive Order 9312 on the Office of War Information,” March 9, 1943, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16372>.

<sup>56</sup> Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black, “What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945,” *Journal of American History* 64, no. 1 (June 1977): 87–105; Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 2009, 16.

<sup>57</sup> United States Congress House Committee on Appropriations, *National War Agencies Appropriation Bill for 1946: Hearings Before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, Seventy-Ninth Congress, First Session, on the National War Agencies Appropriation Bill for 1946. Alien Property Custodian, Office of; Censorship, Office of; Contract Settlement, Office of; Defense Transportation, Office of; Economic Stabilization, Office of; Fair Employment Practices, Committee on; Inter-American*

those who planned and lead the *Häuser* during the Occupation period learned their craft while serving in the OWI, their expertise growing as the Allies moved across Europe. Through trial and error, the Americans established practices in wartime that carried over into the creation of the *Amerikahäuser*, particularly in the establishment of reference libraries and reading rooms.

These libraries were open to neither Army personnel, nor the local civilian population. Rather, they were mainly filled with reference books for the use of Allied journalists working in Occupied areas.<sup>58</sup> Testifying before a Congressional committee in 1945, OWI Director Edward Barrett elaborated on a OWI practice that carried over to the *Amerikahäuser* and remained in place for the next fifty years: while often employing German nationals, the *Amerikahäuser* would almost always be led by Americans. Creating and managing the narrative was crucial; Barrett was explicit in his desire for U.S. staff to run these libraries and reading rooms because in his view, “the American story must be told by Americans... in our own terms if we are to win the support America needs in this critical period.”<sup>59</sup> The sentiment was clear: only Americans could be trusted to correctly interpret the American experience.

Though late to the idea of culture as a tool of foreign relations and diplomacy, the Americans more than made up for lost time. By the end of the war the United States had amassed, less by design than out of necessity, a “mighty global apparatus of advocacy and

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*Affairs, Office of; Petroleum Administrator for War; Retraining and Reemployment Administration; Scientific Research and Development, Office of; Selective Service System; Smaller War Plants Corporation; Strategic Services, Office of; Surplus Property Board; War Information, Office of; War Mobilization and Reconversion, Office of; War Labor Board; War Production Board; War Relocation Authority; War Shipping Administration* (U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1945), 920.

<sup>58</sup> Appropriations, 1034.

<sup>59</sup> Appropriations, 964.

cultural projection” without parallel.<sup>60</sup> However, many in the United States and Europe saw that apparatus, in the guises of Radio Free Europe and the *Amerikahäuser*, as Trojan Horses. The classical music recitals, jazz clubs, libraries, and reading rooms in the *Amerikahäuser* hid a move for U.S. cultural and economic hegemony in postwar Europe.

Wishing, in the words of William F. Buckley, “to stand athwart History, yelling stop!” the increasingly isolated isolationist wing of Congress fought a rearguard action against expanded American commitment to Europe after the war.<sup>61</sup> They feared the reconstruction of German industry, for they saw it as the key to German aggression, and they had grave concerns over the commitment of the United States to international organizations requiring binding obligations, such as the United Nations. To Germans who saw themselves as guardians of culture and homeland, the *Häuser* were designed to seduce susceptible Germans with the false promises of American “civilization (*zivilisation*)” as opposed to the contribution of German culture (*Kultur*) to the larger world.

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<sup>60</sup> Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 2009, 20; Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 1–3.

<sup>61</sup> William F. Buckley, “Our Mission Statement,” *National Review*, November 19, 1955.

## CHAPTER 2

### *KULTUR, CULTURE, AND THE INFORMATION CENTERS*

The Americans overseeing the Information Centers were there to assist in the restoration of a “(German) intellectual, spiritual, and cultural life,” that going forward “would be based on the principles of freedom, social justice, brotherhood, and individual and group responsibility” to the German people.<sup>62</sup> Germans who came of age at the beginning of the twentieth century faced some of the same choices regarding politics in 1945 as they had in 1918, in that the end of the Second World War forced members of the educated German bourgeoisie to once again formally come to terms with their relationship to politics, democracy, and mass culture (*Massenkultur*). In the postwar disorder of occupied Germany, some of the defeated took refuge in a mythopoetic culture they believed offered something superior to the utility of politics. Conditioned by upbringing and education to see political participation with a skeptical eye, for them the inevitable compromises, disappointments, and appeals for popular support that define democratic politics epitomized the pitfalls of “civilization” after 1945, just as they had after 1918. The attitude of German elites toward democratic reform was of vital importance to American occupation authorities, who took advantage of the opportunity that cultural offerings afforded them to make sustained contact with influential Germans.

An emergent youth culture was one of many signifiers of the societal changes underway in East and West German cities after the war, and clothing choices among the young reflected the growing influence of American popular culture in postwar German society. Governments and individuals on both sides of the German ideological divide were forced to address the growing

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<sup>62</sup> Education and Cultural Relations Division Office of Public Affairs, *A Guide to Education and Cultural Relations* (Bad Nauheim, 1950), 5.

importance of satisfying the consumer cravings of young people, whose adoption of elements of American popular culture such as Rock and Roll and the myths of the American West were seen as challenges to existing cultural practices. In 1950, the capitol city of Bavaria was the scene of one such challenge. “It is no unusual thing in Munich,” an observer of German society wrote with dismay, “to see ten-year old boys with toy pistols and sombreros, playing in the street under posters advertising (American) motion pictures of gangsters and degenerates.”<sup>63</sup> The author saw no connection between the playacting of the children and the widespread German fascination with the American West (or at least the idea of it), which predated the Occupation by many decades.<sup>64</sup> In the eyes of the author, the children, heirs to the cultural patrimony of Goethe and Schiller, had been degraded by “primitive, vulgar, trashy” American popular culture.<sup>65</sup> Tonally, it certainly had much in common with those German cultural commentators who more often than not saw the products of American popular culture as societal threats, such as the movie reviewer who asserted *The Blackboard Jungle*, an American film whose plot revolved around juvenile delinquency, was more than a cultural artifact, it was “an expression of American civilization (*Zivilisation*).”<sup>66</sup> To these authors and those who shared their concerns, German culture was something to be protected from the outside world, unless those outside cultural actors reinforced notions of German cultural superiority.

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, “German Youth and the U.S.: Knowledge of American Culture and Institutions, Almost Totally Lacking in Germany Today, Can Be as Important in the Cold War as Guns and a Lot Cheaper to Export,” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, 1951, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 16; H. Glenn Penny, *Kindred by Choice: Germans and American Indians since 1800* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>65</sup> Volker R. Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone Between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), xvii.

<sup>66</sup> “Amerikanische Schultragödie,” *Wirtschaftszeitung*, November 5, 1955.

However, the alarm over presumably American-influenced sombrero wear among Munich children was sounded by an American historian: Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker, the Edwards Professor of American History at Princeton University, scholar of the colonial American South, and by the time his letter from Germany was published, a past President of the American Historical Association. Trained in German ways of scholarship, and enamored of Germanic ideas surrounding the development of the inner self (*Bildung*), Wertebaker had been a visiting professor at the University of Göttingen before the war. In 1931, at the very institution where the Grimm brothers compiled the first German dictionary, and where both Metternich and von Humboldt had studied law, Wertebaker observed first-hand the end of the Weimar Republic and the establishment of the National Socialist regime.

The occasion of Professor Wertebaker returning to Germany after the war was a U.S. sponsored two-week conference on how to “introduce the study of American civilization into the schools and how best to promote it in the universities.”<sup>67</sup> He deplored the fact that many Germans, particularly German youth, received their earliest impressions of the United States from movies such as *The Wild Ones*, where Marlon Brando flouted authority and led a motorcycle gang, or from the early Rock and Roll percolating through German youth culture, marked by a “wild rhythm” that according to the West German newspaper *Bravo*, could turn an otherwise normal German youth into a “white negro” (*Weißer Neger*); according to the author, cases of spontaneous negritude had already happened in England.<sup>68</sup> Distressed by the how the United States was perceived in the German popular imagination, and concerned that popular film was filling in for missing American history lessons among young Germans, Wertebaker wanted

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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker, “German Youth and the U.S.,” 10.

<sup>68</sup> “Die ganze Welt rockt und rollt,” *Bravo*, September 30, 1956; Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, 89.

to challenge what he believed was a widespread German perception of the United States as "...a land of millionaires, or of organized crime, or of money chasers, or of demagogues."<sup>69</sup> While acknowledging the necessity of military forces, Wertebaker believed the political culture in the United States offered something the force of arms could not and wondered if "...an exchange of students, a visiting professor from Germany, a scholarship for the study of our civilization in a German university may be more potent for victory than a bomb or a cannon," declared Wertebaker.<sup>70</sup> Without knowing it, Professor Wertebaker became a champion of American "soft power," and epitomized the thinking behind the establishment of the Information Centers.

Professor Wertebaker is relevant to the story of the *Amerikahäuser* because his thinking typified that of many of the Americans helping to establish the network of Information Centers across American-occupied Germany. They, like Wertebaker, shared a deep appreciation of German culture, as well as a belief that exposure to the American historical experience could serve as a guide for Germans rebuilding their society. And as members of a larger transatlantic cultural community whose mission was to help bridge a transatlantic cultural divide, Americans in the Information Centers also shared a belief with Wertebaker that cultural means could be used to accomplish political ends; German culture was a vehicle by which Germans could transit the intellectual space between the anti-democratic past of their shared historical experience and their American-envisioned future predicated on mass democracy and economic reform.

This chapter examines how the Information Centers used culture, particularly musical culture, to establish connections with the influential Germans the Americans thought essential to their work: members of the professions, journalists, and politicians, whose pre-Occupation conduct was generally free of Nazi taint. The manipulation of vanity is at the heart of this

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker, "German Youth and the U.S.," 11.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

chapter; these influential Germans were, despite recent depredations against the rest of humanity, often firmly convinced of the superiority of German culture. But most of all, after years of Nazi cultural repression, many Germans were hungry for virtually any kind of artistic expression. The Americans knew this, and in interpreting German music and introducing the audiences at the same time to modern American works, Information Center programmers played to German cultural self-regard in an attempt to make a connection. In highlighting German contributions to the arts, the Americans gave the Germans what they wanted, an affirmation of the German cultural tradition and demonstrative appreciation for German cultural contributions throughout history. But they also made an argument for the validity of American musicianship, and in sponsoring Jazz clubs in the *Amerikahäuser*, the American government formally recognized an indigenous American art form that was rooted in the African-American tradition, albeit in a manner that somewhat decontextualized the music from the ethnic culture it came from.

This chapter necessarily examines specifically German conceptions of “culture” (*Kultur*), the antithetical state of “civilization” (*Zivilisation*), and the importance both held to bourgeois Germans and the *Amerika Haus* staff attempting to influence German opinion. While most German intellectuals shared a respect, if not reverence for the constituents of *Kultur*, not all Americans working on cultural issues in the early years of the Occupation knew what the elastic term *Kultur* meant to the Germans, or the esteem in which it was held by educated Germans. When we look at the American emphasis on the creation of a “healthy” German culture and the strong response by the German public to U.S. cultural efforts on display at the *Amerikahäuser*, we find mutual agreement on the importance of culture to the rebuilding of German society. The fetish-like devotion with which many German intellectuals held to their culture was both reinforced and challenged by the *Amerikahäuser*, where German cultural needs were catered to

as part of an ongoing effort to cultivate elite acceptance of Occupation policies. American support for the arts via the Information Centers was never an expression of *l'art pour l'art*; the tremendous work on the part of the Americans to reach Germans through their own culture was done, as always, to aid “Germany’s integration into the family of nations.”<sup>71</sup>

Before we look at how the Americans used German culture as a lever to move elite opinion, we must first understand the importance of *Kultur* in the minds of educated Germans. Members of a societal elite based on education rather than wealth, many bourgeois Germans saw their history, from the abortive 1848 revolution to the fall of Weimar and the rise of Nazism, as validation of their belief that politics and culture were mutually exclusive terms.<sup>72</sup> Taking their cues from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, particularly his *Twilight of the Idols*, advocates for German culture saw it as a transcendent, quasi-spiritual force that united Germans in ways politics never could. Furthermore, they believed engaging in politics, particularly those which appealed to the mass of the citizenry, like democracy, as antithetical to cultural life, and as such was the chief signifier of the vulgar temporal realm of the mundane, *Zivilisation* (civilization). The Americans wanted a passionate support for democracy from the Germans under Occupation, and the *Amerikahäuser* were a primary means by which to instill that passion.

American notions of mass democracy and economic consumption put them squarely at odds with the traditions of *Kultur*, which demanded from adherents an almost monastic retreat from public affairs and displays of wealth. More than anything, the Americans wanted the influential Germans coming through the doors of the Information Centers to be engaged in the political, as well as the cultural, reconstruction of postwar Germany, as opposed to the lukewarm

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<sup>71</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 9.

<sup>72</sup> Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 5.

response many of them gave to the Weimar Republic. Typical of that response was the eminent German historian Friedrich Meinecke, who before fleeing Germany and finding refuge in the United States, saw himself "...at best, a monarchist at heart," while "in regards to the future, a republican of reason (*Vernunftrepublikaner*)."<sup>73</sup> The author of an examination of the rise of Hitler, *The German Catastrophe*, came around to the virtues of democracy, declaring that "cosmopolitanism (*Kultur*) and the modern idea of the national state were not originally rigid contrasts," but existed "for mutual enrichment," an example of "polar and dialectical tension and connection with one another."<sup>74</sup>

What the Americans needed were more intellectuals to follow the lead of Meinecke and take the leap of faith into the modern postwar German state. Rather than harboring feelings of cultural insecurity, the Americans in the Information Centers engaged influential members of German society in a mutually understood language, that of the arts, and specifically, German contributions to a shared transatlantic culture. By exploring the sometimes-tortured relationship between culture and politics in German society before the Occupation, we gain a better understanding of both the cultural milieu the Americans found themselves in during the first years of Occupation, and a greater appreciation of the challenges they faced in their attempts to engage the "mandarins" of German *Kultur*.

The years encompassing the Great Depression and the Second World War were difficult for the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. Lower attendance, heavy real estate taxes, and the cumulative effects of wartime rationing of everything from electrical wire to silk led to serious doubts about the commercial viability of the opera company. A shareholder revolt in 1940 forced

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<sup>73</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, *Werke: Politische Schriften und Reden* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1957), 281.

<sup>74</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections*, trans. Sidney Fay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 118.

the sale of the original opera house at 39th and Broadway, with only a frantic public fundraising effort and the corporate largesse of the Texas Company (otherwise known as Texaco, whose public image was tarnished from the extensive business it had done with pre-war Germany), keeping the lights on. As the most widely-recognized American opera company, the financial distress of the Metropolitan Opera had larger implications for how the cultural pretensions of the United States were perceived abroad, with many culturally-sensitive Europeans (as well as to many Americans) taking the lack of support for a leading American artistic institution as something of a referendum on the state of American culture. According to one professed devotee of European high culture, the difficulties of the Metropolitan Opera were hardly surprising, for, according to Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, it was bound to happen “in a country that only has a single opera.” He went on in this vein, writing in his diary:

The American continent is hardly in a position to bring forth anything of its own in the cultural realm. It is dependent upon (cultural) imports from Europe, and since the Americans are so crazy about money they naturally like to take possession of the results of our creative and inventive labors as far as possible without paying for them.<sup>75</sup>

That the Propaganda Minister saw himself as a defender of art, music, and literature is instructive, for the comments in his diary reveal attitudes and beliefs regarding culture held by many educated Germans of his age, not just Party elites. In believing in the superiority of European culture and the parallel lack of culture in the United States, Goebbels was not that different than many of countrymen.

Another example, from a more palatable source, the author Thomas Mann, who had settled in California after his flight from Nazi Germany. Mann, the author of *Buddenbrooks* and *The Magic Mountain* and recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, had enormous cultural

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<sup>75</sup> Joseph Goebbels, *The Goebbels Diaries, 1942-1943*, ed. Louis Lochner (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 181.

weight in Germany, which consequently made him quite a propaganda catch for the Americans. In Pacific Palisades, California, in a home he had custom-built, Mann presided over the German exile community in Hollywood.<sup>76</sup> Regardless of his new surroundings, the pull of German *Kultur* still held him in thrall. When asked to organize donations for the construction of an American bomber with the slightly insulting name *Loyalty*, he refused. "I do not want," he wrote in a letter to his onetime muse, Agnes Meyer, "after my death, that Germans who read my books- or don't read them- think of myself as chairman of a committee responsible for the destruction of German monuments of culture (*Denkmäler der Kultur*)."<sup>77</sup> Apparently the qualms Mann felt over the bomber were not caused by being associated with the air raids consuming the lives of countless Germans, but with the destruction of "monuments of culture." Perhaps most revealing is the realization that this privileging of monuments over people would have been seen as perfectly understandable by his peers back home in Germany, who, it is presumed, might have been on the receiving end of the Allied bombing campaigns.<sup>78</sup>

These two examples, though extreme, do reveal a common trait among many educated Germans: the oversized emphasis placed on matters of *Kultur*, to a degree many Americans serving in the Occupation saw as absurd. This emphasis on cultural matters meant the Americans in the Information Centers had to cater to a discriminating German audience, whose members, despite the events of the first half of the twentieth century, were frequently convinced of their own cultural superiority. For the Americans to make headway with the lasting reconstruction of German civil society after the war, they addressed these cultural attitudes by engaging the Germans on their own terms; this time, however, the field of battle in the war of ideas was the

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<sup>76</sup> Janet Flanner, "Goethe in Hollywood," *The New Yorker*, December 13, 1941.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Mann and Agnes Meyer, *Briefwechsel, 1937-1955*, ed. Hans Rudolf Vaget (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1992), 394.

<sup>78</sup> Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, 3.

performance spaces and exhibition areas of the Information Centers. That Goebbels saw the propaganda value in the financial distress of the Metropolitan Opera tells us something about the importance of cultural matters to the German state, even during wartime; in this case, the news of the Opera facing bankruptcy happened to reinforce existing prejudices against the cultural life of the United States, a happy accident from the point of view of the Reich Minister of Propaganda. After the downfall of Nazism, the importance of cultural matters did not diminish in the German public or private spheres; if anything, some who had a vested interest in cultural matters clung tightly to what they knew.

For something so important to so many people, *Kultur* is a very hard concept to define, particularly for the non-native German speaker. The elasticity of the idea of *Kultur* sometimes posed a challenge for those on the front lines of the battle for hearts and minds, for sometimes *Kultur* signified

... the sum-total of civilization, including its moral standards (as when the political parties promise to protect Christian-Western ‘*Kultur*’),” while “the next moment it means no more than an education (as when the work ‘*Kultur*’ appears on a poster advertising an illustrated lecture on Bulgaria.”<sup>79</sup>

The Americans appreciated the chameleon-like qualities of *Kultur*, correctly determining that

This diversity of meanings permits many groups to consider themselves the guardians of “*Kultur*.” Because of the noble connotations of the word, even the simplest activity, when described as “*Kultur*” becomes strangely sanctified in the popular mind. Today many hope to save “*Kultur*,” and many hope to be saved by it. For some, it is the last refuge in defeat and disaster.<sup>80</sup>

This is as close as the Office of the U.S. Military Government (OMGUS) could get to a working definition of *Kultur*, and it is, as the author points out in his report from the Research Branch of

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<sup>79</sup> David Monod, *Settling Scores: German Music, Denazification, and the Americans, 1945-1953* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 58.

<sup>80</sup> “Kultur and Politics” (Research Branch, OMGUS, July 25, 1947), RG 260, 4/18-3/1, Landesarchiv Berlin.

the Military Government, “dangerously imprecise.”<sup>81</sup> Problematizing the issue for the Americans in the Information Centers was the frequent association between *Kultur* and German nationalism, particularly political nationalism. Before the unification of Germany in 1871, historian Hugh Trevor-Roper argued, Germans were a people who shared a culture, they were, in his words, a *Kulturvolk*, who after their military success against France in 1870 transitioned into a people living in a culturally-unified state, a *Kulturstaat*.<sup>82</sup> As state and culture walked in lockstep, victory in the Franco-Prussian War was evidence not just of Prussian mastery of arms, the victors argued, but also a triumph of German *Kultur*; as a consequence of statehood, politics was to be “the guarantor of German culture,” while at the same time, “culture provided politics with added legitimacy” and supported the State.<sup>83</sup> A vivid example of this phenomenon came to light early in the First World War, when 93 prominent German academics and artists, self-styled “heralds of truth” (*Herolde der Wahrheit*) including the discoverer of the X-Ray, Wilhelm Roentgen, the pioneering physicist Max Planck, and the avant-garde theatrical impresario Max Reinhardt, published a manifesto entitled *To the Civilized World (An die Kulturwelt)*. When they declared “Were it not for German militarism, German civilization would long since have been extirpated,” they enlisted the legacies of Goethe, Beethoven, and Kant to serve in the trenches alongside the soldiers whose belt buckles were inscribed *Gott mit uns*, a carryover from the Prussian era.<sup>84</sup> Little had changed by 1945, where some intellectuals who stayed in through the rise and fall of

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<sup>81</sup> Cora Sol Goldstein, *Capturing the German Eye: American Visual Propaganda in Occupied Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), n. 46.

<sup>82</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, “Jacob Burckhardt,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 70 (1984): 370–73.

<sup>83</sup> Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, 18.

<sup>84</sup> Professors of Germany, “To the Civilized World,” *The North American Review* 210, no. 765 (1919): 285.

Nazism saw themselves as patriots who “did not abandon their sick mother Germany” in time of need.<sup>85</sup>

German sociologist Norbert Elias, like Trevor-Roper, located the origins of *Kultur* in the nineteenth century, before the unification of the German states, and saw it as a thoroughly middle-class construct.<sup>86</sup> The “learned middle class,” in his words, first attempted to create models of what a German was, “and thus to establish at least in the intellectual sphere a German unity,” which did not seem achievable after the failure of the 1848 revolution.<sup>87</sup> As “invented traditions,” ideas of culture and civilization, among other uses, fulfilled a desire among the middle-class for national identity when none was available. Language and music unified German intellectuals when there were no corresponding political institutions to draw their focus, as members of an imagined community of “cultural people,” (*Kulturvolk*) without a state.<sup>88</sup>

German ideas surrounding culture were also frequently woven into Protestant narratives, which favorably compared themselves against their Roman Catholic neighbors. This increasingly-educated middle class, growing in size from the rapid industrialization and minimum education standards, frequently framed the Catholic Church as opposition, sentiments abetted by the actions of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck who singled out Catholics in his “culture wars” unifying the new German state.<sup>89</sup> To members of the mostly Protestant educated middle class, the Roman Catholic Church, with a liturgy that was still in Latin, even in the land of

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<sup>85</sup> Thomas Mann, Frank Thiess, and Walter von Molo, *Ein Streitgespräch über die äußere und die innere Emigration* (Dortmund: Druckschriften-Vertriebsdienst, 1946), 3.

<sup>86</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, ed. Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom, and Stephen Mennell, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 5.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.; Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, 19; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>89</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 9.

Luther, and led by the ferociously anti-modern Pope Pius IX, whose *Syllabus of Errors* condemned such propositions as “The Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with, progress, liberalism and modern civilization,” a position which only reinforced existing German anti-Catholic cultural prejudices.<sup>90</sup>

Not all German elites were completely in thrall to their national past. Indeed, many prominent intellectuals saw German ideas of *Kultur* as familiar and comfortable traps, dead-end roads which they and their fellow Germans had been lured down before. Among those disturbed by the postwar use of culture as a substitute for politics were the returned German exiles, Theodor Adorno and Hannah Arendt, who had taken up teaching positions in West Germany. The two scholars shared similar experiences in their dealings with postwar Germans and reached similar conclusions about what they saw as the negative consequences of continuing the practice of *Kultur*-worship into postwar German society.

The two public intellectuals, though they disliked each other intensely, had one thing in common: their initial appreciation for the work ethic of their students was ultimately replaced by concern that German universities were on the verge of turning out, in the words of Arendt, “a whole class of frustrated and starving intellectuals.”<sup>91</sup> Their students felt no need to involve themselves in politics because they believed Germany had no political future. “The desire to become a world power has proven to be a false idol for us,” declared Friedrich Meinecke, who hardly spoke for the young but still managed to convey the aimlessness and sense of betrayal felt by those finding their place in a new Germany, echoing Nietzsche when he declared politics “an adventure which cuts in two directions leading to temptations in which culture is too much the

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<sup>90</sup> “Quanta Cura & The Syllabus of Errors,” accessed February 13, 2018, [http://archive.org/details/QuantaCuraTheSyllabusOfErrors\\_247](http://archive.org/details/QuantaCuraTheSyllabusOfErrors_247).

<sup>91</sup> Hannah Arendt, “The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany,” *Commentary*, 1950, 352.

loser.”<sup>92</sup> Both Adorno and Arendt had returned to Germany after the war to teach and to get an informal sense of postwar German sentiment, to mark the changes wrought by Nazism, war, defeat, and occupation.

Like many in their situation, both Adorno and Arendt were trying to make sense of the cataclysm that was Nazism. They tried to understand how it began and under what conditions it flourished. However, the two scholars were not completely fixated on the past, they were also concerned with the effect of the recent Nazi past on the German future. For his part, Adorno thought he “could do some good things to prevent a repetition of disaster.”<sup>93</sup> In the beginning, both had high hopes for their students which were replaced by something more ambivalent. Apparently, the work of their German students was exemplary, but Adorno and Arendt, who believed intellectuals had a public duty to weigh in on the issues of the day, were appalled at the lack of political interest on the part of their students. The only enthusiasm the students showed was for their studies, and the more esoteric, the better. Though clearly disgusted at the political apathy displayed by her peers who had remained behind in Germany, Arendt refused to ascribe this behavior to a German “national character,” an idea she rejected out of hand, and in her now-famous 1950 essay, *The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany*, she argued, provocatively, that the supposed German “national character” was not the issue; rather, it was the *lack* of it. Interestingly, she linked ideas of national character to militarism, but not in the way one might expect. “The real problem,” she said, “is not the German national character but rather the disintegration of that character, or at least the fact that this character does not play any role in German politics any more. It is as much a part of the past as German militarism and

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<sup>92</sup> Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*, 109.

<sup>93</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Auf die Frage: Warum sind Sie zurückgekehrt,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 20.2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), 395.

nationalism.”<sup>94</sup> Both the threat of a resurgence in militarism and the cultural baggage that came with claims of “national character” were apparently no longer an issue for Arendt, for they had been replaced by apathy and self-centeredness.

Similarly, Theodor Adorno was at first struck by the dedication of his philosophy students, going so far as to praise them and their efforts at rebuilding German culture in an essay, *The Resurrected Culture (Die auferstandene Kultur)* and was optimistic that he could help Germany rebuild. Adorno looked forward to teaching in German, the only language “he considered fully suitable for dialectical-speculative, anti-positivist thinking.”<sup>95</sup> Adorno was impressed with the work ethic of his students, and their “passionate participation regarding these (philosophical) questions and matters, a participation that has to make a teacher happy.”<sup>96</sup> However, in a letter to Thomas Mann, Adorno soon likened his students to German students before the wars of liberation; like them, these young German intellectuals after the Second World War were fated to be “poor in deeds and full of thoughts again,” as they had in 1800.<sup>97</sup> Neither Adorno nor Arendt thought this boded well for the future of democratic Germany, and neither scholar was particularly well received upon their return to Germany. Adorno, in particular, had to put up with a great deal of hostility from his colleagues at the University of Frankfurt.

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<sup>94</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Das ‘deutsche Problem’: Die Restauration des Alten Europa,” in *Zur Zeit. Politische Essays* (Berlin: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1986), 31.

<sup>95</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On the Question: ‘What Is German?’” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 212; Lars Rensmann, “Returning from Forced Exile: Some Observations on Theodor W. Adorno’s and Hannah Arendt’s Experience of Postwar Germany and Their Political Theories of Totalitarianism,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 49, no. 1 (2004): 179.

<sup>96</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Die Auferstandene Kultur,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 20.2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), 454.

<sup>97</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Thomas Mann, *Briefe und Briefwechsel: 1943-1955*, ed. Christoph GÖdde and Thomas Sprecher, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2002), 48.

However, not all German intellectuals agreed with this comingling of politics and culture and took their cue from Friedrich Nietzsche in seeing the *Reich* not as the defender of culture, but rather as an impediment. Culture had held together German-speaking peoples in an imagined community before 1870, but Nietzsche and others saw the spiritual power of the emergent state as something approaching a zero-sum game, and it was crucial where that energy was spent:

If you spend yourself on power, on grandiose politics, on economics, world trade, parliaments, military interests- if you give yourself away in this direction the quantity of understanding, seriousness, will and self-overcoming that you are, then this quantity isn't available in the other direction."<sup>98</sup>

"Politics swallows up all seriousness about really spiritual things," Nietzsche wrote in *Twilight of the Idols*. "*Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles*: I'm afraid that was the end of German philosophy," he added, neatly summarizing the position he and his adherents took toward the partnership of State and *Kultur*.<sup>99</sup> For Nietzsche, Burckhardt, and other like-minded German intellectuals in this camp, culture was not apolitical, it was explicitly anti-political. That these words were written regarding events set into motion by the Franco-Prussian War was irrelevant to those German intellectuals picking up the pieces of their cultural life after the Second World War. His words were relevant to their own historical experience, for those who were inclined to agree with Nietzsche took his words in *Twilight of the Idols* to heart; the fall of Weimar and the rise of National Socialism had shown them the virtues of retreat from the public sphere and "inner emigration."

However, where Adorno, Arendt, Nietzsche, and others saw the postwar political apathy and embrace of "culture" and intellectual pursuits as an illusionary retreat from politics, others saw the measured embrace of German culture as a way forward. As was the case with those

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<sup>98</sup> Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, 20; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Richard Polt (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 45–46.

<sup>99</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 43.

running the Information Centers, public intellectuals such as the historian Friedrich Meinecke saw the reconstruction of German culture through institutions such as the *Amerikahäuser* as affirming the best in the German liberal cultural and political traditions, and as an inoculation against both Soviet enticements and a resurgence of right-wing authoritarianism. Americans such as Professor Wertebaker and other advocates of “soft power” believed culture could serve as the transatlantic bridge between Germany and the United States. As a means by which Germans could interpret “American civilization” for their own edification and benefit, Wertebaker believed the displays, exhibits, and musical performances in the *Amerikahäuser* were ways by which Germans, particularly German intellectuals, could see that the American relationship to Germany was “not merely a matter of guns and planes and divisions,” but that it was also “a matter of ideals, of mutual understanding, of friendship” as well.<sup>100</sup> This appeal to international friendship and mutual appreciation through the exchange of ideas, regardless of borders, was a message that echoed Goethe and the Weimar classicism that Wertebaker and others knew held such cultural weight among educated Germans. Americans in the State Department hoped the combination of an appeal to these high-minded ideals, plus incorporation of the “best in foreign music and literature” would effect change in German elites.<sup>101</sup> The *Amerikahäuser* were supposed to serve as “islands of democratic ferment” within the larger German cultural sphere.<sup>102</sup>

To those steeped in the German intellectual tradition of the past century, the opposite state of *Kultur* was “*Zivilisation*” (civilization). To the casual observer the distinction seems minute and the two states even complimentary or symbiotic, but to a devotee the distance between the two conditions was so vast as to render them antithetical. Drawing from an

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<sup>100</sup> Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker, “German Youth and the U.S.,” 12.

<sup>101</sup> Monod, *Settling Scores*, 46.

<sup>102</sup> Alonzo Grace, “Islands of Democratic Ferment in Germany,” *The American Scholar* 19, no. 2 (1950): 341–52.

intellectual tradition firmly anchored in the past, bourgeois Germans made an acute distinction between *Kultur* and what they considered to be the lesser, pedestrian realm of civilization. But unlike culture, the state of *Zivilisation* was more easily defined. German sociologist Norbert Elias defined it as the world of “political, economic and social facts,” as opposed to the more rarefied realm of the spirit.<sup>103</sup>

While the tangible products of “civilization” such as the products of applied science were impressive, many German elites saw these accomplishments as inherently inferior to the cultural products of such luminaries as Goethe and Wagner, because the products of their art were expressions of the soul and, it was argued, spoke to eternal truths. To a devotee of *Kultur*, the ingenuity behind the internal combustion engine of Karl Benz, the x-rays of Roentgen, or the aniline dyes which propelled the German economy were impressive achievements, but ultimately the product of the factory reflected neither a higher truth, nor anything about those who created it.

In their efforts to secure the allegiance of influential Germans, the Information Centers found themselves serving two masters: those who associated *Kultur* with German nationalism, and those who saw politics as the antithesis of culture. Both positions were problematic for the Americans. On the one hand, they wanted to keep a tight lid on unapproved expressions of German nationalism, forbidding parades, flag displays, and other overt signs of patriotism without prior approval from Occupation authorities.<sup>104</sup> Between fears of Nazi recidivism and communist infiltration, the Americans were extremely wary of unapproved political expression.

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<sup>103</sup> Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 5.

<sup>104</sup> “JCS 1067,” n.d., <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/ga3-450426.pdf>.

They wanted Germans to take pride in their country, but, as one official put it, “within a permitted context.”<sup>105</sup>

On the other hand, the Americans wanted to encourage political participation in the new German state, which meant convincing those intellectuals who wanted nothing to do with politics. Information Center officials could to some extent empathize with their German patrons who took shelter in their shared culture. It was explained in the pages of *Information Control Review*, published for those officials serving in the Information Control Division of Military Government, that “The almost religious emphasis on *Kultur* fulfills several important functions for Germans,” among them:

Dwelling on the past glory of German culture restores some measure of self-respect and national pride, within a permitted context, and the hope of rebuilding Germany's prestige in the eyes of the world. It supplies an avenue of escape from the harsh economic and political realities of present-day German life. In effect, it supplies a symbol, something Germans can believe in and cling to in the midst of the general spiritual and intellectual wreckage.<sup>106</sup>

For many German intellectuals, politics after the Second World War, as it did in 1918, represented national failure and humiliation, “while culture represented the sphere of their freedom and their pride.”<sup>107</sup> Those responsible for cultural programming in an *Amerika Haus* took this deep-seated attachment of German elites to their culture into account when making programming decisions. However, Information Center officials faced another challenge beyond those posed by skeptical German intellectuals and the hardships of providing services in bombed-out cities. The Americans faced the delicate task of recognizing and supporting German

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<sup>105</sup> “Culture and Politics,” *Information Control Review*, no. 33 (1946): 6.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Michael Schröter, trans. Eric Dunning and Stephen Mennell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 126–27.

cultural and intellectual traditions and achievements while at the same time pointing out that Americans could actually make a contribution to European culture.

A trait shown by many of those Germans who worshipped at the temple of German *Kultur* was the belief that the United States was a cultural wasteland, and as a consequence had with very little to offer the world of lasting value. Many Germans looked at American cultural production the same way Americans of the period looked at Japanese industrial production, as ultimately derivative of other, more “advanced” societies, and dependent upon the contributions of others. Americans, it was argued, were first-rate copyists who confused economic consumption with culture, and regarded “technological achievements as cultural accomplishments.”<sup>108</sup> Some Germans admired the sense of dynamism they encountered in their visits to the United States, such as the politician Walter Rathenau when he enthused, “Away with Athens on the Spree,” referring to Berlin, “now we have Chicago on the Spree.”<sup>109</sup> This was not necessarily a compliment; Berlin was often looked down on, even by fellow Germans, as a parvenu city, whose energy, as was the case with America, masked a superficiality at the heart of both. “Berlin,” according to one cultural critic, was “the capitol of German non-culture (*die Hauptstadt der deutschen Nicht-Kultur*).”<sup>110</sup> The American author and humorist Mark Twain referred to Berlin as “the Chicago of Europe,” a decidedly mixed compliment.<sup>111</sup> The staff of the Information Centers faced a daunting challenge in reversing this attitude and emphasized to the

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<sup>108</sup> Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 112; Paul Rohrbach, *Amerika Und Wir. Reisebetrachtungen* (Berlin: Buchenau & Reichert Verlag, 1926), 175.

<sup>109</sup> Claire Colomb, *Staging the New Berlin: Place Marketing and the Politics of Urban Reinvention Post-1989* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 41.

<sup>110</sup> Karl Scheffler, *Berlin- Ein Stadtschicksal* (Berlin: E. Reiss Verlag, 1910), 121; Jürgen Schutte and Peter Sprengel, eds., *Die Berliner Moderne, 1885-1914* (Stuttgart: P. Reclam Verlag, 1987), 101; Nolan, *Visions of Modernity*, 113.

<sup>111</sup> Mark Twain, *The Chicago of Europe, and Other Tales of Foreign Travel* (New York: Union Square Publishing, 2009).

*Amerika Haus* patrons that the United States excelled not just at the mass production of refrigerators and automobiles, but in the production of cultural artifacts of lasting value as well. One way the Americans attempted to prove that assertion was through music, because according to one American official, “experience has shown that (the) presentation of American music and concerts by outstanding American interpreters impress the German audience more than most of the other offerings.”<sup>112</sup> Gaining the respect of the German public for American musical culture was an important was not just important, it was the sole reason for the music program.

As was the case with virtually everything else about the Information Centers, the objective of the music programs at the various *Amerikahäuser* was the promotion of the United States in as favorable light as possible. It was necessary, according to an American cultural official, “to impress upon the German audience that the United States is a worthy heir to the great Western musical tradition and that our people are doing their part in carrying on and developing this tradition.”<sup>113</sup> Excerpts from a 1953 internal study of the Information Centers illustrates the shared belief in a cultural lacuna between Germany and the United States, and the American attempts to cross that gulf and meet the Germans on their own cultural ground. To do that, the Americans devised a four-part strategy, quoted here verbatim:

1. By the presentation of young American artists who can demonstrate the high level of musical competence, sensitivity, and technical perfection achieved by our present rising generation of musicians and who can show their grasp and mastery of the great classics;
2. By the performance of American compositions in order to acquaint the German audiences with the many American contemporary composers and their great creative effort;

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<sup>112</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 23.

<sup>113</sup> United States Office of the US High Commissioner for Germany Management and Budget Division and United States Office of the US High Commissioner for Germany Office of Public Affairs, *The America Houses: A Study of the U.S. Information Center in Germany* (Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, 1953), 72.

3. By record concerts of the great American symphony orchestras and choral ensembles in order to show the vast public interest and support which alone make these expensive organizations possible;
4. By a serious and intelligent presentation of pure jazz and musicals to show America's unique contribution in these art forms.<sup>114</sup>

An examination of the weekly program for March 5-11, 1951, at the Frankfurt *Amerika Haus* reveals a mix of American and German cultural products. On Monday, there was a lecture, accompanied with photos, on the German painter Max Beckmann, on Tuesday there was a documentary film on the Californian Youth Symphony Orchestra, and a lecture, *American Drama on German Stages*, also in German and with photographs. On Friday, selections from Bach, Beethoven, Marcello, Krenek, Honegger, and Milhaud were played in concert.<sup>115</sup> On Wednesday, however, the programming made an unexpected turn, with a lecture on the "Nature and Development of Jazz Music. From the Folklore to the Vanguard, Swing and Bebop," led in German by Olaf Hudtwalcker, with recordings.<sup>116</sup> The title of the last presentation gives something away about the tenor of the event; it was a sober examination of a musical form, not a jam session.

### **Jazz and the Information Centers**

Much to the consternation of the proponents of traditional *Kultur* and morality, jazz was enormously popular in Germany before, during, and after the Second World War. With origins specific to the African-American experience, it was no surprise that jazz was a target of Nazi opprobrium. The Nazi rejection of jazz played out in different ways. According to a German

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 79.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

musician working during the period, a Bavarian Nazi official issued the following decree regarding music:

...As to tempo, preference is also to be given to brisk compositions over slow ones (so-called blues); however, the pace must not exceed a certain degree of allegro, commensurate with the Aryan sense of discipline and moderation. On no account will Negroid excesses in tempo (so-called hot jazz) or in solo performances (so-called breaks) be tolerated.<sup>117</sup>

Such “rules” certainly do adhere to a National Socialist musical aesthetic that fundamentally revolved around race. As a cultural import from America after the First World War, the so-called “Jazz Age,” the music was popularly associated with the bohemian demi-monde through the association with the African-American musicians who had pioneered the form and brought it to Europe. However, as the musical form became codified into various schools such as Bebop, jazz had gained in respectability among the German middle-class. As Uta Poiger has pointed out, because jazz was broken down into discrete “schools” and seriously studied, it was able to resist being tarred with the same critical brush as Rock and Roll, which German cultural critics dismissed as dysfunctional.<sup>118</sup> As a result, the listening experience inside an Information Center was usually closer to an introductory music history course than a jazz club. As in the case of Herr Hudtwalcker, there was often some form of presentation or lecture, and it was not uncommon to find audience members taking notes. In Berlin and Frankfurt, jazz found a home at the *Amerika Haus*, where patrons carefully listened to, rather than danced to the music. The semi-scholarly tone of the jazz lectures at the *Amerikahäuser* was noted, and added legitimacy to the emergent genre.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> J. J. Gould, “Josef Skvorecky on the Nazis’ Control-Freak Hatred of Jazz,” *The Atlantic*, January 3, 2012.

<sup>118</sup> Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, 149.

<sup>119</sup> “Drei Jahre NJCB,” *Spandauer Volksblatt*, April 27, 1958; Agnes C. Mueller, ed., *German Pop Culture: How “American” Is It?* (University of Michigan Press, 2004), 86.

In one instance, the Berlin *Amerika Haus* became a place of refuge for a jazz band. The members of the New Jazz Circle, looking for a professional home in a city where performance space was at a premium, were invited to take up residence at the *Amerika Haus* and quickly became noted for their serious approach to the performance and study of Jazz music. Dues were collected from the members, who were dropped from the rolls if they did not regularly attend lectures. Greatly assisting not just the jazz groups, but all the music programs at the Information Centers was that most ubiquitous piece of postwar technology, the record player. Recordings made all of this possible, first, because Jazz musicians were scarce in postwar Germany, and unlike live music, records could be replayed at the leisure of the listener, which allowed for close study of the music.<sup>120</sup> This of course, tended to render the act of listening into a more academic, and less visceral, experience, but more importantly, it also tended to remove Jazz from the African-American culture that spawned it and place it within the larger context of Modernism, a framing device the Germans were far more comfortable with. It should be noted that during the age of Jim Crow, by allowing Jazz music in the Information Centers the U.S. government was officially endorsing the validity of this music, a product of African-American culture and giving it added legitimacy in the eyes of the wider (and whiter) public. Granted, it was easier for the American government to make this statement outside the borders of the United States than within them, but nonetheless it sent a clear message of inclusion to the citizens of Germany, a country that until recently had been centered on racial exclusion and inequality.

As Penny von Eschen has pointed out, “there was constant tension between the view of jazz as high modernist art and the view of jazz as popular culture meant to appeal to the

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<sup>120</sup> Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, 146–47.

masses.”<sup>121</sup> However, Jazz was as close to popular culture as the Information Centers wanted to get. The burgeoning Rock and Roll scene in Germany was deeply problematic for the Americans in charge of the Information Centers. Demographically speaking, Rock music was associated more often with the German working class, not the intelligentsia that the *Amerikahäuser* were aimed at. Furthermore, the educated bourgeoisie closely associated Rock and Roll music with the phenomenon of urban delinquency, the so-called *Halbstarke*, who, with “Texas pants,” motorcycles, and appreciation of the American films *Rebel Without a Cause* and *The Wild Ones*, symbolized to cultural critics everything that was wrong with postwar German society. The Germans the Americans wanted were older, college educated, and at least until the war, had career prospects through which they could hope to have some measure of influence over German society.

### **Performances and Recordings**

The Americans were counting on an acute hunger for novel cultural products, particularly music, as a means of attracting otherwise skeptical Germans into the *Amerikahäuser*. University educated Germans were often musically literate as well, with pianos being a common bourgeois household accompaniment. The *Amerikahäuser* in urban areas thus found music students willing to utilize their services to supplement their school librettos and sheet music. Music holdings were integrated into the larger facility in a seamless fashion. In addition to books, the libraries inside the *Amerikahäuser* also contained sheet music that could be checked out. Larger Information Centers offered listening rooms for patrons, who could select the music they wanted and take it to a room and enjoy it in privacy, with or without headphones. It should be noted that for many, if not most Germans after the war, record players and a large collection of records were luxuries,

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<sup>121</sup> Penny M. von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 19.

and remained so for several years, making the offerings of the *Amerikahäuser* that much more desirable. And with paper shortages common immediately after the war, sheet music was considered a luxury item as well. With an average of more than 250 scores on offer, the Americans allowed professional musicians to check out music for up to four weeks, and students two weeks. In this fashion the *Amerikahäuser* had some small part to play in the revitalization of popular entertainment in Germany, at least in the cities where professional musicians took advantage of the generosity of the Americans. The only time a charge for the sheet music came into play was when it was used for film scores or radio broadcasts. In that situation a rental fee on a sliding scale was paid to the Combined Allies Lending Library in Berlin with the fee determined by the “importance of the orchestra.”<sup>122</sup>

Record libraries were also an important part of the music programs at the Information Centers. Each Center had a basic set of twenty-one titles, with anywhere to one and three copies each, depending on the size of the *Amerika Haus*. The titles were broken down into three groups: Classical music, Classical music performed by Americans, and specifically American music such as folk songs and African-American spirituals. Since musicians were not always easy to come by, recording played an important role in the music programs. A report, *Monthly Musical Programs at the America Houses*, of musical programs at each of the 36 *Amerikahäuser* for 1952 shows far more recorded programs than live. For example, the Information Center in Augsburg offered one live performance per month, with 60 people attending, but 69 recorded performances, with over 1800 people in attendance. This is compared to Munich, which offered 31 live performances with almost 21,000 audience members, but only twelve recorded performances with just under 700 attendees, by far the largest number of live performances that

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<sup>122</sup> Hooper, *Designing Democracy*, 173; Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 23.

year. With the exception of Munich, smaller towns pulled much bigger audiences than larger cities, since in the words of one American official, “there is such a splendid supply of quality music programs in the community, the need for the America Houses’ contribution in this area is not great.”<sup>123</sup> For 1952, there were a total of 117 live performances across all the Information Centers, with 40,916 people in attendance, for an average of 350 guests per live performance per month; there were exactly twice as many recorded performances in the *Amerikahäuser* at 234 per month, with 9156 people in attendance, for an average attendance of 39 people per recorded concert, and a total of 50,072 people attending musical events, for an average of 143 average attendance per program each month.<sup>124</sup>

In early 1953, almost 32,000 records were in circulation at the America Houses, with Munich (which also had the most live performances) having the most at over 1700 recordings for patrons to choose from. Bremen, came in second with nearly 1600, which was more than Frankfurt, which owned approximately 1500 albums. Folk music was extremely popular, according to the report that furnished these totals. While the Daughters of the American Revolution prevented opera singer Marian Anderson from singing at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., “Negro spirituals sung by Marian Anderson” were some of the most popular recordings at the Information Centers, along with “native music by Sioux and Navajo Indian tribes.”<sup>125</sup>

During fiscal year 1952, 47 singers and musicians performed at the Information Centers, 38 of them coming from the United States, two from Holland and Germany, and one each from Great Britain, Latvia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Hungary. Of these 47 artists, eighteen were solo

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<sup>123</sup> Division and Affairs, *The America Houses*, 75.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>125</sup> Division and Affairs, 55.

vocalists and sixteen performed piano concerts. There were five concerts for violin and piano, two organ and string quartet recitals, and one concert each for harpsichord, cello and piano, one choir concert, and one dancer, though the addition of the dancer may have been a typographical error. Polling of the audience confirms that the music programs were popular with visitors. When asked where the musical programs ranked in attracting visitors to the *Amerikahäuser*, 60 percent of those who responded put them in the upper third, 35 percent ranked them in the middle third, while only five percent put them in the lower third. However, “when asked to make a similar rating with regard to their effectiveness in achieving the objectives of the Public Affairs program,” only ten percent of the *Amerika Haus* Directors said the music program ranked in the upper third in achieving directives, while 80 percent said it ranked in the middle third. Only ten percent said it ranked in the lower third, revealing a slight disconnect between Center Directors and audiences, who seemed to think the music more of a draw than the *Amerika Haus* personnel did.<sup>126</sup> What was undeniable was the popularity of musical offerings to the guests of the Information Centers. Unfortunately for the Americans, paying for musicians was much more difficult than presenting their music.

An internal report neatly summarized the problem facing *Amerika Haus* Directors when it came to finding performers: “To remain within the policy governing reimbursements which HICOG [the office of the High Commissioner for Germany, which replaced Military Government in 1953] can pay artists for their services in the America Houses, it is difficult to present programs of the quality normally presented elsewhere in the communities.”<sup>127</sup> Until 1950, distinguished members of the American artistic community were invited to visit the *Amerikahäuser* on an ad hoc basis, and often with the visitors having to manage some of the

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>127</sup> Division and Affairs, 75.

costs themselves. For example, if Information Center personnel learned that a distinguished author or musician happened to be in a German city, the person was often invited to give a talk or performance, but not at U.S. government expense. Hoping that speakers and performers would be satisfied with the prestige associated with the Information Centers was hardly suitable for acquiring talent over the long term, and after 1950 visitors were booked centrally and visited numerous *Amerikahäuser* across Germany, instead of just one. In this way, a visitor to an Information Center in Augsburg had as good a chance as someone in Berlin at meeting American playwrights Arthur Miller or Thornton Wilder, both who spoke at *Amerikahäuser* over the years. Further complicating the search for guest speakers and performers was the legislative requirement that speakers obtain a security clearance, which made it difficult to use people who were visiting Germany for only a short time.<sup>128</sup>

Despite vague attempts at central planning, performing or speaking at an Information Centers were hardly moneymaking propositions, with the government picking up of the cost of travel and issuing a per diem of 42 Deutschmarks, or roughly \$10.00. Because of this, many of the speakers were locals, or the Americans recorded their talk, which was then circulated among the various *Amerikahäuser*. Such was the case with the American playwright Thornton Wilder, who recorded his talk at an *Amerika Haus*, where, according to one report “audience participation was enthusiastic.”<sup>129</sup> Of the 69 speakers brought to the Information Centers by the Speakers and Artists section in 1952, 42 came from the United States, eight from Germany, five from Switzerland, four from Great Britain, two from India and Austria, and one speaker each from Finland, Canada, Ireland, Cuba, and two speakers classified as “stateless,” whose names were not revealed in the report. Of these 69 speakers, thirteen of them discussed International

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>129</sup> Division and Affairs, 69.

Affairs and U.S. foreign policy, twelve discussed music, theater, and art, and the rest of the lecture topics ran the gamut from German-American relations, which brought eight speakers over the year to discuss the topic to English folk songs.<sup>130</sup>

### **Lectures and Discussion Groups**

Those who led the *Amerikahäuser* had two priorities that were sometimes in competition with each other. On one hand, they were charged with running what was essentially a cultural institution open to the German public. However, it was also an institution that had the task of giving a “full and fair picture” of the United States to a select audience of Germans whom the Americans considered essential to the reconstruction of civil society. This binary choice, in the words of one official, came down to the decision as to whether or not the Information Centers should be seen as “... passive library operations intersticed (sic) with concerts, non-controversial films, and talks of a primarily cultural nature,” or as “articulate, positive outlets of the complete Public Affairs program, using the facilities of the Houses to achieve a better understanding and support of the United States” and American foreign policy.<sup>131</sup> As the Cold War progressed, the question became increasingly rhetorical, as the Information Centers began to conform to the latter priority and as fundamental to American public diplomacy in Germany.

To this end, lectures and discussions were a large part of the community outreach program for an Information Center. Seen as the most direct route to West German audiences, lectures provided “information on and the philosophy of the American pattern of life and United States foreign policy,” in a straightforward manner, “with minimum assistance from entertainment type programs.”<sup>132</sup> About 30 percent of the lecturers, singers, and musicians who

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>131</sup> Division and Affairs, 44.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 61.

appeared at the *Amerikahäuser* were booked by Military Government officials, while the remainder were booked directly by Information Center staff or Public Affairs officers with the U.S. Army. Lectures were extremely popular with German audiences, who were starved for reliable information on the world outside of Germany. A sample of lectures and discussions in the *Amerikahäuser* for one month in 1952 reveals 349 lectures and 433 discussions booked, with an average of ten lecture programs per house, and twelve discussions. Attendance was impressive, with a total audience for lectures of 41,000 people, and 23,522 in attendance for discussions for the month. The average audience for each program was 120 for the lectures, and 55 for the discussions. In Berlin, for example, there were four lectures on “Americana” (broadly interpreted to mean American history, customs, and culture) with 886 attendees, while the eleven lectures on literature drew over 1000 people. Literature was popular in Hamburg as well, with seven lectures pulling in 1700 people during the same month. The most popular topics regarded daily life in other countries, followed by politics. “Americana” came in third, while “other” came in fourth, followed by lectures on art and literature. Literature and “Americana” were the most popular topics, followed by politics and life in other countries besides the United States. On average in 1952, 154 people attended lectures on life in other countries, while 120 people attended lectures on politics, and slightly fewer, 113, attended lectures on Americana.<sup>133</sup> Considering the growing number of entertainment options available in German cities during the “economic miracle,” *Amerika Haus* administrators were pleased with the attendance figures.

The topics varied according to the location of the *Amerika Haus*, the interests of the patrons, and the desires of the Information Center staff. A look at the list of adult discussion groups on offer at one anonymous *Amerika Haus* had a wide variety of topics on offer, from

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<sup>133</sup> Division and Affairs, 62.

“Norman Mailer,” to “Is money the root of all evil,” and “Television’s advantages and disadvantages.” Some Houses tried to walk a line between culture and politics, with odd results. Such was the case in one *Amerika Haus*, where the “Young People’s Groups” were tackling issues of greater import, such as “Should Germany participate in her own defense,” and “Will the Republican government change the policy of the United States to a great extent?” than those of the adult groups, who were more interested in topics such as astrology and film history. That the “Young People’s Groups” were asking harder questions did not go unnoticed by the author of the review. “It is interesting to note,” it was pointed out,

...that the discussion subjects for the adult group have little program value, whereas the young people’s group consistently discusses topics which further the America House mission. The Director of this House explained that he was displeased with the composition of the adult group, but that he could not radically change its nature nor redirect the selection of topics without causing a minor furor. He therefore established a second group for young people, for which he personally undertook the responsibility of supplying topics. He thus avoided offending anyone, while at the same time reaching a much sought-after target group with topics of program value.<sup>134</sup>

In this case it was the young, not the older professionals, who were of more value to the *Amerika Haus* staff, a reversal of normal policy. While a reversal of policy, the Americans could also see it as confirmation of their policy of engagement with the German population, and the validity of the *Amerikahäuser* in the pursuit of the hearts and minds of the German population.

The Americans wanted to reinforce the themes of brotherhood and transnational understanding so central to the “good Germany” of Weimar classicism, while opening up German culture to what “seemed vital and fruitful” in the postwar world.<sup>135</sup> Through the adoption of democracy, the rule of law, and a market-based economy, West Germany, like the United States, would combine the New and Old Worlds, with the rare ability to peacefully

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<sup>134</sup> Division and Affairs, 66.

<sup>135</sup> Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*, 9.

harness economic, cultural, and military force. Unlike the German examples of unification under Bismarck, democracy from below, not the state, was the animating force to unify culture, state and nation.

When we encountered Professor Wertenbaker of Princeton at the beginning of this chapter, he was, like many intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic, deeply concerned about the future of German culture. Though an American, Wertenbaker, like many educated Germans, firmly believed that *Kultur* was the foundation for German society. The grandson of the man Thomas Jefferson appointed the first Librarian at the University of Virginia, Wertenbaker was a member of southern intellectual aristocracy. Born into a world of economic, racial, and intellectual deference, and thus sensitive to it, Wertenbaker carefully noted some of the more striking cultural changes that had occurred because of the war, notably the absence of the traditional regard shown to social and cultural elites. Before the war, he recalled, old men spoke of “our dear Kaiser,” but of the “rising generation” after the war, none confessed to missing the Hohenzollern monarch, or for that matter, the Republic that replaced him. Nor did any, of course, express any sense of loss for Hitler within the earshot of Wertenbaker. As in the cases of Adorno and Arendt, it was not so much that the Princeton historian found German intellectuals harboring a secret fondness for totalitarianism of either the left or right; rather, it was that these elites, who would ordinarily be the political leaders of the German nation, displayed little interest in public affairs or the future of the German state at all. “In their bewilderment,” he wrote, “some of the students have become pacifists,” which bewildered Wertenbaker. His reaction, though, perhaps reflected the relative security which he enjoyed as an American during the 1930s and 1940s, running counter to the experience of the Germans over those decades. It is just as valid to

ask why, after all they had been through over the last decade, these Germans would not want to wash their hands of politics forever.

These were some of the cultural currents the Information Centers navigated during the first years of Occupation, and the cultural values that the Americans attempted to both reinforce and challenge. In interpreting German music for German audiences, the Americans were making a statement about the quality of American musicianship, and by introducing Germans to American music, making a bid for cultural equity with the Germans. Also, by giving the imprimatur of the American government to jazz music, the U.S. was also championing the music whose roots lie in the African slave trade and West African rhythms. In doing so, the Americans challenged existing racial and musical hierarchies abroad, something it was less comfortable doing at home.

As was the case with seemingly every other aspect of West German society, *Kultur* was a contested intellectual space after the Second World War. Gatekeepers of traditional German culture found themselves stuck in the past and on the defensive, with their artifacts unable to provide an adequate reply to the horrors of recent German history. German high culture was a raft many bourgeois Germans were clinging to after the war, despite the inability of German *Kultur* to account for the horrors that occurred under Nazism; Reconciling Goethe and Hitler was an impossible task.

For their part, the Americans were not sure what the Germans meant when they discussed *Kultur*, problematized by the fact that culture was intimately associated with German cultural and political nationalism. Furthermore, the Americans had to manage the political expression of the Germans, promoting a historic German cultural legacy while dampening nationalistic impulses, unless those nationalistic desires comported with democratic values. As members of an

imagined community united by language and shared histories, German intellectuals had first been united by a shared culture regardless of statehood. After victory in the Franco-Prussian war and the consequent creation of the German Reich in 1871, the members of that imagined community of Germans, a so-called *Kulturvolk*, had their membership in the community exchanged for citizenship in the real, and far more complicated, German state. The bourgeois-invention of *Kultur*, coopted and protected by the State, and the two engaged in a symbiotic relationship by which both parties were allegedly strengthened. However, not every German intellectual agreed about the correctness of the new “cultured State,” the *Kulturstaat*.

Complicating matters for the Americans was the strain of German intellectualism whose militant rejection of politics began with the thought of Nietzsche and served as a model to like-minded intellectuals. To him, and those who followed him, politics and culture were antithetical; the State, in using culture for political purposes, transformed *Kultur*, which before had been about matters of the spirit, or *Geist*. Politics epitomized “civilization,” (*Zivilisation*) the temporal realm of the mundane, the opposite of *Kultur*, and prolonged exposure to politics was grounds for expulsion from the Germanic intellectual paradise that was *Kultur*.

As a result, the Americans served two groups of Germans with competing beliefs about the role of politics in German life. One group identified *Kultur* with German nationalism, either intellectual or political, while the other rejected any role for politics in *Kultur* whatsoever. The Americans understood the appeal of *Kultur* to the shattered community of bourgeois intellectuals and attempted to both play down the nationalistic impulses of one, while trying to create support for democratic government among a group that though politics should be kept out of matters of culture, for politics was the cause of most problems. The Americans chose music as the point of connection between themselves and the Germans and used it to both support German cultural

pretensions as well as advertise the quality of American musicianship and the arrival of the United States on the cultural stage. Also, the liberal policies regarding the use of the sheet music and record libraries at the *Amerikahäuser* also helped resuscitate the musical culture of the cities that hosted them.

Lectures, performances, and discussion groups played an important role in the lives of the *Amerikahäuser* as well as the lives of the cities where they were located. The topics mirrored the two competing visions for the Information Centers: as innocuous cultural destinations, or as “islands of (American-style) democracy,” integral parts of the American public diplomacy effort. As time passed and the Cold War became a fixture, the question became irrelevant; the Information Centers were central to American efforts to transform postwar German society into a democratic state with a market-oriented economy based on balanced economic consumption and a healthy relationship with Labor.

For Professor Wertenbaker, despite the challenges faced by the Americans, the overall cultural trends were positive for the Americans in Germany. He took heart at the positive West German reaction to the *Amerikahäuser*, reasoning that “the fact that they are usually crowded is the best evidence of the good they are doing.”<sup>136</sup> Often, most of the crowds were in the library, the most popular part of an *Amerika Haus*, and the most visible demonstration of American democratic values. Despite the popularity among German patrons and the great symbolic value the libraries held, they became the center of a debate on free speech that would call into question everything the Americans had built up in Germany after the war. At the center of the dispute was Senator Joseph McCarthy.

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<sup>136</sup> Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, “German Youth and the U.S.,” 12.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE LIBRARIES

On July 12, 1948, the United States Information Center in Munich opened at 45 Briennerstraße, in the former Nazi Party building where Adolf Hitler kept a suite of offices used for formal ceremonies. Presiding over the dedication of the building that only three years earlier had been referred to as the *Führerbau* was the Deputy U.S. Military Governor, Major General George P. Hays, who in his prepared remarks drew a connection between the library of the new *Amerikahaus* and the renewal of democracy in postwar Germany. To Hays, the library of the Information Center was more than a collection of books; it was a foundation of personal freedom, and an indicator of the health of the state:

A free people must have access to the world's knowledge and must be in a position to decide for themselves what they shall read; what they shall listen to; what they shall believe. This is only possible when there is a free access to books, theater, and the radio under a government that guarantees the liberty and dignity of the individual man.<sup>137</sup>

The anodyne words of the General regarding the virtues of liberty and dignity were in sharp contrast to the history of the building, a fact that surely must have resonated with the audience of more than 300 who had gathered for the dedication. The German guest of honor was the Bavarian Minister-President, Dr. Hans Ehard. In 1923 it was Ehard, as Public Prosecutor (*Staatsanwalt*), who had prosecuted Adolf Hitler and Erich Ludendorff for their roles in the abortive coup against the Bavarian state, and his comments had the effect of giving the event a quasi-mystical tone. In order to disconnect the building from the recent past, Ehard, like most of his constituency a conservative Roman Catholic, attempted an exorcism of historical memory. The Minister-President, in the very room where Hitler and British Prime Minister Neville

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<sup>137</sup> "Largest Information Center Opens," *Information Bulletin*, August 10, 1948, 6.

Chamberlain signed the Munich Treaty hastening the Second World War, declared the building cleansed from past associations and gave the repurposed building his blessing. “The evil spirit has been driven out of the building,” Ehard declared. “May it be replaced by a new spirit of peace, culture, and goodness.”<sup>138</sup> The veteran politician, who less than a year earlier had publicly broken with Americans over proposed school reforms that lessened the role of the Catholic Church in Bavarian education, on this day found himself in agreement with the Americans.<sup>139</sup> The sentiments expressed by General Hays regarding intellectual freedom were, for the most part were principles adhered to by those in charge of the *Amerika Haus* libraries.

However, less than five years later, the spirit of “peace, culture, and goodness” so longed for by Minister-President Ehard was put to the test by U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy and his hunt for Communist subversion of American foreign policy, a pursuit that led his investigators across the Atlantic to the very shelves of those *Amerika Haus* libraries that were so cherished by their German patrons. The Information Center libraries in Germany found themselves at the center of an entirely manufactured political crisis that in the end generated much heat, but very little light; no communist subversion was found in the libraries, and the inspection tour was derided as an expensive transatlantic joke. The attack by McCarthy and his sympathizers on the libraries proved to be an embarrassment to American occupation officials, and it worked against U.S. efforts promoting a more democratic and open society in postwar Germany. “It is impossible to calculate the harm the United States is doing to itself,” wrote a letter to the Editor of *The New York Times*, but it was clear “the hullabaloo raised by McCarthyism” did not serve

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<sup>138</sup> “Largest Information Center Opens,” *Information Bulletin*, August 10, 1948, 6. While symbolically important, the building was later found to be not suitable for an *Amerikahaus*, which relocated to Karolinenplatz.

<sup>139</sup> James F. Tent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 162.

American interests in Germany.<sup>140</sup> Perversely, the scrutiny of the Information Center libraries by Senator McCarthy and his followers was a testament to the enormous popularity the libraries enjoyed among the German public. Had they not been so accepted among the German people, the Senator and his Committee would never have noticed them.

In 1951, three years after Minister-President Ehard performed his exorcism of the *Führerbau*, the Director of the Stuttgart *Amerika Haus*, Peter Behrens (no relation to the famous German architect and industrial designer) announced to his fellow State Department employees that "German readers have run into something new, and they like it."<sup>141</sup> In the pages of the monthly *Information Bulletin*, published for State Department personnel in West Germany, Behrens shared the enthusiastic German response after nearly five years of exposure to the Information Center libraries, particularly their system-wide policy of open stacks, where patrons could browse the books on the shelves at their leisure. Allowing the German public relatively unobstructed access to library resources such as books and recordings, an act taken for granted by the millions of Americans who were familiar with their local public libraries, ran completely counter to existing German library practices, which focused more on the physical security of the library property, than on broadening patronage and encouraging the circulation of resources.

Before the introduction of the Information Centers, libraries circulated books the same way archival documents are today: the visitor to one of the relatively scarce German public libraries who wanted to borrow a book first consulted a catalog, then filed a written request to a librarian who, if the patron was found worthy and if the book was available, would then grant the request. German public libraries were librarian-focused, rather than book-focused; the librarian

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<sup>140</sup> George Patrick Carlin, "Our Overseas Libraries; Regret Expressed for Undermining of a Program Considered Valuable," *The New York Times*, July 21, 1953.

<sup>141</sup> Robert Behrens, "Democracy Stalks the Library," *Information Bulletin*, 1951, 35.

was the gatekeeper to whom patrons had to appeal for access. This was a thoroughly bourgeois construction that reinforced existing class lines and benefitted the growing educated German middle-class, not the working poor concentrated in the growing German cities. In the eyes of the librarians, the literate poor could not be trusted with books, while the wealthy had their own libraries, the often-conspicuous totems of the intellectual and spiritual development (*Bildung*) that was so prized among educated Germans. As a result, in the words of one State Department employee surveying the state of German library affairs after the war, the few functioning public libraries were considered by Germans and Americans alike as uninviting, “dismal places with the books hidden away.” And unlike those in the *Amerikahäuser*, those German libraries still standing after the war had “no reading rooms” or “children’s corners” and were lacking any kind of organized cultural programming.”<sup>142</sup> Under National Socialism, libraries and librarians were important parts of the domestic propaganda effort, and while Nazi officials considered the idea of libraries with open stacks before the war, the practice remained dormant within German libraries until the arrival of the U.S. Information Centers.<sup>143</sup> “Nothing seems to have impressed the German reading public more,” than the open-shelves of the *Amerika Haus* library, one American observer noted in the pages of the *Christian Science Monitor*, to the point that by the early 1950s, almost half of the 525 public libraries spread across West Germany had adapted open-shelving or planned on incorporating it into building renovations.<sup>144</sup> The undeniable popularity of the libraries among the German public gave the Americans a powerful instrument

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<sup>142</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 23.

<sup>143</sup> Margaret F. Stieg and Margaret Stieg Dalton, *Public Libraries in Nazi Germany* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 155.

<sup>144</sup> Olwen Williams, “Information Units Brief West Germans on America,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 21, 1951.

with which to influence elite opinion. That the U.S. also permanently changed German library practices was an unintended consequence of occupation.

However, it is important to note that the library inside an Information Center was not the same thing as a public library in the United States. The differences between the two institutions were subtle but hinged on the question of mission. While both offered open stacks to peruse titles at leisure, a public library necessarily needs to stock materials that appeal to a wide audience. *Amerika Haus* librarians however, stocked material whose subject matter was the United States, broadly conceived. A visitor to an Information Center library would be struck by the number of reference works focused on the United States, and when it came to prose fiction, the absence of foreign authors on the shelves. However, the most important difference was political, in that the libraries inside the Information Centers were carefully curated to put forth an image of the United States that aligned with the policies of the American government and put the best possible gloss on the intellectual products of the United States. As the Information Centers featured the “best” in American architecture and design, the libraries also stocked what were considered the highlights of American literature. But it was what was *not* on the shelves that was particularly telling. There were few, if any, portraits of race relations in the United States under Jim Crow to counter the narrative such as those presented in the government-sponsored book, *The Negro In American Life*, that of incremental, but substantive, progress among African-Americans in the United States. This period shows us the limits to freedom of speech in the *Amerika Haus*.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights : Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 49; Harry J. Walker, *The Negro in American Life* (New York: Oxford Book Co., 1954).

This chapter examines the establishment of the first U.S Information Center libraries in Germany and their role in early U.S. efforts at reaching out to Germans through cultural diplomacy. As institutions predicated on intellectual and cultural exchange, the *Amerikahäuser* and their libraries swam against the current of early U.S. occupation policy, particularly as expressed in the foundational document for the American occupation, JCS 1067. This document, unabashedly punitive in tone, emphasized a clearly subordinate relationship between the conquered Germans and the Allied conquerors. The libraries were a tacit repudiation of those policies, an acknowledgement on the part of the Americans that engagement, not the restrictive practices forbidding “fraternization,” was the way to help secure the allegiances of influential Germans. As the contest between the United States and the Soviet Union began in earnest for the political fidelity of the German population, the Americans were not content to have their patrons come to them; through the Bookmobile (*Autobücherei*) the Americans came to their rural patrons. However, the libraries and bookmobiles were more than their collections. As was the case with the *Amerikahäuser* in general, they were carefully constructed symbolic and physical representations of the stated cultural and political values of the United States to the German population under Allied occupation.

Though organized on the model of an American public library, and as well as superficially resembling U.S. examples, the Information Center libraries were *sui generis*. Part reference library and part cultural center, the libraries had a natural appeal to the sorts of German most sought after by American political officers. One report paints a *gemütlich* (cozy) scene:

In the spacious, well-lighted rooms people sit and read. There are students and school boys and girls- and old gentlemen who can work here undisturbed, while at home their wives are preparing the dinner on the little cooking-stove. There are journalists copying biographical notes on Hawthorne from an encyclopedia; a teacher, whose pupils expect from her some enlightenment about Abraham Lincoln of whom she does not much know

herself. There are housewives, too, who take a holiday from the everlasting monotony of the daily household chores.<sup>146</sup>

As representations of the United States abroad, the libraries, particularly their collections of books and periodicals, reflected the highly-charged partisan political climate of the time. The libraries, while outwardly presenting a positive image of the United States for German consumption, were, for the Americans responsible for them, often contested ideological spaces whose occupants had a capacity for cognitive dissonance.

The first half of this chapter looks at the ideological foundation of the Information Center libraries, one informed by Progressive-era beliefs that linked democracy to education and emphasized the free exchange of ideas. The second half of this chapter examines how the American commitment to these principles was tested, as the libraries were swept up in the American “Red Scare” of the late 1940s and early 1950s. By inserting himself into German occupation policy via the hunt for “communist subversion” in the Information Center libraries, anti-communist crusader Senator Joseph McCarthy forced American occupation authorities to publicly address their commitment to free speech and transformed the libraries into a front in an internal ideological conflict among the Americans that once exposed was profoundly embarrassing to the United States. As we will see, the U.S. commitment to free speech through the vehicle of the Information Center libraries had limits, and American efforts to both comply with McCarthy and other anti-communists while exemplifying the American commitment to free speech were marked by policies quickly established then withdrawn; lists of questionable titles circulated, then disavowed; and titles quietly removed from library shelves, then mysteriously returned. In capitulating to Senator McCarthy and his supporters by removing books written by “controversial” authors (a euphemism for known and suspected communists, anti-

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<sup>146</sup> “Hospitable Amerikahaus,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 22, 1949.

segregationists, and members of the nascent postwar American counterculture), the State Department caused far more damage to the reputation of the United States in Germany than whatever quantum of “subversion” was uncovered in the German Information Center libraries. American anti-communist hysteria came to Europe when Senator McCarthy sent his two investigators, Roy Cohn and David Schine, on a whirlwind trip across Europe to root out “subversion” and “anti-Americanism” within State Department facilities, including the *Amerikahäuser*. The tour of overseas libraries was an embarrassment to the U.S. government, with the two “junketeering gumshoes,” as one American diplomat described Cohn and Schine, confirming the worst suspicions of nervous European elites who were dubious of the enormous American cultural, political, and economic footprint then forming in postwar Europe.<sup>147</sup> The patient work of many individuals serving in West Germany was challenged by the reckless conduct of McCarthy and his followers, who ultimately found little of substance but nevertheless tarnished the reputation of the *Amerikahäuser* among Americans and Germans alike.

McCarthy and his henchmen, while failing at exposing Communist subversion, did highlight institutional divisions that hampered the effectiveness of American efforts in reconstituting German society. The dissonance between American political thought and practice generated confusion, ill-will, and mistrust among Germans and Americans alike, while the sniping from members of Congress who saw the overseas information programs as easy ways to burnish their anti-communist credentials, the frequent policy revisions resulting from political pressure, and the changing and generally unclear guidance from superiors hardly helped matters. Despite this, the libraries remained overwhelmingly popular among Germans, though their faith in American commitment to free speech was sorely tested by the Senator from Wisconsin.

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<sup>147</sup> Murray Marder, “McCarthy’s ‘Junketeering Gumshoes’ Flayed by U.S. Official Admitting Red Ties in Youth,” *The Washington Post*, April 30, 1953.

## Beginnings

Alonzo Grace, in his role as the Director of Education and Cultural Relations for the United States at the beginning of the occupation of Germany, held a retreat for Amerika Haus personnel in, of all places, Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps. The setting was both breathtakingly beautiful, and as the place where Hitler had planned the destruction of France, Poland, and the Soviet Union, rich in historical irony. Grace, the Connecticut Commissioner of Education before the war, described the task ahead them in language approaching the religious, if not the apocalyptic. “Few people have ever been privileged to be a part of a more important or more challenging mission,” he informed his audience. The stakes were enormous, for they were nothing less than “the intellectual, moral, spiritual and cultural reorientation of a defeated, conquered and occupied Germany,” and the Amerikahäuser spread across western Germany were the agents by which real change would be brought to German society.<sup>148</sup> The American philosopher and public intellectual John Dewey had written that democracy “needed to be reborn in each generation,” and Grace believed that to be the case in Germany as well.<sup>149</sup> He hoped the Information Center libraries under construction across Germany would serve as birthing suites.

The initial occupation of Germany after the war was marked by fear and loathing on the part of the Americans toward their German charges; fears over a general sense of German political unreliability and a communist future, and a loathing of the immediate Nazi past. For the initial cohorts of U.S. cultural officials travelling to Germany for duty, there was no more important mission than securing the political allegiances of the German population. Politically, the situation in Germany, especially in the devastated former capitol Berlin, was very fluid, with

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<sup>148</sup> Alonzo Grace, “Out of the Rubble: An Address on the Reorientation of the German People,” n.d., RG 260, OMGUS, National Archives 2; Tent, *Mission on the Rhine*, 304.

<sup>149</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 22.

the Americans extremely conscious of political extremism of all kinds, and in the case of Berlin, the three-month head start enjoyed by Soviet cultural officials before the Americans took up residence in the former capital. During that time, the Soviets had successfully courted many of those Germans working in the culture industry of Berlin.<sup>150</sup> At the same time, from 1945 to 1947 the Americans were deeply concerned about a Nazi resurgence, or at least revanchist sympathies, fears which then transferred to the Soviet Union as the relationship between the United States and the U.S.S.R. became increasingly acrimonious.<sup>151</sup> Despite the wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union and the apparent warm personal relations between Roosevelt and Stalin, as early as 1944 *The Saturday Evening Post* was already asking, “Will Europe Go Communist After the War?”<sup>152</sup> All this added urgency to American efforts to reach out to influential Germans and initiate some sort of rapprochement. The library and book clubs of the *Amerikahäuser* were purpose-built vehicles for facilitating that contact.

In modern terms, entities such as the *Voice of America* (VOA) and *Radio in the American Sector* (RIAS) were true broadcasters, in that they existed to appeal to as many people as possible. On the other hand, the *Amerikahäuser* libraries were examples of narrowcasting, in which specific audiences are targeted and engaged. The library patrons tended to be intellectually curious, educated, and open to new ideas, just the sort of people the Americans desperately wanted to cultivate relations with. The libraries were uniquely suited to reach those elites where they lived: in the world of arts and letters. With pent-up German demand for reading material,

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<sup>150</sup> Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Transmission Impossible : American Journalism as Cultural Diplomacy in Postwar Germany, 1945-1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 99.

<sup>151</sup> Harold Zink, *American Military Government in Germany* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 135–36.

<sup>152</sup> Demaree Bess, “Will Europe Go Communist After the War?” *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 22, 1944.

the libraries in the *Amerika Häuser* were uniquely placed to satisfy the needs of German elites. The library served, as one patron put it, “as a bridge of understanding,” between West Germany and the United States.<sup>153</sup>

As extensive as the American efforts in Germany were, they were part of a larger global effort to counteract Soviet propaganda that was critical of the United States. “The character of the American people, their purposes and their motives are being systematically and savagely attacked,” Secretary of State Dean Acheson declared in a 1950 budget hearing. “... We owe it to ourselves to meet this campaign of vilification with an energetic campaign of truth.”<sup>154</sup> For his part, at the annual conference of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, President Truman framed the ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union as “the cause of freedom against the propaganda of slavery,” and argued for presenting a positive picture of the United States to the world. The peoples of the world, Truman explained, did not understand that Americans, despite their high standard of living, had “hopes and problems like their own.”<sup>155</sup> As the most popular part of the *Häuser*, the libraries were foremost a vehicle to promote understanding between the United States and West Germany, to advance American policies, and to remind German visitors of the virtues and benefits of democracy. While the Information Center libraries and superficially resembled American public libraries, they were different institutions that served different purposes, they both operated from the assumption that education was inextricably connected to the growth of political democracy. This was a premise taken from the American Progressive political tradition, particularly as championed by John Dewey, and transplanted in Germany.

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<sup>153</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 23.

<sup>154</sup> Pilgert, 3–4.

<sup>155</sup> “Truman Proclaims World-Wide Fight to Crush Red Lies,” *The New York Times*, April 21, 1950.

## Democracy and Education

Those responsible for the libraries believed their work was inextricably linked to the success or failure of democracy in postwar Germany. Fearing that postwar German society would revert to the tribal politics of Weimar, dividing people into what Dewey described as “antagonistic sects and factions,” which served to undermine “the democratic way of life,” the Americans responsible for the *Amerikahäuser* agreed with Dewey and his fellow Progressives on the connection between education and the construction of democratic institutions.<sup>156</sup> The librarians in Germany had American institutional support for their beliefs on democracy and education. After the war, the American Library Association (ALA) made the same hypothesis connecting the education of the individual citizen to the health of political democracy, in this case by using library patronage as an indicator of education. As an individual, a library patron was negligible,

...merely an individual, seated in a library or his home, absorbing wisdom and beauty from a book... but multiplied a million-fold in every section of the country, the result is significant in the eternal search for personal fulfillment and a better group life.<sup>157</sup>

Alonzo Grace would have been in full agreement, and he saw his role in Germany in much the same way. In this context, the librarians in the *Amerikahäuser* had a larger purpose, one that was much more than merely supervising collections. Like Johnny Appleseed, they went across Germany spreading libraries that bore the fruit of democracy, American-style, their highly-visible shelves of books serving as tangible examples of American democratic ideals and adding ideological luster to a temple dedicated to American political values.

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<sup>156</sup> Larry A. Hickman and Thomas M. Alexander, eds., *The Essential Dewey. Volume 1: Pragmatism, Education, Democracy*, vol. 1 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 340.

<sup>157</sup> Carleton B. Joeckel and Amy Winslow, *A National Plan for Public Library Service Prepared for The Committee on Postwar Planning of The American Library Association* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1948), 2, <http://archive.org/details/nationalplanforp010145mbp>.

In the 1948 *National Plan for Public Library Service*, the ALA argued that public libraries in the United States were more than buildings holding books. Collectively, they served as “an organ of social democracy” for their communities, “and an instrument of self-realization” for their patrons.<sup>158</sup> The librarians had a voice in Washington, D.C. in Archibald McLeish, the Librarian of Congress, who saw the role of libraries in a global context of promoting democracy around the world, particularly in Europe, where Soviet expansion replaced Nazism as the focus of concern among the Americans. The United States was now engaged, he said, in a global struggle in which “librarians must become active, not passive agents of the democratic process,” an idea completely in keeping with the mission of the *Amerikahäuser*, and put into practice through the Information Center libraries.<sup>159</sup>

### **From Control to Exchange**

By the end of the first year of occupation, the American policy of non-fraternization with the German population was an obvious failure. For evidence, the Americans had to look no further than the rate of sexually transmitted infections (STI) among their own troops.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, Allied health care workers were the first to warn of the negative consequences of American non-fraternization policies to the sexual health of U.S. soldiers. “There is no prospect whatsoever,” declared one despairing medical professional,

...of achieving success in the battle against V.D. through the seemingly easy course of automatically making sexual intercourse by V.D. sufferers, or the transmission of the disease, a criminal offence... Indeed, it is highly probable that it has tended to produce

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<sup>158</sup> Carleton B. Joeckel and Amy Winslow, 2.

<sup>159</sup> Archibald McLeish, “The Librarian and the Democratic Process,” *ALA Bulletin*, no. June (1940): 388; Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19; Sarah Ellen Graham, *Culture and Propaganda: The Progressive Origins of American Public Diplomacy, 1936-1953* (London, England; New York: Routledge, 2016), 63.

<sup>160</sup> John Willoughby, “The Sexual Behavior of American GIs During the Early Years of the Occupation of Germany,” *The Journal of Military History* 62, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 155–74.

the very evil which frustrates all workers in this field—viz, that of driving the disease underground.<sup>161</sup>

Rates among the American soldiers were so high that General Eisenhower bowed to the inevitable and quietly ended the policy linking a STI diagnosis to a violation of the non-fraternization policy, “except in cases of willful concealment of infection.”<sup>162</sup> It was clear that on a local level the Americans and Germans were creating bonds of affection between themselves; what U.S. occupation officials wanted was an enthusiastic emotional bond between influential Germans and American-style democracy, not the measured support some German intellectuals had for democracy during Weimar, the phenomenon of “rational republicanism (*Vernunftrepublikanismus*),” support for the former Republic that was based on reason, rather than actual attachment to democratic values. For the Americans, the tool of seduction was not the carton of cigarettes, or the access to sugar, or chocolate, or coffee, or reliable heat, electricity, and water, but the library. It was there that the Americans revealed their intentions for postwar German society, their own society serving as a model for the future German state, in which access to information and the unimpeded exchange of ideas were paramount.

Where once the U.S. emphasized the control of the German population, the newfound stress on engagement required the creation of permanent institutions such as the Information Centers to facilitate American contact with German elites.<sup>163</sup> The open stacks of the *America Haus* libraries provided such a space in which the Americans could reach the Germans where the latter were most comfortable, in the world of ideas. However, the Americans could not be too heavy-handed in their linkage of education to democracy, for “the guiding images for the

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<sup>161</sup> J. Reinisch, “Public Health Work in the American Occupation Zone,” in *The Perils of Peace: The Public Health Crisis in Occupied Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 195–96, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK293866/>.

<sup>162</sup> J. Reinisch, 196.

<sup>163</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 3.

majority of non-Communist Germans,” warned one American report, were “cultural and not political symbols.”<sup>164</sup> The library was an intersection of culture and politics; granting unfettered access to library books in the *Amerikahäuser* was an inherently political act on the part of the Americans, and, it was hoped, taken as a statement to the Germans about the U.S. commitment to free speech and access to knowledge. As we will see, those principles were put to the test when the libraries came under the scrutiny of Senator McCarthy.

Because of their overt political nature, the Information Center libraries, though informed by the same Progressive Era values that connected education to the growth of democracy, did not have much in common with American public libraries. Sources of funding, the process of book selection, and audience tastes, not to mention the buildings themselves, where the libraries shared space with exhibitions, displays, and performance spaces, separated the *Amerikahäuser* libraries from the local Carnegie library most Americans were familiar with.

Because of the unique mission of *Amerikahaus* libraries, that of presenting information about the “American way of life” to curious Germans as part of a political reeducation process, they had collections much narrower in scope than that of an American public library. The U.S. Information Centers were exactly that, centers where Germans could find credible information about the United States, and this propaganda mission was reflected in the books chosen for the *Amerikahäuser* collections. Bestsellers and beach books were not prominent in the offerings of an Information Center library, nor were books overly critical of American foreign policy.

However, one could pick up a copy of *Democracy in America*, by Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Road to Serfdom*, by Friedrich Hayek, and as soon as it came out, the German memoir *Child of*

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<sup>164</sup> Office of Military Government for Germany (U.S.) and Control Commission for Germany, “Information Control Review, Period Ending 30 August, 1947” (Information Control Division, Office of Military Government for Germany, 1947), RG 260, File 158, National Archives 2.

*the Revolution* by Wolfgang Leonhard, which chronicled his tortured relationship with the Soviet-style communism established in East Germany.<sup>165</sup>

The largest difference between an American public library and an Information Center library is the political context. A public library works within a political context of state and local government, a framework which determines everything from monetary funding to location choices. On the other hand, though the facilities were open to all, an Information Center library, funded by the U.S. government (generously, as we will see in the next chapter) as a tool of cultural diplomacy, an attempt at exerting “an effective democratic influence,” and overt organ of propaganda, attempted to draw patrons from German intellectual circles and from those in positions of cultural and political authority.<sup>166</sup> While American public libraries might conceive of themselves as “instruments of self-realization” for their patrons, the libraries in the Information Centers concerned themselves with the realization of the future German state, one modelled along American lines.<sup>167</sup> “The American public library collection that does not include a copy of *The Iliad*, or of Gibbons’ *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is probably a bad collection,” according to an American internal review document. However, in the case of an *Amerika Haus*, the situation was reversed:

It may be said that an America House library that *does* own these books is a bad collection, or, at least, that it is giving shelf space to books that are *meaningless to the program*. On the other hand, an American public library collection may still be excellent, even though it lacks such books as Jacobs’ *Amerikanische Umgangssprache* (American

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<sup>165</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000); Alexander Hamilton et al., *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1961); Friedrich A. von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents*, ed. Bruce Caldwell, vol. 2, *The Collected Works of F.A. Hayek* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, trans. C.M. Woodhouse (New York: Pluto Press, 1987).

<sup>166</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 32.

<sup>167</sup> Carleton B. Joeckel and Amy Winslow, *A National Plan For Public Library Service Prepared For The Committee On Postwar Planning Of The American Library Association*, 2.

Colloquialisms) or Gunther's *Inside U.S.A.*, while an America House library without these books is open to a charge of inadequacy.<sup>168</sup>

This comment also highlights the importance of reference materials to the library mission. As a literal "Information Center," whose patrons were often members of the professional class, librarians supplied reference materials on the United States that were unavailable elsewhere, as well as a reference service where patrons could fill out reference requests and receive their answers later. Most of the material for the reference libraries was furnished by the Department of State, under the auspices of the Library and Institutes Division of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs.<sup>169</sup>

### **Organization and Structure**

The libraries varied in terms of physical space and the size of their collections, depending on the size of the city where they resided. Though by 1953 most libraries were in urban centers, some had also been established in smaller, culturally significant cities such as Bayreuth, home of the annual Wagner festival. These smaller libraries held collections that ranged in size from 4,500 to 12,000 books and a limited selection of English-language newspapers and magazines, while the medium-sized libraries in cities such as Mannheim and Hannover had collections running from 13,000 to more than 20,000 books, and almost 600 newspapers and periodicals for patrons to choose from.<sup>170</sup> Finally, the residents of Frankfurt, where the Americans were headquartered, Stuttgart, and similar-sized cities enjoyed *Amerikahäuser* libraries whose collections had 20,600 or more books. Because of the unique status of Berlin, where the

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<sup>168</sup> United States Office of the US High Commissioner for Germany Management and Budget Division and United States Office of the US High Commissioner for Germany Office of Public Affairs, *The America Houses: A Study of the U.S. Information Center in Germany* (Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, 1953), 18.

<sup>169</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 22.

<sup>170</sup> Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, "Tenth Quarterly Report on Germany," 1952, RG 306, Box 212, National Archives 2.

Information Centers were visibly competing with the Soviet Palaces of Culture described in the next chapter, the former German capitol city had five branch libraries possessing a total collection of more than 51,000 books.<sup>171</sup> Adding nuance to these numbers is the fact that about 85 percent of the books on offer at an Information Center *Bibliothek* were in English, not German. There were two reasons for this elevation of the English language at the expense of the German: sensitivity toward German claims of American cultural hegemony, and the use of English as a filtering mechanism by which the “right” kind of German could be identified by the Americans for further attention.

First, in privileging English-language titles, the *Amerikahäuser* libraries tried to avoid competing with the German public libraries that were being established after the war. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Americans were acutely sensitive to German accusations of American *Zivilisation* running roughshod over German *Kultur*.<sup>172</sup> Second, and most importantly to the Americans, stocking the libraries with English-language titles was done, counterintuitively, in order to facilitate contact with West German elites. In this case, the term “elite” was elastic, and not necessarily defined by wealth, but by the potential for cultural influence. The Americans sought out those with “...a real desire to enlarge their knowledge and cultural experience” of the United States,” and familiarity with the English language (or a desire to learn it) was something of a filtering mechanism.<sup>173</sup> Within this context, it is not surprising that members of the professions, writers, journalists, and artists were popular targets for the Americans seeking to influence the course of occupation immediately after the war.

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<sup>171</sup> Division and Affairs, *The America Houses*, 20–22.

<sup>172</sup> Gordon Textor, “Uniform Operation of U.S. Information Centers,” December 7, 1948, RG 260, Box 320, National Archives 2.

<sup>173</sup> Textor.

When it came to selecting fiction titles, German visitors focused on the German-language titles, but tended to read non-fiction in English, favoring books on housing and architecture, trade unionism, psychology, political science, social science, medicine, and enjoyed brief histories and biographies. The privileging of English-language titles did not abate over time; in 1950, when the Americans added 265,556 new books to their libraries, of this number, only 72,775, or 27 percent, were in the German language. Though the majority of books in the *Amerikahäuser* would always be in English, over time U.S. officials would arrange for “worthwhile German translations” of American books, purchased in Switzerland, Sweden, and Holland.<sup>174</sup>

### **Book Selection**

Choosing the books for the *Amerikahäuser* was a tedious, time-consuming task that required patience and the successful navigation of several layers of U.S. occupation bureaucracy. To request an addition to a library collection, a local librarian first filled out a standard-size notecard for each title requested. On the notecard was the publication information, as well as an affidavit signed by the librarian certifying the book would be “appropriate” for the library in question.

The cards, with their affidavits, were then forwarded to the OMGUS Central Distribution Section in Munich, where the requests were discussed at the monthly meeting of the Book Selection Committee. The Committee, whose members were the Chief of the Central Distribution Section, a “field liaison librarian” representing the *Amerikahäuser* libraries, four members of the Library Committee, and a German member of the German book unit at Army headquarters, was the first level of approval. The book request then was forwarded to the

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<sup>174</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 21–23, 33; Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, “Tenth Quarterly Report on Germany.”

Information Center Division headquarters in Frankfurt, where another committee examined the requests and gave the final disposition the book requests. The entire process took from five to eight months, and reasons for rejecting a title were “given only to America House directors and at their specific request.”<sup>175</sup>

The seemingly innocuous slip of paper requesting a book, highlighted a central question asked by Information Center librarians and Congressmen alike: which books were appropriate for the libraries, and which, if any, were not, and if there were limits, how were the Americans going to reconcile those limits to their German patrons? The question of what was considered suitable material for the libraries was answered on the local level until the scrutiny of Senator McCarthy. Up to that point, the Americans had spent much time and effort in Germany trumpeting the freedoms enjoyed by their fellow countrymen, particularly the freedom of speech. Suddenly removing books from library shelves because their authors were deemed politically unreliable did nothing to support the American message in Germany but did much to discount it.

### **German Staff**

Though the Information Center libraries were inspired by U.S. Progressive Era thought, stocked with English-language books and almost always supervised by an American, most of the staff were German. The same counterpart funds that paid for the construction of the *Amerikahäuser* also paid for the West Germans working there, a phenomenon of government largesse discussed in length in the following chapter. By 1951, 830 German-speaking personnel were on the payroll, but as the author of one study pointed out, “too few of the German employees in key positions had first-hand knowledge of the United States,” a situation that was

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<sup>175</sup> Division and Affairs, *The America Houses*, 39–40.

somewhat alleviated by exchange programs run by the American Library Association.<sup>176</sup> The librarians, “selected from the top brackets of the better trained and better educated elements of the population,” typified the type of German the Americans were after, and the Americans hoped the cultural affinity the librarians shared with their patrons would overcome their lack of personal experience with the United States or with Americans.<sup>177</sup> To the degree that the libraries were popular, and indeed they were, this gap in personal experience did not seem to hinder the library experience for the patrons who interacted with the librarians. Notwithstanding, it is not hard to imagine the mutual bafflement between librarian and patron over American customs and mores.

Despite their newness, or perhaps in part because of it, the libraries were enormously popular with German audiences almost from the beginning. By 1950, seven out of every 100 Germans living in the American occupation zone, both urban and rural, patronized the *Amerikahäuser*, with visitors citing the library as the most popular feature, despite the fact that most of the titles were in English. A few years later, American officials estimated that fully 42 percent of staff time in the Information Centers was consumed by library functions.<sup>178</sup> What the numbers do not reflect is the gain in a sense of intellectual autonomy that the libraries provided their German patrons. They went from one extreme to another, from over a decade of intellectual privation to becoming enthusiastic library patrons, choosing the books they wanted for themselves, without an intermediary or justification. As one American report put it, the overall

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<sup>176</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 15.

<sup>177</sup> Pilgert, 16.

<sup>178</sup> Division and Affairs, 17; Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 24–27; Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, “Tenth Quarterly Report on Germany.” Division and Affairs, *The America Houses*, 17; Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 24–27; Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, “Tenth Quarterly Report on Germany.”

tone of the *Amerika Haus* libraries was less about “what do you want, and why,” and more about “what can I do to help you?” This in itself was a reflection of a cultural shift; the libraries were more than collections of books, they were also agents of societal change. However, not all the Germans the Americans were after lived in the cities; there was a sizable rural contingent as well. Through the use of bookmobiles (*Autobucherei*), the reach of the libraries was extended to a countryside otherwise shut out of what was nothing less than a national intellectual reformation.

After the war, according to the author of a State Department public affairs piece, Germans living in rural areas “could not go out to the world,” due to a lack of affordable transportation or employment opportunities, but through the support of the American occupation authorities the world would now come to them “on the wheels of the *Amerika Haus* bookmobile.”<sup>179</sup> This was a bit of hyperbole, what rural Germans were getting was not “the world,” but a selection of materials that highlighted American accomplishments in the arts and culture, such as American orchestras interpreting German classical music contributions, as well as access to reference works such as English-German dictionaries. The Bookmobiles held small book collections, periodicals, record albums, and display materials that often mirrored the larger exhibitions on display at the larger *Amerika Häuser*. Tellingly, Displaced Persons (DP’s) and refugees (*Fluchtlinge*) were not denied access to the bookmobiles in their circuits around the countryside, where they also stopped at internment camps.<sup>180</sup> This stood in contrast to the attitudes many American soldiers held toward the refugees, which at best was not charitable, and often openly hostile. General Patton, briefly the American Military Governor of Bavaria, was

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<sup>179</sup> “Amerika Haus- Natürlich!,” *Field Reporter*, 1953, 8.

<sup>180</sup> Konrad Hugo Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 207–10.

disgusted by the living conditions of the camps, and placed the blame squarely on the refugees, many of whom had recently been freed from the Nazi death camp apparatus. When ordered by General Eisenhower to improve conditions at one camp for Jewish DP's, Patton took his time in carrying out the order and confided in his diary, "If for Jews, why not Catholics, Mormons, etc.?"<sup>181</sup> The circulation of books to the refugee and DP community was not entirely altruistic behavior on the part of the Americans toward the profoundly less fortunate; there was a political dimension to the American largesse, as the stateless were considered by the State Department to be "the readiest raw materials for revolution and communism."<sup>182</sup> It appears that anti-communism took precedence over any personal revulsion *Autobücherei* staff might have felt toward their refugee and DP patrons, though to the credit of the Bookmobile drivers there was no evidence of any ill will, and the act of providing books and music was a humanitarian gesture, perhaps a small confirmation of a shared humanity between those who had so much and those who had nothing.

In addition to the bookmobiles, book and dramatic reading clubs centered around American literature and drama were established in the libraries, and they quickly became popular. The Americans thought it was important to present the Germans with "an opportunity to make themselves familiar with American literature," because "through fiction," the Americans believed, "a great deal of the American spirit is transmitted in an attractive and discerning manner."<sup>183</sup> Library staff answered myriad questions about American lifestyles, from "whether or not U.S. schools allow the teachers to spank their pupils," to use of cloth diapers among

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<sup>181</sup> Susan L. Carruthers, *The Good Occupation: American Soldiers and the Hazards of Peace* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016), 173.

<sup>182</sup> Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, "Tenth Quarterly Report on Germany."

<sup>183</sup> Office of Military Government for Germany (U.S.) Information Services Division, Information Centers and Exhibitions Branch, "Report on Amerika Haeuser in Germany," 1948, RG 59, Box 117, United States Information Agency Historical Collection, National Archives 2.

American mothers.<sup>184</sup> While the German response to the female library staff was often gendered, the librarians were praised for their professionalism, which was, according a patron writing in the pages of the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1949,

...one of the most attractive features of the *Amerika Haus*, for they were by no means 'Ami Girls,' elaborately made up and stalking around smoking 'Luckies,' but rather providing service to their patrons, always ready to help, who are on excellent terms with their regular visitors, but without showing too much familiarity.<sup>185</sup>

It appears to at least one patron of the *Amerika Haus* library that the professionalism of the library staff transcended his assumptions regarding their moral integrity. The popularity of the libraries was noted on both sides of the Atlantic. While the local reactions to American efforts at cultural outreach around the world varied, one reporter noted:

In all the reports received, hardly an ill word was uttered about any of the U.S.I.S. libraries. Wherever operated they seemed to stand in relation to foreign students, teachers and others with special interests as the films stood to the public in general.<sup>186</sup>

Those "foreign students, teachers, and others with special interests" were just the type the Americans were looking for. Despite, or perhaps because of, the popularity of the libraries, they had come to the notice of anti-communist crusader McCarthy, who saw in them another venue for his cause. He used the popularity of the distant libraries that few Americans would ever visit to stoke fears among some in the United States that the Information Centers were insufficiently rigorous in their anti-communist ideology, making them easy targets for communist subversion. American anti-communist hysteria came to Germany and found a home in the *Amerika Haus* libraries.

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<sup>184</sup> "Amerika Haus Heidelberg," *State Department Record*, 1950, 1.

<sup>185</sup> "Hospitable Amerikahaus."

<sup>186</sup> Russell Porter, "Propaganda Drive of U.S. Said to Vary in Effect Overseas," *The New York Times*, November 24, 1952.

## “Don’t Join the Book Burners”

June 14, 1953, marked Commencement Day at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. The weather was mild, and the temperature struggled to reach the 70-degree mark as the students fidgeted in their caps and gowns, waiting to receive their diplomas. But first, they had to sit through several speeches from the recipients of honorary degrees, among them the future Canadian Prime Minister, Lester Pearson, and more notably John J. McCloy, the American High Commissioner for Germany. Most eyes, however, were on President Eisenhower, sitting in his academic regalia next to the pine tree stump that traditionally serves as the Commencement lectern at Dartmouth. Seated behind Eisenhower was College librarian Richard Morin, and as the graduating class marched in, he was in the perfect spot to overhear a conversation between the President and Federal Appellate Judge Fred Proskauer, who was also receiving an honorary degree, and who was seated next to the President. According to Morin, Judge Proskauer “was disturbed by the withdrawal of books from American libraries in Germany on grounds of a disapproval of their contents or their authors.” Eisenhower seemed genuinely surprised by the news and initially disputed any notion of government censorship:

The President said he didn’t believe that this kind of censorship was going on because Jack McCloy had told him not so long ago that American libraries in Germany contained books which made numerous critical references to him (the President). The President seemed amused by the presence of books critical of him, and certainly there was nothing in his reference to them that suggested the slightest disapproval of their being available in libraries.<sup>187</sup>

Judge Proskauer politely contradicted the President, pointing to the removal of the book *The United States and Russia*, by Vera Micheles Dean, the head of research for the non-partisan Foreign Policy Association and a scholar Proskauer admired. Published in 1948, the book, with a

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<sup>187</sup> Richard C. Cahn, ““Don’t Join the Book Burners”,” *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*, 2016, <http://dartmouthalumnimagazine.com/articles/%E2%80%9Cdon%E2%80%99t-join-book-burners%E2%80%9D>.

preface written by the former Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, was a conventional, dispassionate examination of the historical forces that have influenced the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, in calling for peaceful coexistence rather than the dissolution of the Soviet Union, *The United States and Russia* must have been seen by the State Department as insufficiently anti-communist for distribution in the overseas Information Center libraries. Eisenhower seemed genuinely perplexed by what Proskauer was telling him. “But who is withdrawing the books?” Eisenhower asked. “The State Department,” the Judge replied, which McCloy confirmed. Eisenhower, his interest piqued, said he would be speaking elsewhere that day and might bring the subject up. For most people, that would be enough. But Judge Proskauer persisted, telling the President that if he was ever going to speak out against censorship, “the time to do it is now here at Dartmouth, in front of this library.”<sup>188</sup> Much to the surprise of Judge Proskauer and McCloy, the President accepted the challenge, and in only four sentences began a process that brought a curtain to McCarthyism. The Information Center libraries in Germany had inadvertently struck a blow for civil liberties in the United States.

After congratulating the graduates and thanking the College for inviting him to speak, Eisenhower addressed the audience briefly, with “courage” as his topic. Most of the speech was forgettable, but near the end, the President ad-libbed and got specific in his prescriptions to the new graduates. “Don’t join the book-burners,” Eisenhower urged them:

Don’t think you are going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they ever existed. Don’t be afraid to go in your library and read every book, as long as that document does not offend our own ideas of decency. That should be our only censorship.

Temperamentally averse to the less-salubrious aspects of political life, until then Eisenhower was reluctant to address the issue of Senator McCarthy and his strong-arm tactics, particularly as the

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<sup>188</sup> Richard C. Cahn.

two men belonged to the same party. However, it is possible that the persistence of Judge Proskauer and the information regarding the removal of books from German Information Center libraries was the tipping point for the President, as the remarks the President made that day were clearly intended to address the phenomenon of the Wisconsin Senator and his ambitions. In making his remarks, though he did not mention McCarthy by name, Eisenhower made criticism of the Senator acceptable, and by the same time next year McCarthy would be formally censored by his colleagues, his aide Cohn publicly fired, and his nemesis, Time Magazine, supplying a corporate officer to speak at Commencement at Dartmouth.

But when President Eisenhower spoke in New Hampshire, McCarthy was arguably at the high point of his brief political career, and his focus was now on the U.S. Information Center libraries in Europe. Germany, serving as a physical and ideological front-line in the war against Soviet Communism, came under special scrutiny, to the point that McCarthy sent his investigators Roy Cohn and David Schine on a whirlwind tour of the European Information Center libraries. While there, they interviewed employees about possible communist infiltration and subversion and made a great display of scrutinizing the ideological content of the library collections to make sure it was sufficiently anti-Communist. At the same time, before being asked, the State Department circled the institutional wagons and bowed to the prevailing political sentiment. Books from authors such as James Baldwin or Langston Hughes, who portrayed the unvarnished realities of life in the United States brilliantly, but unflatteringly, were put into storage. Works that seemingly had nothing to do with communism, such as the now-classic mystery novel *The Maltese Falcon*, were pulled from the shelves because of the political beliefs of the authors, not because the work itself advocated communism or class struggle. According to *The New Republic*, among the titles removed were a novel by Walter Duranty; the works of

Thomas Paine edited by Howard Fast; *Union Now*, by Clarence Streit; the two-part study of small-town life in Muncie, Indiana, *Middletown*; and *The Loyalty of Free Men* by Alan Barth.<sup>189</sup> The experience of McCarthy and the libraries was an enormous embarrassment to the United States, with U.S. actions contradicting the democratic principles the Americans had been preaching to the Germans since 1945, while at the same time proving to be a failure in professional statecraft, and “unwise as a measure to combat Communist propaganda.”<sup>190</sup>

On February 19, 1953, the State Department issued orders to the overseas libraries forbidding the use of materials produced by “Communists, fellow travelers, etcetera.”<sup>191</sup> As this guidance was vague and left to individual interpretation, the result was not surprising: confusion among State Department personnel and librarians alike all around the world. However, *The New Republic* took it to mean “...as referring to any author about whom derogatory information has been offered before a Congressional committee,” which, as it turned out, was pretty close to the truth.<sup>192</sup> Their works, while never actually burned, briefly disappeared from Information Center library shelves in Germany in the early 1950s, as American anti-communist hysteria was exported globally, via the State Department.

A week after the State Department directive to the libraries became public it was quietly rescinded; the original guidance, it appeared, was “based on erroneous interpretation of an office

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<sup>189</sup> The New Republic Staff, “The Horrible, Oppressive History of Book Burning in America,” *New Republic*, June 28, 1953, <https://newrepublic.com/article/119516/report-book-burning-under-huac-and-eisenhower>.

<sup>190</sup> “Protest to Dulles Over Books,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1953, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9500E6DC163FE53ABC4A53DFB5668388649EDE>.

<sup>191</sup> “Own Rule Puzzles Information Unit,” *The New York Times*, March 3, 1953, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9C06E6D71F3AE53ABC4B53DFB5668388649EDE>.

<sup>192</sup> The New Republic Staff, “The Horrible, Oppressive History of Book Burning in America,” *The New Republic*, June 28, 1953.

directive.”<sup>193</sup> The questions of exactly whose office and whose “erroneous interpretation” remained unanswered. Any opportunity for the issue being resolved quietly was removed when Senator McCarthy, in his capacity as Chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Permanent Investigations, inserted himself into the book selection policy for the overseas libraries, finding the guidelines too “pro-Communist” for his liking. McCarthy was not alone in his sentiments. Senator Karl Mundt (R-SD), who co-authored the Smith-Mundt Act that enabled U.S. soft-power programs such as the *Amerikahäuser* had misgivings about those in charge of book selection for the Information Center libraries. As was the case with McCarthy, Mundt too feared the State Department did not take the threat of communist infiltration seriously enough. In a Senate hearing on U.S. public diplomacy programs, Mundt alleged that there were books on the shelves of Information Center libraries that “enthusiastically applauded the Russian regime,” while advocating for the overthrow of government by force, though he was not specific about which books he was using for examples.<sup>194</sup> A colleague charged that the books in the libraries were “derogatory to the American system,” and “favorable to the system that prevails in Russia,” though again the books in question were never specified.<sup>195</sup> The final report of the Committee was clear: despite the lengthy book selection process described earlier in this chapter, patrons could find books supporting communism, broadly speaking, because the books were chosen by people who were color-blind to “anything red or pink.”<sup>196</sup> Chiming in, Senator McCarthy and the members of his Subcommittee determined there were 30,000 books by Communists and “fellow-travelers,” in the combined holdings of all the Information Center libraries around the world,

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<sup>193</sup> “Own Rule Puzzles Information Unit.”

<sup>194</sup> Senate Committee on Government Operations, 83rd Congress, 1st. Sess., “State Department Information Program,” 1953, 40.

<sup>195</sup> Senate Committee on Government Operations, 83rd Congress, 1st. Sess., 50.

<sup>196</sup> Senate Committee on Government Operations, 83rd Congress, 2nd Sess., S. Rept. 879, “State Department Information Centers Report,” 1953, 10.

though as with many of the figures McCarthy came up with, there was little hard evidence for his conclusions, nor was the methodology revealed by which he arrived at the figure of 30,000 books.<sup>197</sup>

The works under threat by the anti-communist activists ranged from the obvious targets—the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, to the works of historians, mostly identified with the Left, who challenged the dominant narrative on race in America such as Philip Foner, and the mysteries of Dashiell Hammett, a favorite author of President Eisenhower. Hammett had refused to testify against his peers while being deposed by the House Un-American Affairs Committee, an act that as *The New Republic* pointed out, virtually guaranteed removal from the shelves of the *Amerikahäuser*.<sup>198</sup> Until the arrival of Senator McCarthy, it appears that local libraries handled the question of which books were appropriate for the library at the local level. This *laissez-faire* approach was an unsatisfactory solution for the bi-partisan anti-communist faction within Congress.

### **“The Junketeering Gumshoes”: Cohn and Schine Inspect the Libraries**

The overseas library tour of Cohn and his friend David Schine, an unpaid consultant to the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations was dismissed by many in the Washington establishment as a stunt designed to keep Senator McCarthy in the headlines, and their actions did little to dispute that narrative. The two travelled from west to east, starting in London, then moving on to Paris, Bonn, Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich, Rome, Athens, Belgrade, and finally Vienna, often staying only a day or two in each city, not at the embassy, but at the finest hotels. With a travelling press corps and photographers following the two wherever they went, the

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<sup>197</sup> Senate Committee on Government Operations, 83rd Congress, 2nd Sess., S. Rept. 879, 12–13.

<sup>198</sup> The New Republic Staff, “The Horrible, Oppressive History of Book Burning in America.”

inspection tour took on a circus-like aspect, with Cohn at center of it. Unabashedly hungry for the spotlight, Roy Cohn was brilliant, but deeply flawed. The son of a New York Supreme Court Appellate Judge, Cohn graduated from Columbia University Law School at nineteen, and had to wait two years to take the bar exam. He landed on his feet after graduation, with his first job as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, a highly visible assignment that would usually go to an applicant with many more years of legal experience, not, as was the case with Cohn, an attorney who had just passed his bar exam. He cultivated relationships with the press as well as his superiors; he served as confidential assistant to the U.S. Attorney, then was assigned to work in the Internal Security Section of the Department of Justice, another job usually reserved for much more experienced attorneys. Through hard work and ambition, he insinuated himself into the Department of Justice to the point where he assisted in the prosecution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for spying on behalf of the Soviet Union. “Brash kid,” was “one of the more genteel descriptions” given to Cohn, according to a 1953 profile in *The New York Times*.<sup>199</sup> Cohn got his first anti-Communist experience while serving as an Assistant U.S. Attorney trying to ferret out alleged Communists from the United Nations, and along the way cultivated a relationship with powerful Democratic Senator Pat McCarran of Nevada. From there, at only age 25, Senator McCarthy appointed Cohn as Counsel for the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

The inspection tour of the European libraries by Cohn and Schine was quickly derided as a farce on both sides of the Atlantic. The two were often photographed in profile, looking pensively at books on the shelves, or turning magazine pages, apparently looking for signs of anti-Americanism. The mission itself was unclear. According to Cohn, “waste and

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<sup>199</sup> “Cohn, Veteran Investigator at 25, Will Aid McCarthy in Inquiries,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 1953.

mismanagement,” and the need to “pin down responsibility,” presumably for such mismanagement, were the reasons for the trip.<sup>200</sup> However, it quickly became apparent that shoring up the anti-communist ideology of the libraries took precedence over hunting for waste, and “mismanagement” was a euphemism for Information Center staff being insufficiently anti-communist. The two investigators were profiled during the trip by *Time Magazine*, which cast a skeptical eye on their tour of European capitals:

After twelve hours in Bonn, Cohn proved that he was indeed a fast worker. Already, he announced at a press conference, ‘we have some significant things to report.’ Asked for specifics, Cohn said portentously that there were not enough copies of the *American Legion Magazine* in U.S. Information libraries.<sup>201</sup>

Also damning, in the eyes of Cohn and Schine, was that the libraries contained such magazines as *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, and books by authors Agnes Smedley, Dashiell Hammett, and Anna Louis Strong. From the American perspective, each of these authors were problematic. Smedley, whose semi-autobiographical novel *Daughter of Earth* was her most famous work, had had been known to the U.S. government since her work on birth control with Margaret Sanger, her advocacy of Indian independence from Britain, and her work on behalf the intelligence agencies of both the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party. In her peripatetic existence, she was romantically involved with the Soviet spymaster Richard Sorge and her ashes are buried in a Shanghai cemetery reserved for communist revolutionaries.<sup>202</sup> Though not evident in his prose fiction, Dashiell Hammett did not hide his communist sympathies, going so far as to endure time in jail and professional blacklisting instead of giving up the names of his compatriots to a U.S. District Court. Anna Louise Strong was a pacifist during the First World War, as well as a member of the Seattle School Board and a supporter of the Industrial Workers

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<sup>200</sup> “Schnuffles and Flourishes,” *Time Magazine*, April 20, 1953.

<sup>201</sup> “Schnuffles and Flourishes.”

<sup>202</sup> Chalmers Johnson, “Again the Sorge Case,” *The New York Times*, October 11, 1964.

of the World (IWW). Her support of the IWW eventually led to a narrowly-lost recall of her seat on the School Board, and she began travelling to the Soviet Union, where she became a champion of Stalinism, and painted an altogether positive picture of Soviet life that defied historical experience, with her works *The Soviets Conquer Wheat: The Drama of Collective Farming*, and *The New Soviet Constitution: A Study in Socialist Democracy* being typical of her oeuvre.<sup>203</sup> With the exception of Hammett, these were not authors the Americans wanted in the libraries, because their work was stridently pro-communist, yet at the same time, through the Information Center libraries the U.S. trumpeted the American commitment to free speech and the exchange of ideas in civil discourse. By removing the books from the shelves, the Americans belied their stated commitment to free speech and took a “realist” approach to the situation, arguing that the preservation of a democratic state was more important than the preservation of democratic values.

For his part, Cohn related that “with us, TIME is a four-letter word.”<sup>204</sup> Inexplicably, Cohn and Schine did not make it to the *Amerika Haus* in Berlin, the centerpiece of State Department efforts in Germany, and a showcase for American cultural diplomacy. The two did, however, cause a stir when they arrived at the *Amerika Haus* in Frankfurt. Hans Tuch, the facility Director was there to greet the two, who were followed by a crowd of reporters. Cohn asked Tuch directly, without a so much as a greeting, where Tuch had “hidden the Communist authors,” the former director recalled. Upon telling Cohn that to the best of his knowledge, there were no Communist books in the library, Cohn asked to see the Dashiell Hammett books. Tuch took Cohn and Schine to shelf where *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Thin Man* resided. “He turned

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<sup>203</sup> Anna Louise Strong, *The Soviets Conquer Wheat; the Drama of Collective Farming* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1931); Anna Louise Strong, *The New Soviet Constitution: A Study in Socialist Democracy* (Henry Holt and Company, 1937).

<sup>204</sup> “Schnuffles and Flourishes.”

to the reporters and announced triumphantly that this was proof that there were indeed Communists represented in the American library.”<sup>205</sup> As Tuch recollected the scene,

We proceeded to the periodical section, and Mr. Cohn asked me where the anti-Communist magazines were. I pointed out those that I considered anti-Communist, showing him the Jesuit periodical *America*, *Business Week* and others, including *Time* and *Newsweek*. He dismissed *Time* by saying that the magazine was a swear word to him. He asked, did we have the American Legion Monthly? When I said no, he countered that we obviously didn’t have anti-Communist magazines.<sup>206</sup>

The trip ultimately proved very little, though it did speed up the resignation of Theodore Kagan, the Deputy Public Affairs officer at the U.S. High Commission in Germany, who on his way out gave Cohn and Schine the soubriquet of “junketeering gumshoes,” which stuck to the two on their trip across Europe.<sup>207</sup> The end result of the trip was the finding that “many persons working in the Information Service were “doing a sound, efficient and effective anti-Communist job.”<sup>208</sup>

### **Disappearing Books**

There were indeed Communist works in overseas libraries, because the State Department wanted, in the words of William Benton, former Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, “a balanced approach” when it came to Communist materials, in which readers could draw their own conclusions about capitalism and communism. As far as the image of America on display at the *Amerikahäuser*, the existing policy was animated by the belief that the best picture of the United States for foreign consumption was one that incorporated “the whole and sometimes controversial range of American thought.”<sup>209</sup> These nuances were lost on McCarthy and his

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<sup>205</sup> “Roy Cohn’s Descent on the Libraries of Europe,” *The New York Times*, August 17, 1986.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> “Roy Cohn’s Descent on the Libraries of Europe.”

<sup>208</sup> “Cohn and Schine Return,” *The New York Times*, April 22, 1953.

<sup>209</sup> Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1997), 479; William Benton, “The Selection of Books, Periodicals and Documents for Libraries Overseas,” 1947, Box 376, William Benton Papers, University of Chicago Library Special Collections.

supporters. By the spring of 1953, books by “controversial authors” began disappearing from *Amerikahäuser* library shelves. Works on race in America by Marxist scholars such as Herbert Aptheker were removed, as was *The Thin Man*, by Dashiell Hammett. Evidence was beginning to mount of a purge, and rumors of “book-burnings” were circulating. *The New Republic* put the President on notice about what was happening in the libraries, declaring that “a match bearing the brand name of Eisenhower and Dulles” was used to light a metaphorical bonfire of books. “A score of books were removed from all Amerika Haus libraries in Berlin,” the staff of the magazine noted, including the poems of Langston Hughes, as well Howard Fast’s edition of the works of Tom Paine.<sup>210</sup>

Judging by his reaction at the Dartmouth Commencement, Eisenhower was unaware of what was going on. Regardless, by June 1953, “several hundred books from more than forty authors” had been removed from overseas libraries, apparently at the instruction of a new memorandum.<sup>211</sup> According to the State Department the original memorandum banning “undesirable” books was no longer valid, though it served as the basis for the new list of books to be removed, or in the language of the State Department, the list of banned books was “not directly related to the original policy directive, but the listing nevertheless would serve here as a guide to books that should be taken from present library stocks.”<sup>212</sup> The removal of the books drew harsh criticism, which focused for the most part on charges of hypocrisy on the part of the U.S. government. The authors of a *New York Times* editorial went so far as to argue that it would have been “...far better that the U.S. have no libraries abroad at all than that we have libraries

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<sup>210</sup> The New Republic Staff, “The Horrible, Oppressive History of Book Burning in America.”

<sup>211</sup> “New Hearings Set on ‘Red’ Book Issue,” *The New York Times*, June 24, 1953.

<sup>212</sup> “U.S. to Inventory Overseas Libraries,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1953, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9901E1DF173DE23BBC4C53DFB1668388649EDE>.

that mock the concepts of freedom and culture and democracy for which we as a nation stand."<sup>213</sup> These were, of course, the same values the Americans had spent considerable time, effort, and money trying to convince postwar Germans to adopt. The next month, a clearly chagrined State Department attempted to justify the book removals by falling back on policy; it took great pains to draw a distinction between a public library and the library in an *Amerika Haus*, which the State Department considered a “library of special purpose,” comparable to medical or legal libraries.<sup>214</sup> In doing so the U.S. took a position that was technically correct. The library inside an Information Center was indeed a highly specialized library, one that was dedicated solely to the history and culture of the United States. It was not a public library, nor did it have the mission of a public library. Unfortunately for the Americans, their advocacy of free speech made any sort of book removal, no matter how unsuitable the material might be, appear to be an act of hypocrisy on the part of the United States.

The problem for the State Department was two-pronged, and because they were grounded in the realm of ideology, were hard to combat. The Information Center libraries were guided by the Progressive Era values that equated education with democracy and privileged the free flow of information. Even if the *Amerikahäuser* was not a typical library, ideological litmus tests went against the grain of accepted library training and practice. Coupled with that was the reality that in Germany, the U.S. had put freedom of speech in the front and center of the political liturgy celebrated at the American temple to democracy, the *Amerika Haus*. The criticism the Americans received over the book removals at the Information Centers was proportionate to the amount of

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<sup>213</sup> “Books Not for Burning,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 1953, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9404EED91F3DE03ABC4852DFB1668388649EDE>.

<sup>214</sup> Walter H. Waggoner, “Dulles’ Aides Cite ‘Mission’ on Books,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 1953.

emphasis the Americans attached to the First Amendment at the *Amerikahäuser* themselves. There, a visitor would see posters celebrating free speech and watch movies about the First Amendment in American life. The patron had a reasonable expectation that this American devotion to free speech could be experienced first-hand in the library, whose knowledge was presumably free to all. At the same time, the State Department ordered a complete inventory of the books in the 189 overseas libraries around the world, though it claimed it had no connection to the removal of “Communist, pro-Communist, and certain ‘controversial’ authors” from the library shelves.<sup>215</sup>

By July 1953, the State Department changed course again. This time it produced an internal master list of approximately 300 books that were considered unacceptable, and quietly returned some of the previously removed books. The State Department was quick to note that the number 300 referred to volumes, not authors, but declined to make the list available to the public. Some authors had recourse when it was alleged their works had been banned, but the availability of appeal was apparently based on personal relationships, not legal standing. Journalist and proponent of a European Union, Clarence K. Streit, had a book promoting a league of European democracies, *Union Now*, when he heard had made the list, he wrote to his friend, Secretary of State Dulles. The Secretary apologized to Streit, not for the practice of banning of books from the Information Center libraries, but for banning his book by mistake:

I have checked with Dr. Robert L. Johnson, director of the International Information Administration, who assures me that no books from the overseas libraries were ordered removed except those by sixteen authors who were either known Communists or about whom there was grave public doubt. I regret that mention of removal of your books in connection with these has caused you embarrassment.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> “U.S. to Inventory Overseas Libraries,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1953.

<sup>216</sup> “Some Banned Books Are Restored To Information Libraries Abroad,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 1953.

There was no record of how Streit responded, but the momentum of public opinion began to shift against Senator McCarthy. President Eisenhower had obliquely referred to McCarthy in his address at Dartmouth, but in doing so he made it acceptable for others to follow suit, and with more venom. McCarthy sealed his fate when a member of his staff attacked the Protestant clergy, who were, he claimed, even more left-leaning than college professors.

J.B. Matthews, Staff Director for the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation, and personally hired by Senator McCarthy, claimed that the Protestant clergy was a bastion of Communist support, and that “clergymen outnumber professors two to one in supporting the Communist-front apparatus of the Kremlin conspiracy.”<sup>217</sup> Matthews, who up to this point had made his name linking ten-year old Shirley Temple to international Communism for sending wartime Christmas greetings to the readers of the French newspaper *Ce Soir*, had been a member of a cottage industry of anti-communist crusaders, but now he was being paid with taxpayer money, and with it came scrutiny. Eisenhower was furious with Matthews, and by extension, McCarthy. “Such attacks portray contempt for the principles of freedom and decency,” Eisenhower wrote to the National Conference of Christians and Jews, which had protested the inflammatory rhetoric of Matthews.<sup>218</sup> For Eisenhower, this was thundering rhetoric.

McCarthy was losing steam in his “investigations,” and those in charge of the *Amerika Haus* libraries sensed it. Robert L. Johnson, who oversaw the information programs of the State Department was, like Theodore Kagan, retiring from government service and saw his opportunity to speak his mind. It was “one of the tragic ironies of our time,” Johnson said in a thinly veiled reference to Senator McCarthy, “that some of those who are in the forefront of the fight against Communism are among those who are damaging the action programs that do battle

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<sup>217</sup> J.B. Matthews, “Reds and Our Churches,” *The American Mercury*, 1953, 3.

<sup>218</sup> C. P. Trussell, “Eisenhower Scores Attack on Clergy,” *The New York Times*, July 10, 1953.

against it.”<sup>219</sup> Foremost among those “action programs” was the *Amerikahäuser*. Sensing a change in the political winds, Johnson and the State Department altered course slightly, this time towards a goal of banning books based on content, not on authorship.

The policy was inadvertently absurdist. From this point onwards, the works of Marx and Engels, for example, would be excluded from *Amerikahäuser* library shelves not because they were written by men named Marx and Engels, but because their work advocated the overthrow of capitalism. On the other hand, the work of Dashiell Hammett returned to the shelves. Because Nick and Nora Charles, the protagonists of *The Thin Man*, were not seeking to become the vanguard of the industrial proletariat (hardly, they lived in a Manhattan art deco apartment with an Airedale), they could return to circulation, even though the author of their story was a committed member of the American Left who served time in prison for not testifying against his associates. A new directive was released to the overseas libraries in which the content of the book, and not the author, was the prime consideration for inclusion in the libraries, and those who had availed themselves of the Fifth Amendment could have their books restored if they passed muster.<sup>220</sup> A year earlier, Johnson would not have dared to challenge Senator McCarthy, or issue such a sweeping directive, but it was an indication of changing sentiment, and not just because he was retiring from government service and wanted to exact a measure of revenge against Senator McCarthy.

The downfall of McCarthy was swift. Within a year, public sentiment turned against the Senator, who would be formally censured by his Senate peers for his claims of communist

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<sup>219</sup> Walter H. Waggoner, “Johnson Deplores Program’s Critics,” *The New York Times*, July 16, 1953.

<sup>220</sup> “New McCarthy Aide Attacked on Books,” *The New York Times*, July 18, 1953, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9F07E7D7143EE53BBC4052DFB1668388649EDE>.

subversion of the American military, amid allegations that his trusted aide Roy Cohn had pressured the Army to give preferential treatment to David Schine, who had accompanied Cohn on his “inspection tour” of Information Center libraries. Cohn was publicly fired, and McCarthy died, his hepatitis aggravated by heavy drinking.

Even if we examine the *Amerikahäuser* libraries in the most reductive fashion, as lending libraries, they still remain a unique American effort at public diplomacy in postwar Germany. In both design and practice, the libraries were distinctive principally because they were dedicated solely to the explanation of the United States to a German audience. But they also stood out from their German counterparts for what would appear to be the most prosaic of reasons, by allowing German patrons the freedom to roam the stacks and choose the books they want (albeit from topics focusing on the American history and culture). It was this policy, taken for granted by most Americans, that was possibly the most demonstrative example of the First Amendment in American life that the U.S. could come up with in Germany. In doing so, they invested a great deal of intellectual capital into the enterprise by linking education to the growth of political democracy, a principle straight out of *Democracy and Education* by John Dewey, and the spirit that animated library science after the Second World War. However, this American commitment to free speech had limits in occupied Germany, limits that briefly tarnished the reputation of the libraries with those Germans whom the Americans most wanted to cultivate relationships with.

The Germans got a taste of the anti-communist “Red Scare” of the 1940s and 1950s when the popularity of the libraries made them a convenient vehicle for the crusading Senator Joseph McCarthy. The Senator, who claimed to have exposed communist infiltration of the Information Center libraries, possibly resulting from the machinations of communist sympathizers within the libraries themselves, sent his two investigators, Roy Cohn and David Schine, on a tour of the

libraries to find out for themselves the extent of the supposed problem. The two found nothing except a shortage of publications from the American Legion and occasionally, a copy of *The Maltese Falcon*. There weren't many "questionable" titles to begin with, because the State Department, sensing a rightward turn, preemptively purged library shelves of books by "controversial" authors. No books were burned, but the Department only restored the purged books after the tide had turned against the excesses of Senator McCarthy and his anti-Communist policies. Even then, while most books were returned to the shelves of the *Amerikahäuser* libraries, some books would not be. Bans remained, but based on the content, not on the name of the author. The mystery novels of Dashiell Hammett were returned to the shelves of the *Amerikahäuser*, but the collected works of Marx and Engels was not. The libraries would hold no books advocating the violent overthrow of the government or expressing overt communist sympathies. The embarrassment caused by McCarthy and his aides to the reputation of the United States called into question the depth of the American commitment to the constitutional principles it avowedly subscribed to.

The libraries were essential tools in developing closer relationships between American occupation officials and the German elites whose support the U.S. believed was absolutely necessary for the growth of democracy in postwar Germany. Though open to all, the libraries in particular were a specialized tool to reach a specialized audience of college students, journalists, and members of the professions who had an interest in the United States. Staffed by Germans who had some experience of American society and stocked mostly with books in English, the libraries drew a self-selecting patronage who had a more than above-average interest in American society. More than a meeting place for Germans and Americans, or an example of the American commitment to free speech and the exchange of knowledge, the *Amerikahäuser*

libraries were a metaphor for the changing relationship between the United States and the Germans living in the American occupation zone and nascent Federal Republic. The open shelves of the libraries were a tacit admission of the failure of the policies of control that undergirded the early occupation statutes, particularly *JCS 1067*. The Americans were quick to realize the limitations of *JCS 1067* and that the atmosphere of control that permeated relations between Americans and Germans was both unrealistic in that many occupation soldiers and civilian personnel blatantly ignored the non-fraternization statutes in the first place. The black market thrived until currency reform in 1948, and the high number of soldiers with sexually transmitted infections removed any doubt that the policy of control was a failure. Furthermore, if the Americans wanted democracy and economic opportunities in postwar Germany then a transatlantic partnership based on exchange, not American anger and condescension, was the only viable path forward. In this sense, the libraries were an admission of American postwar failure as well as expressions of hope for the American-German future.

In addition to their popularity, the libraries in the *Amerikahäuser* were often the most visible feature of the *Amerikahäuser* as well, their floor to ceiling windows revealing the shelves of books available for perusal, as well as suites of modern furniture that invited the visitor to sit down (during the Vietnam War, the glass would have an almost magnetic attraction to rocks and eggs). This was not an accident. An *Amerika Haus* was something of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a “total work of art” inside and out, from the design and construction to the furniture and furnishings, all of it trying to explain the United States to a suspicious German public distrustful of propaganda, and leery of government in general. When it came time to build the Information Centers in Germany, the Americans chose a design vocabulary they knew would resonate with their German audience: architectural modernism. In the next chapter, we will see how the

Americans came to the land of the Bauhaus and replanted the modernist flag in the Information Centers. In creating the *Amerikahäuser*, the Americans placed themselves at a metaphorical crossroads of politics and culture; in incorporating architectural modernism, a movement whose origins lied in German-speaking Europe, the Americans had made that melding of politics and culture a concrete achievement.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE U.S. INFORMATION CENTERS AND ARCHITECTURAL MODERNISM

No country can exercise political world leadership without exercising a degree of cultural leadership as well. Whether consciously or not, the U.S. government has now made U.S. architecture a vehicle of our cultural leadership.<sup>221</sup>

The United States Government is making modern American architecture one of its most convincing demonstrations of the vitality of American culture.<sup>222</sup>

Considering the assaults on civil liberties committed by Senator McCarthy and his followers, the “red” (communist) and lavender (homosexual) “scares” roiling the domestic American politics of the late 1940s and early 1950s, it is easy to characterize the period as one in which the politics of personal destruction were in ascendance.<sup>223</sup> However, a closer look at the period reveals that this was also a time of political restoration, and the restoration of people, ideas, and movements that had taken a forced hiatus under National Socialism. The early years of occupation saw reversals of fortune on both sides of the Atlantic that were as absurd as they were tragic; within two years of the acceptance of the German surrender the United States and the Soviet Union increasingly saw each other as the enemy, while both states actively rehabilitated the reputations of former Nazis who had skills that Washington, Bonn, Moscow, Berlin, or the local city council in a rural German town needed. The latter was the case in 1948 when the “very Nazified” community of Neustadt elected four former Nazis to the city council.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> “U.S. Architecture Abroad,” *Architectural Forum*, 1953, 4.

<sup>222</sup> “Architecture for the State Department,” *Arts and Architecture* 70 (November 1953): 16.

<sup>223</sup> “Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government Interim Report Submitted to the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments by Its Subcommittee on Investigations Pursuant to S. Res. 280 (81st Congress)” (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1950).

<sup>224</sup> Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30.

This *ad hoc* rehabilitation was underway while the war was still underway, as the Allies closed in on Berlin from the east and west in 1945. The race was on, but not just to reach the Reichstag and plant the flag at the symbolic seat of German power. The Allies were engaged in all-out effort against the Soviet Union to secure those Germans with the skills needed to rebuild not just a future German state, but to make postwar contributions to the nation-states of the Allies as well. Without a doubt, one of the most egregious examples of this Allied largesse was the German missile scientist Wernher von Braun, a wartime SS Colonel who, despite the deaths of the slave laborers assigned to his facilities at Peenemünde was transformed into the handsome “shirtsleeved, tousled, and bright-eyed” von Braun of Cold War legend, and central to the success of the American space program.<sup>225</sup>

However, political rehabilitation was not reserved solely for individuals after the war; within the larger context of the battle for the political loyalties of the German people, ideas, and the movements they spawned were also repurposed and put to use against ideological opponents. Modernist architecture is one example. It offered the Americans the opportunity to place the postwar prosperity-fueled material culture of the United States within a larger conversation about the virtues of democracy. In the libraries, the Americans linked democracy to education, but democracy was also intimately connected with economic consumption. Even if the West German government took an aggressive position in regulating markets after the war, “more than lip service” was paid to issues of consumer sovereignty, as Jan Logemann argued.<sup>226</sup> The institution of the *Amerika Haus* served as a spectacular example of this mixing of consumption and democracy, conflating the relationship between the two almost to the point of

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<sup>225</sup> “SPACE: Reach for the Stars,” *Time*, February 17, 1958, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,862899,00.html>.

<sup>226</sup> Jan L. Logemann, *Trams or Tailfins? Public and Private Prosperity in Postwar West Germany and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 6.

indistinguishability. And the Information Centers were spectacular, at least in terms of the ambition and commitment on the part of the Americans, who attempted to create buildings representing the virtues of U.S.-style democracy rigorously tied to a modernist aesthetic both inside and out.

The Cold War in Germany both shaped material culture and imbued it with political meaning, seemingly regardless of how humble the object.<sup>227</sup> In this context, buildings and their furnishings were not just enclosed spaces in which to live and work, but they could also be a form of political speech under the right circumstances, with ideas regarding aesthetics and design framed by both the Americans and the Soviets as democratic or anti-democratic. The Americans deployed modernist design specifically to win the support of a captive German population living under occupation, in part by appealing to the Germanic origins of the movement and co-opting Germanic modernist ideals, particularly the Bauhaus design school, consciously associating them with democratic self-rule as practiced by the United States. Through the institution of the *Amerika Haus*, the Americans demonstrated that nothing was immune from the touch of the Cold War, whether it was the design of a building, or the furniture within it.

The period covered in this survey, 1945-1953, was in some ways the peak of the Information Center program in Germany. The State Department had almost carte blanche to purchase land, construct, and furnish buildings almost at will, and through the financial windfall of wartime foreign credits, with exquisite materials. After the 1952 elections in the United States, the Republican Congress that swept into power also swept away a large portion of the funding for the Information Centers, redistributing it to the Defense Department during the Korean War. Until then, the part of the State Department that dealt with physical property, the Foreign

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<sup>227</sup> Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 109.

Building Operations (FBO) division, wanted for very little, and it showed in the details of the *Amerikahäuser*.

This chapter examines the Information Centers as physical and symbolic objects, whose architecture, construction, furnishings, and exhibitions were powerful metaphors for the material and aesthetic sophistication of the United States, carefully calibrated to impress, but not alienate, a German public that was in a period of prolonged privation and resentful of occupation. Designers made a conscious effort to make the Information Centers a veritable “vision of modernity” inside and out, which, in the early years of occupation, they often were in comparison to the areas surrounding them. Despite the work of the women tasked with clearing the wreckage in the cities, the celebrated *Trümmerfrauen*, in the early years of occupation a gleaming *Amerika Haus* frequently stood in sharp relief against neighboring properties.<sup>228</sup> This is not to say the Americans were always successful in projecting U.S. economic largesse and cultural pretensions in ways always appreciated by German patrons. As we saw in the exhibition of American postwar residential housing that toured the Information Centers, *So Wohnt Amerika* (How America Lives), the Americans often came off as tone deaf to their audiences, and insensitive to the realities of West German life.

Exploring the *Amerikahäuser* within the context of postwar modernist architecture and design deepens our understanding of the institution by allowing us to see the buildings scattered across the western half of Germany as a medium for an American message that, as we will see, tied the idea of modern architecture to the German adoption of democratic institutions and American-style consumption practices. Furthermore, in their design and construction, the Information Centers often co-opted the German modernist tradition, many of whose practitioners

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<sup>228</sup> Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

fled National Socialism and relocated to the United States. In doing so, they helped solidify the association between modernist design and American democracy, which, the Americans argued, allowed for the freedom of expression necessary to pursue creative vision.

Particularly when it came to the divided city of Berlin, whose public and private spaces were increasingly coopted in the ideological battle for the “hearts and minds” of the former capitol, the Americans actively encouraged German patrons to compare what they saw in the *Amerikahäuser* to the design culture of the German Democratic Republic next door. There, architects and product designers worked under ideological restrictions not encountered in the West, with aesthetic choices made by designers and architects inevitably framed as inherently political acts by the dominant Socialist Unity Party (SED). As was the case with other creative professions in East Germany, there were personal and professional consequences for backing the wrong “side” in the ideological debates stirred by American and West German practices as displayed in an *Amerikahaus*. The “socialist modern” style popularly associated with architecture in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) such as the television tower in Alexanderplatz and the former Palace of the Republic, both in the center of Berlin, and projects further afield such as the *Pragerstraße* complex in Dresden, came later in the life of that country; in 1949, the GDR openly disavowed modernist trends in architecture, deriding them as “academic formalism,” detached from the true wants and needs of the postwar German public.<sup>229</sup> Those designers and architects caught up in the dragnet against “formalism” often found themselves completely shut out of their careers for years before being allowed to reenter their professions, or were

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<sup>229</sup> Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, & Identity in Divided Berlin*, Culture, Politics, and the Built Environment (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 31–32; Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

transferred to remote areas of the Democratic Republic where they would have no effect on policy.

One area the United States could compete and win against the Soviet Union, or in the context of the *Amerikahäuser*, East Germany, was in the provision of consumer goods, even if after the war Germans could not yet afford to buy them. In terms of pent-up consumer demand, East Germany was not that different from West Germany, or for that matter, the United States; the combination of the Great Depression and the Second World War had citizens of all three states not just wanting, but expecting, a plethora of consumer goods after the conversion to peacetime economies. Consequently, the material advantage enjoyed by the United States in satisfying consumer appetites for material goods demanded a highly visible statement from the American government, and it took full advantage of the opportunity. In this competitive spirit, the Information Centers, particularly the one across the street from Zoo Station in Berlin, gave Germans the opportunity to acquaint themselves first-hand with the “best” of American design, construction techniques, furnishings, and other consumer goods, with the Americans hoping the exposure would invite comparisons with what was on offer in the German Democratic Republic.

Conceptually, notions of “reconstruction” permeated virtually every aspect of German social life immediately after the Second World War. German society was shot through with ideas surrounding reconstruction, whether the focus of the restoration was on buildings and infrastructure, or familial relationships.<sup>230</sup> In adopting architectural modernism, the U.S. consciously placed itself apart from communist rivals, who had internal divisions among

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<sup>230</sup> Jeffrey Diefendorf, “The New City: German Urban Planning and the Zero Hour,” in *Stunde Null: The End and the Beginning Fifty Years Ago*, ed. Geoffrey Giles (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1997), 89; Pugh, *Architecture, Politics & Identity*, 31.

themselves regarding modernism as an aesthetic movement.<sup>231</sup> Both medium and message, Information Centers were both a reinforcement to the German modernist architectural tradition as expressed through the Bauhaus, a challenge to German architects and designers to adopt new ways of building and new approaches to materials and furnishings, they also reinforced the already-existing message that German architects and designers were themselves agents in the moral rehabilitation of the German state.

### **The Construction Boom**

The Germans were not the only ones lacking space after the war. American occupation forces, both military and civilian, found themselves in the paradoxical situation of occupying a sizable Central European country, yet lacking the physical space in which to comfortably live and work, a situation that greatly complicated the relationship between occupier and occupied. The first Americans stationed in Germany took to heart their instruction in JCS 1067, the document first governing American occupation forces, to treat the Germans not as “a liberated people,” but instead as “a defeated enemy nation,” and requisitioned German public and private property for housing and other purposes.<sup>232</sup> For the Americans stationed in German cities in the

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<sup>231</sup> The literature examining the connections between the Cold War and modernist architecture is vast; Paul Betts, “The Bauhaus as Cold-War Legend: West German Modernism Revisited,” *German Politics and Society* 14, no. 2 (1996): 75–100; Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*; Greg Castillo, “Domesticating the Cold War: Household Consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 261–88; Greg Castillo, “Marshall Plan Modernism in Divided Germany,” in *Cold War Modern* (London: V & A Publishing, 2008), 66–72; Greg Castillo, *Cold War On the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Marcus Colla, “Prussian Palimpsests: Historic Architecture and Urban Spaces in East Germany, 1945–1961,” *Central European History* 50, no. 02 (June 2017): 184–217; Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, & Identity in Divided Berlin*; Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).

<sup>232</sup> “JCS 1067,” 1.

first few years after the war, the life of an occupier was luxurious, but ultimately untenable; “It was a super-Westchester existence” recalled an observer, the Americans exhibiting a “tactlessness in the highest degree” that, given the collective privation the Germans faced, provoked active resentment.<sup>233</sup> It quickly became clear to the Americans that if they had plans for a long-term presence in Germany, the Allied requisition of German property could not be an ongoing policy. At the same time, the Americans, as a sign of commitment to a democratic Germany, wanted to expand the already-sizeable pre-war diplomatic presence of the U.S. in the country. Officials with the State Department responded by going on a global spending spree, buying some of the most valuable property in the world and building modernist edifices on it. In this context, the expensive transatlantic undertaking of constructing the network of *Amerikahäuser* across Germany was just a part of a postwar expansion in American diplomatic facilities across virtually every continent on Earth, minus Antarctica.

Few things are more illustrative of the newfound American engagement with the world after the Second World War than the dramatic rise in the number of American diplomatic facilities designed and built between 1946 and 1953. Before the war, the Americans had consulates in Bremen, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Munich, Stuttgart, Breslau, and Dresden. As evidence of the importance of Germany to American plans for the postwar diplomatic order, the U.S. committed to replacing all those facilities, plus Düsseldorf, including housing. Arguably more indicative of the centrality of a friendly Germany to postwar American foreign relations was that in addition to reopening the consulates, new *Amerikahäuser* were built in Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Munich, and Stuttgart as well, the number peaking in the mid-

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<sup>233</sup> C. L. Sulzberger, *A Long Row of Candles; Memoirs and Diaries, 1934-1954* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 456.

1950s.<sup>234</sup> Though ambitious, the expansion of the *Amerikahäuser* and other facilities in Germany was only a part of the unprecedented increase in the construction of U.S. diplomatic construction around the world after the Second World War, facilitated by a confluence of circumstances: congressional generosity; the enormous debt owed to the United States by wartime allies; and an almost complete lack of oversight on the part of Congress or the White House.

Frederick Larkin, the State Department official who after the war had the responsibility for the construction and maintenance of American diplomatic facilities around the world, was also responsible for how the much-needed buildings were financed. Larkin not only convinced Congress to allow the State Department to embark upon an enormous and unprecedented building program, he also found a way to pay for it that managed to simultaneously satisfy fiscal concerns, improve American foreign relations, and operate with a minimum of scrutiny until the mid-1950s. Larkin did it by persuading Congress to allow the State Department to tap the vast amount of credits owed the United States by the Allies from lend-lease agreements, surplus property, and the Marshall Plan.<sup>235</sup> The amount of money extended to the State Department was astounding, but the time frame in which to spend it was even more so: the Department had five years to spend \$125 million on construction, with an additional \$15 million to be spent over the span of twelve years. Accounting for inflation, the total given to the State Department to spend on facilities comes to almost \$17 billion today.<sup>236</sup> However, this was not the last time the Department of State enjoyed such generosity during this period. Through the extension of an

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<sup>234</sup> Henry Pilgert, *The History of the Development of Information Services through Information Centers and Documentary Films* (Historical Division, Office of the Executive Secretary, Office of the U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, 1951), 76–78; Jane C. Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies*, 1st ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 89.

<sup>235</sup> Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 49.

<sup>236</sup> “CPI Inflation Calculator,” accessed September 20, 2016, [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm); Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 48.

additional \$90 million in 1952, the Foreign Buildings Operations division of the State Department authorized the construction of more than 80 office buildings, 245 residences for foreign service personnel, and 14 diplomatic buildings such as embassies and consulates.<sup>237</sup> In congressional testimony, State Department officials stressed that money spent in this fashion provided for “a maximum recovery of foreign credits owed to the United States,” while turning “substantial local currency credits into tangible and valuable assets.”<sup>238</sup> Not only did the use of these funds “enable our allies to discharge some of their obligations without touching their limited hard-currency reserves.”<sup>239</sup> Using foreign credits to pay for construction and furnishings also allowed for the Department to spend virtually whatever it wanted with little to no Congressional oversight. While the accounts the State Department drew against were monies ultimately *owed* U.S. taxpayers by foreign states, they were not filled with money generated by American tax revenue in the first place. The result was that barring fraud, waste, or abuse, Congress had almost no interest in how occupation officials and the State Department spent the money. This allowed the head of the FBO, Frederick Larkin, and his protégé and successor, Leland King, to travel the globe purchasing real estate for *Amerikahäuser*, consulates, and embassies by accessing the hundreds of millions in funds owed the United States by ally and enemy alike. Operating with almost complete autonomy within the State Department, Larkin and King travelled frequently, and when overseas, they operated more like proconsuls on the periphery of a distant empire than cultural ambassadors promoting understanding between peoples. The two men purchased property across Germany for the Information Centers without having to seek prior approval, regardless of cost. Utilizing the financial instrument of the foreign

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<sup>237</sup> “Foreign Buildings Operations, Distribution by Project of Proposed Authorization for Utilization of Foreign Currency Credits” (Washington, D.C.: House, 1950), 16–9.

<sup>238</sup> “Foreign Building Operations,” 16–19.

<sup>239</sup> “Architecture for the State Department,” 31.

credit, the United States was able to place *Amerikahäuser* in some of the most desirable locations in German cities such as Reuterweg in Frankfurt, Karolinenplatz in Munich, and Hardenbergstrasse in West Berlin. As King testified in a Congressional hearing, the use of foreign credits also allowed the State Department to purchase goods and services with local currencies, not dollars, which actually stretched the credits even further, while addressing the wartime debts owed to the United States, monies that otherwise would not be coming to the United States anytime soon.<sup>240</sup> The building program saved the State Department from property rental, and when that option was unavailable, from having to confiscate scarce housing; in turn, this lowered friction with the local residents. Larkin correctly predicted that the building program would have little overall effect on the State Department budget. By 1953, fully 97 percent of the funds allotted for the building program as envisioned by Larkin came from allied accounts, with the remaining three percent obtained from the appropriation process.<sup>241</sup> However, it is important to differentiate between foreign credits dedicated to the construction of the Information Centers and the capital committed to operations; the foreign credits were used to build the Information Centers, but American dollars paid for those expenses not shared with German host cities, such as salaries, utilities, and programming costs.

### **“Dishonest Objects” versus “Good Design”: Modernism, Anti-Americanism, and the Information Centers**

In his book *Modernist America: Art, Music, Movies, and the Globalization of American Culture*, Richard Pells described the influence American magazines had on the architecture of

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<sup>240</sup> “Nomination of Paul V. McNutt to Be Ambassador to Philippines, Discussion of International Aviation Convention, Diplomatic and Consular Service, Foreign Service Buildings Act: Hearing on H.R. 6627,” § Senate Foreign Relations Committee (1946), 7–9.

<sup>241</sup> “Architecture for the State Department,” 31; Ron Theodore Robin, *Enclaves of America: The Rhetoric of American Political Architecture Abroad, 1900-1965* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 140.

postwar West Germany. From the periodicals, Pells argued, architects could draw inspiration for their designs, but it was in the *Amerikahäuser*, especially the one in West Berlin that looked, to Pells “as if it had been designed by a Bauhaus architect just before he fled Germany” and the “streamlined American consulates in Düsseldorf, Stuttgart, and Munich” that were particularly useful to the new generation of West German architects.<sup>242</sup> The use of the word “streamlined” by Professor Pells is problematic. All of the buildings he named, including the America Houses, were considered by their creators as *modernist*, but never “streamlined.” This is not a pedantic distinction; the difference between the two terms and the ideas that informed them was an important one to the those working in architecture and design in postwar Germany, and one often used as an excuse to justify their dismissiveness toward all but the most forward-thinking American design, all of which virtually guaranteed the *Amerikahäuser* drew from a modernist visual lexicon. The importance Germans put on the division between the two aesthetic choices, streamlined or modernist, placed the *Amerikahäuser* squarely at the intersection of consumption, culture, and morality.

The use of the word “streamlined” by Pells is surprising, because few concepts inspired more negative reactions among the Germans who read journals such as *Die Neue Stadt*, *Baumeister*, and *Das Wohnen* than the idea of “streamlined” American architecture and design. Also referred to as “Art Moderne” or “Streamline Moderne,” the design practice of “streamlining” is an expansive term that resists easy definition; both the Chrysler Building and the Chrysler Airflow automobile that might have been parked in the garage underneath the Manhattan skyscraper were noted for their “streamlined” exteriors that exuberantly proclaimed their modernity. If Modernist design, particularly as it was practiced by the Bauhaus, was indeed

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<sup>242</sup> Richard H. Pells, *Modernist America: Art, Music, Movies, and the Globalization of American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 76. Emphasis placed by current author.

“sleek,” that was the almost inevitable result of a process of refining a design until the end result was almost solely dictated by function.

In his *Futurist Manifesto* of 1909, Filippo Marinetti adroitly captured the attitude that animated “Streamline Moderne” in the decades to come. Marinetti declared “the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed, in which... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.” Indeed, after the Second World War, the German trade group representing “serious” architects and industrial designers, the *Deutscher Werkbund*, used the ties between Futurism, Fascism, and streamlined design to criticize American aesthetic choices, and sotto voce, American culture in general.<sup>243</sup> Taking their cues from the idea and sensation of speed, American architects and industrial designers such as Norman Bel Geddes, Donald Deskey, and Walter Dorwin Teague incorporated aerodynamic forms to their work, such as wings and fins, decorative portholes, rounded corners on buildings with “speed lines,” and liberal use of reflective metals such as chrome and polished stainless steel. The Great Depression ensconced streamlined design in the American consciousness when it received the imprimatur of the federal government for use in the courthouses, office buildings, and post offices built through the Works Progress Administration.

What infuriated German design elites the most about the Americans, besides having almost unlimited license to build wherever, whenever, and whatever they wanted to, was the sense that Teague, Bel Geddes, and above all, the focus of the animus of the German design community, Raymond Loewy, did not understand or accept the moral and ethical dimensions

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<sup>243</sup> Hans Dieter Schäfer, “Amerikanismus Im Dritten Reich,” in *Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991), 199–215; Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 89.

that the members of the trade group representing the top tier of German architecture and design, the Deutscher Werkbund, attached to architecture and design. Nor, the members of the Werkbund alleged, were the Americans aware of the reformatory power of “good design” and the consequent hopes for German design sparking a much-needed moral renaissance in the German people after the war.

For the Germans of the *Werkbund*, Raymond Loewy embodied everything wrong with American design. They dismissed his practice of “refreshing” designs to meet spoken and unspoken consumer desires, as nothing more than crass commercialism, driven by the profit motive.<sup>244</sup> As a result of his ubiquity and popularity, Loewy became something of a pantomime villain to the Germans, gleefully twirling his mustache while tying German design to the railroad track of American cultural hegemony. An evident indication of how German design elites saw Loewy, and by proxy American culture, was when his autobiography, *Never Leave Well Enough Alone* was translated for the German market under the title *Ugliness Doesn't Sell*.<sup>245</sup>

Countering the playfulness of Loewy and the other Americans who shared his aesthetic was the seriousness with which the Germans took both modernist design and themselves. The remarks of German architect and Werkbund member Rudolf Schwarz illustrative the point. When asked his opinion for the moral decline in German society during the first half of the twentieth century, he had a ready answer. “Most people,” he declared, “have not led their lives

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<sup>244</sup> Suzanne Slesin, “Donald Deskey, Innovative Designer, Dies at 94,” *The New York Times*, April 30, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/04/30/obituaries/donald-deskey-innovative-designer-dies-a-94.html>; Jason Farago, “These Obsessive Men of MoMA Furnished Your Modernist Home,” *The New York Times*, September 7, 2017, sec. Art & Design, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/arts/alfred-barr-philip-johnson-moma-grey-art-gallery.html>.

<sup>245</sup> Raymond Loewy, *Never Leave Well Enough Alone: The Personal Record of an Industrial Designer* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951); Raymond Loewy, *Hässlichkeit Verkauft Sich Schlecht*, Reprint 1953 (Hamburg: Econ, 1991).

properly, having produced and surrounded themselves with dishonest things as evidence of dishonest lives.”<sup>246</sup> However, the members of the *Werkbund* declared, Germans could begin to redeem themselves by surrounding themselves with artifacts of “good design,” whether they were teacups or factory buildings, as Albert Kahn, whom the *Werkbund* approved of, showed in his work for the Ford Motor Company in Detroit. In worldview of the *Werkbund*, bad furnishings were intimate evidence of a poorly-led life, which in this particular context seems a grossly inadequate explanation for German conduct in the twentieth-century.<sup>247</sup> In an environment that considered decoration frivolous, among the members of the *Deutscher Werkbund* having work considered “decorative” was a grave insult. In their eyes, “Art Moderne” was animated by the profit motive. The very act of trying to make an object “attractive” rendered it crass, the *Werkbund* Germans believed, for the essential form of the object was revealed when it most closely addressed function, and decoration was unnecessary.

However, as we will see, there were points of agreement between the Germans and the Americans when it came to design, with transatlantic designers and impresarios such as Ray and Charles Eames and Florence Knoll serving as bridge figures between the two countries and their design traditions. Information Centers showcased the “best,” or at least the most leading-edge of American furniture design, often from designers with European origins such as Eero Saarinen and Harry Bertioia. And while German rejection of the American popular styling cues revealed more cultural differences between the Germans and the Americans, it also revealed a fundamental acceptance of a shared transatlantic modernist design language that was expressed in the design of the Information Centers built immediately after the war. Fortunately for the

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<sup>246</sup> Ot Hoffmann, ed., *Der Deutsche Werkbund 1907, 1947, 1987* (Berlin: Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn, 1987), 47; Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 89.

<sup>247</sup> Ot Hoffmann, *Der Deutsche Werkbund 1907, 1947, 1987*, 47.

Americans, the U.S. government chose modernism as the architectural aesthetic guiding the decisions on the *Amerikahäuser*; to choose anything else would have most likely opened up the U.S. to even more criticism from those Germans the Americans most wanted to impress.

### **Why Modernism?**

The State Department had carte blanche to choose a visual aesthetic to represent the United States in Germany, and almost unlimited funds to make that vision a reality. It chose a decidedly modernist look for the Information Centers and stuck with that look in the decades that followed. But, why modernism? Why, when it came to visually represent America in Germany through the construction of an *Amerika Haus*, was the official imprimatur given to the sleek angularity of modernism? After all, it was in effect, the official endorsement of an architectural movement that not everyone in the United States agreed with.

“Public schools, colleges, and universities,” railed Michigan Republican Congressman George Dondero in a now-infamous 1949 speech, were being “invaded by a horde of foreign art manglers,” who, Dondero noted ominously, were “an effeminate and provincial tribe,” a veritable “effeminate elect,” who neatly linked class, homosexuality, and the threat of communist subversion. Museum directors ideologically seduced patrons, selling them

a subversive doctrine of "isms," Communist-inspired and Communist-connected, which have one common, boasted goal--the destruction of our cultural tradition and priceless heritage.<sup>248</sup>

Given the rather mixed views regarding modern art and architecture at the time, the State Department choose to go with an emphatically modern aesthetic to represent the United States in Germany, as opposed to a more traditional design language, for two valid and complementary answers. One is prosaic, while the other is political in nature, and more complex.

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<sup>248</sup> George A. Dondero, “Modern Art Shackled to Communism,” *Congressional Record*, 81st. Congress, 1st. Session, August 16, 1949, 11586.

The simple answer is that Leland King liked architectural modernism as opposed to a more historicist tradition, and in his civil service career with the State Department, first as chief architect, then as head of the FBO, he championed modernist architects and their work. His teams of architects and designers in Paris, The Hague, London, Vienna, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Rio de Janeiro commissioned the buildings, hired the architects, supervised the construction, and chose the furnishings and arranged for their installation from offices.<sup>249</sup> King appreciated modernist principles, and while he was not a particularly distinguished architect himself, when he came into his own as head of the FBO he went out of his way to hire those who shared his beliefs, commissioning preeminent modernist architects Edward Durrell Stone and Eero Saarinen to design spectacular embassies in India and the U.K., respectively. While the *Amerikahäuser* were nowhere near as grand in scale or as iconic in design as those structures, the Information Centers were informed by the same aesthetic, they both underwent the same design and construction approval process, and as with the new embassies and consulates, the construction of the *Amerikahäuser* were supervised by FBO teams and paid for by the same foreign credits. It is hard to underestimate the effect that the aesthetic tastes of one man, Leland King, had on the visual representation of the United States in Germany and around the world. King consciously coopted architectural modernism and gave it the imprimatur of U.S. political reliability. In doing so, King ensured that the United States in Germany would be associated with modernity, and the more positive traits associated with it: technological prowess, a youthful vitality, and an appreciation of the novel. If the tastes of Leland King had run more toward Queen Anne-style furniture, the visual component of American foreign policy would be much different today.

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<sup>249</sup> Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 55.

Second, and in the context of postwar German cultural reconstruction, more interestingly, the modernist design of the *Amerikahäuser* was a tangible cultural commonality between the U.S. and Germany, mediated through the influence of the acclaimed German pre-war design school, the Bauhaus. In adopting modernism, then adapting it to the needs of the Cold War, the United States found both a visual alternative to the historicist styles then in vogue in the Soviet Union, as well as a politically useful narrative in the historical experience of the Bauhaus that once carefully edited, the Americans exploited for Cold War purposes.

### **Taking Politics Out of the Bauhaus**

On both sides of the Atlantic, there was perhaps no German architect who was more associated with the modernist aesthetic than Walter Gropius. A protégé of the celebrated architect and industrial designer Peter Behrens, after the First World War Gropius helped establish the influential design school the Bauhaus and led the school until a falling out with a local government suspicious of the curriculum and instruction at the avant-garde school. At the Bauhaus and afterwards in American, Gropius introduced architectural modernism into the mainstream with a language of design we now take for granted; the use of materials such as cast concrete, curtain walls, the elimination of extraneous ornament, and open floor plans utilizing natural light are all part of a design language that began with Gropius and his peers in prewar Germany, a language that went underground with the advent of National Socialism, but reborn when Gropius and his influence returned to Europe. One of the most visible examples of the return of architectural modernism to West Germany in particular was the *Amerika Haus*.

Walter Gropius was not a Nazi, but in the early years of the National Socialist government he was something of an opportunist. Ultimately an exile from Germany, two factors weighed heavily in the decision for Gropius to leave for England and ultimately, the United

States: economic hardship and the rise of National Socialism. But before his self-imposed emigration, Gropius sought work where he could find it, which increasingly meant cultivating relationships with high-level Nazi cultural bureaucrats such as Eugen Hönig, a fellow architect and the President of the Reich Chamber for the Visual Arts (*Reichskammer für Bildende Kunst*), the Nazi agency charged with bringing the visual arts into line with National Socialist ideology and policies.<sup>250</sup> Hönig, who through the issuance of the dreaded *Berufsverbot* showed no reluctance in barring communists, homosexuals, Jews, and members of other suspect groups from working in their chosen professions, felt close to Gropius, despite his earlier association with the decidedly left-wing Bauhaus. Declaring Gropius to be a “German-feeling person,” (*Deutschempfindenen*), Hönig reassured the future chair of the Harvard architecture department that “you can always give proof of your value that you were admitted into the Reich Chamber for the Visual Arts.”<sup>251</sup>

Despite his assiduous cultivation of Nazis such as Hönig, Gropius confessed in a letter to a friend in 1936 that the conditions in Germany for building “...the new architecture are really not very favorable,” and since he had “known everything about the (modernist) movement... for the past twenty years,” he was inclined to emigrate.<sup>252</sup> Gropius landed on his feet in the United States. Carl Friedrich, émigré political scientist, cultural interpreter for the U.S. government, and the epitome of the “good German” for the Americans given the task of occupying Germany after the war, went so far as to personally vouch for the political reliability of Gropius (the fact that he

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<sup>250</sup> Jonathan Petropoulos, *Artists under Hitler: Collaboration and Survival in Nazi Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 68.

<sup>251</sup> Petropoulos, 69.

<sup>252</sup> Reginald Isaacs, *Walter Gropius. Der Mensch Und Sein Werk*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Mann, 1984), 652.

had joined the Reich Chamber for Visual Arts to secure work, but not the Nazi Party, worked in his favor), and secured residence for the architect and his wife in the United States.

The political vacillations of Gropius, from the socialist ideals of the Bauhaus to submitting designs for a Nazi “temple to the German spirit of work” (*Kultstätte deutschen Arbeitgeistes*) were downplayed by the Americans who had vested interests in legitimizing architectural modernism and the credentials of Gropius as a soldier in the Cold War.<sup>253</sup> For his part, Gropius assisted in the American reconstruction of his reputation; his students at Harvard remember his pedagogy, not his politics.<sup>254</sup> When asked about his socialist past, Gropius was evasive. “Many of the members of the Bauhaus were interested in social improvement,” he once replied, “but the main tendency was very much anti-Marxist.”<sup>255</sup> If the faculty and students there were not doctrinaire Marxists, most were socialists, and arguably all of them saw themselves and their residency at the Bauhaus as part of a larger purpose, a striving for what Bruno Taut described at the time as a non-aggressive socialism that bridged “the schism between factions and nations subjected to their own self-discipline and bond human to human.”<sup>256</sup> To say, as Gropius did when pressed, that the Bauhaus was interested in social improvement, is akin to saying meteorologists are interested in weather forecasting. From the beginning, the goal of the Bauhaus was to change German culture, particularly German consumer culture, through good design.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Petropoulos, *Artists under Hitler*, 79.

<sup>254</sup> Charles Burchard, “Gropius at Harvard,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 14, no. 2 (1959): 24.

<sup>255</sup> Greg Castillo, “The Bauhaus in Cold War Germany,” in *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 181.

<sup>256</sup> Bruno Taut, *Die Stadtkrone* (Jena: E. Diedrichs, 1919), 59.

<sup>257</sup> Frederic Schwartz, “Utopia for Sale: The Bauhaus and Weimar Germany’s Consumer Culture,” in *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 115–38.

Gropius had utility to the Americans, and so did the school he helped found. From the perspective of those in the State Department charged with finding an aesthetic to represent the United States abroad, the legacy of the Bauhaus as expressed through the buildings of Gropius, Mies Van der Rohe, and others, had a built-in advantage: most Americans, when they were aware of the Bauhaus legacy at all, knew it for the avant-garde consumer goods it designed, such as the chairs designed by Marcel Breuer made of bent steel tubes and leather straps, while others recalled it for the repression the school suffered under heavy-handed Nazi cultural policies. When it came time to adapt the Bauhaus to American Cold War needs, the State Department had little difficulty in establishing an alternate narrative for the school. What they arrived at was one that stressed two things in particular: aesthetic innovation, and political victimhood.

The American counter-narrative emphasized the innovative designs produced by the faculty and students of the Bauhaus, as well as the unique pedagogical methodology stressing an intimate knowledge of materials and an appreciation for the benefits offered by mass production, not the creation of a new egalitarian society governed by vaguely-defined socialist principles. Also, perhaps somewhat cynically, the fact that the school was shut down by the Nazis lent itself to selling the modernist message. The fact that the Nazi regime, as well as the Politburos of both East Germany and the Soviet Union all officially shared an almost galvanic dislike of modernism and went to great lengths to stamp it out where they found it, actually made the task of architecturally representing the United States in Germany easier. Germans could draw the link between authoritarianism and a lack of artistic freedom for themselves, and the transposition of communists for Nazis, or Americans for Nazis, was a staple of German propaganda on both sides of the political divide.

Philip Johnson, Alfred Barr, and Henry-Russell Hitchcock at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) made the decision to politically enervate the Bauhaus, and to focus on aesthetics. Consequently, when the State Department sought to de-politicize the Bauhaus and use it for a stylistic alternative to Soviet aesthetic efforts, it found that most of the work had already been done by the museum, an effort that started with the pivotal 1932 Modern Architecture exhibition at MOMA that did so much to solidify the reputation of the Bauhaus in the United States. The program that accompanied the exhibition made copious references to the “technical and utilitarian factors” of the modernist movement and the pedagogical aspects of the Bauhaus, but nothing about the mission of the school in Dessau as a reform movement trying to improve the quality of life through innovative methods of design and production.<sup>258</sup> “The aesthetic qualities of the style” was the focus of the exhibition, not the “...sociological aspects of the style except in so far as they are related to the problem of design.”<sup>259</sup> Those “sociological aspects” went unexamined in the exhibition program.

Barr, Johnson, and the others at MOMA consciously de-politicized the Bauhaus movement to American audiences for several reasons. First, the relative youth of the United States compared to those of Europe meant there was not an American architectural tradition in which a building style was looked at comprehensively, such as the Romanesque or Gothic. Americans had not lived through architectural movements that sought to totalize a world view, so the idea of a design school as initiating historical change was contrary to the American historical experience of architecture. Instead, American architects borrowed styles from neighboring societies on both sides of the Atlantic and Pacific, using historical styles

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<sup>258</sup> Alfred H. Barr, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, and Philip Johnson, “Modern Architecture: International Exhibition, New York, Feb. 10 to March 23, 1932, Museum of Modern Art” (Museum of Modern Art, 1932), 14.

<sup>259</sup> Barr, Hitchcock, and Johnson, 13.

decontextualized from their historical surroundings. The result were city streets where Beaux-Arts buildings lived next door to neo-Gothic ones, which were neighbored by Greek Revival edifices, and so on, with the result a visually unappealing jumble of historical styles divorced from historical settings or context. The closest thing the United States had as an organic architectural movement was the Chicago School of Louis Sullivan and his protégés, which was a phenomenon of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and while the steel-framed building and the skyscraper were the definitive markers of American architecture, they were relatively new vehicles for architectural expression. Similarly, while some in the United States such as the public intellectual Lewis Mumford appreciated the novel approach the Bauhaus took toward addressing the need for affordable housing, most American architects did not see themselves as agents of social reform.<sup>260</sup> While the faculty and staff of the Bauhaus saw their work as heralding a new age of better living through intelligent design, the Americans limited their engagement with the work of their transatlantic peers to the technical, revealing a fascination with how the school approached technology and mass production, but that was all. To many Americans, European approaches to housing, such as the interwar *Siedlungen* of Gropius suggested of collectivism, and consequently Marxism, making the idea a difficult sell among those individuals and businesses, and cities most likely to afford modernist architecture. It is hard to tell which is more ironic: that the “cool, sleek, powerful, and efficient,” as well as expensive, postwar corporate modernist architecture we associate with Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe originated in a school that saw architecture and design as the vehicles for societal reform, a belief most likely anathema to all but the most enlightened American patrons; or that

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<sup>260</sup> Barr, Hitchcock, and Johnson, 179–87.

Gropius and van der Rohe founded it.<sup>261</sup> Finally, it was important to Philip Johnson, who at age 26 was wealthy and precocious enough to both organize and pay for the Architecture and Design department at the Museum of Modern Art, as well as supervise several pivotal exhibitions revolving around modernist design. Johnson, in addition to being supportive of modernist art and design, was also an anti-Semite, a racist, and a promoter of Nazi propaganda, and did not want the work he loved so much to be associated with socialism.<sup>262</sup> However, a year later, under pressure from National Socialist government, the Bauhaus closed, with many of the faculty leaving for the United States. Later that year, modernist buildings were prominently featured in the Chicago World's Fair, a sign that modernist architecture had broken out of coastal enclaves and moved into the public sphere of mid-America.<sup>263</sup>

### **The Value of the Bauhaus to the Americans**

Though most of those employed in the State Department office of Foreign Building Operations who were charged with supervising the design and construction of the Information Centers genuinely approved of the use of a modernist aesthetic in the newly-constructed facilities, there was a cynical aspect to the American championing the Bauhaus and modernist principles in general, in that the popularity of Gropius and his school had “as much to do with... victimization by the Nazis,” as their avant-garde reputations.<sup>264</sup> For the Americans, being closed down by the Nazis gave the Bauhaus legitimacy in the fight against authoritarianism, and the historical memory of the institution and the struggle it had with Nazi authorities was fully

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<sup>261</sup> Pells, *Modernist America*, 75.

<sup>262</sup> “Two Forsake Art to Found a Party,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 1934, 23; Franz Schulze, *Philip Johnson: Life and Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 104–46; Kazys Varnelis, “We Cannot Know History: Philip Johnson’s Politics and Cynical Survival,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 49, no. 2 (1995): 92–104.

<sup>263</sup> Margret Kentgens-Craig, *The Bauhaus and America: First Contacts, 1919-1936* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 73–76.

<sup>264</sup> Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects*, 12.

adaptable to the fight against communism, becoming en route “a polestar of International Style liberalism.”<sup>265</sup> The founder of the school was rehabilitated as well, and made the shift from designing Nazi congress halls to American embassies with consummate grace. Both his left-wing past and his acquiescence to the Right were actively forgotten, and his career was transformed in ways he could never have imagined, going from the status of “enemy alien” to that of “...an American cultural ambassador and internationally recognized authority on democratic approaches to urban planning.”<sup>266</sup>

In Germany, one of the most highly visible examples of this melding of architecture and the new political reality was a U.S. Information Center, whose ability to draw the eyes of visitors rested in the modernist “curb appeal” of the *Amerikahäuser* scattered across western Germany. While many of the first facilities were housed in confiscated Nazi properties that the Americans prized as much for their symbolic value as much as their utility, the need for purpose-built facilities became clear very quickly, particularly as habitable property in urban areas was scarce and American property requisitions were deeply resented by the Germans. According to U.S. officials, the scarcity of urban space also “did not permit attention to high standards of modern architecture,” while many of the *Amerikahäuser* “could do no more than develop a few rooms which resembled American counterparts.”<sup>267</sup> Despite the cost savings, occupying former government buildings were released back to the Germans, the Americans quickly settled on prime real estate in cities across western Germany, creating buildings in the “cool, sleek, powerful, and efficient” International Style.<sup>268</sup> Careful thought was given as to how these new facilities should look, with the State Department commissioning the architectural firm Skidmore,

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<sup>265</sup> Betts, 13.

<sup>266</sup> Castillo, “The Bauhaus in Cold War Germany,” 181.

<sup>267</sup> Pilgert, *History of the Development of Information Services*, 17.

<sup>268</sup> Pells, *Modernist America*, 75.

Owings, and Merrill (SOM), a firm virtually synonymous with architectural modernism in the United States, to come up with plans informing the construction of Information Centers going forward.<sup>269</sup> The result was an arresting combination of architecture and furnishings that struck a chord with German elites, who saw in the buildings an American acknowledgment of the debt owed to the German modernist tradition. However, there was another unspoken message, one the Germans were less willing to acknowledge, and that the Americans had to finesse; despite German origins, the Americans were the heirs to the modernist tradition. The design, materials, and furnishings of the *Amerikahäuser* testified to the strength of such a claim.

### **Inside the *Amerika Haus***

It is important to remember that when the first purpose-built Information Centers were constructed in the late 1940s, many Germans, particularly those living in urban areas, were existing in a subsistence economy with severe shortages of food, clothing, and shelter, and many German cities had yet to fully clear away the bombed-out rubble. All of this made the *Amerikahäuser* stand out in comparison with their surroundings. But when patrons went inside, the relative opulence of their surroundings made them acutely conscious of both American affluence, but also the pauperization that Germany had undergone. In 1952, Leland King, Chief of the State Department Foreign Building Operations toured the Lever House in Manhattan, and impressed, contracted with architect Gordon Bunshaft and his employer, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) to provide planning for the expansion of both the Information Center program, as well as other overseas State Department buildings. Bunshaft and his firm successfully championed the Bauhaus idiom in corporate America, and in a transatlantic gesture of aesthetic

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<sup>269</sup> Hooper, *Designing Democracy*, 188.

solidarity repaid the intellectual debt owed German modernism in the design of *Amerikahäuser* and other State Department buildings.

No two Information Centers were identical, but the ones built in the initial postwar period followed a pattern laid out for them in the guidance from SOM. Seen from above, they were often notably set back from the road, emphasizing the *Häuser* as self-contained destinations in themselves, not merely one of many things competing for the attention of the potential German visitor. Seen from above, the early Information Centers often took the shape of a not-quite-Palladian asymmetrical dumbbell, with two boxes connected by a glass-fronted walkway which also served as a lobby. It was not an accident that these buildings closely resembled the American consulate in Bremen; Gordon Bunshaft designed both buildings. While the auditorium portion of the buildings were usually constructed from solid brick, the rest of the buildings were to follow the lead of the “dignified and sober,” yet “sparkling and elegant” Bremen consulate in the use of painted steel that had first been “welded, sand-blasted, acid-etched, zinc-coated,” and “finally painted steel” for the frames of the rest of the buildings.<sup>270</sup> Unfortunately, it was difficult to produce enough exotic steel in sufficient quantities in either Germany or the United States to meet the specifications laid out by SOM, and less rarified materials were substituted.

Glass was integral to the design of the *Amerikahäuser*, both practically as a building material, but also symbolically, for it both spoke to American notions of openness, transparency, and movement, and it also had the power to shock and awe German visitors. That we take the liberal use of glass in modern buildings as a given speaks volumes to how we have absorbed the lessons of architectural modernism, but in the late 1940s most Germans had never opened a door of solid glass, or sat in a room with glass walls dividing it from other interior spaces. The

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<sup>270</sup> “Architecture for the State Department,” 16.

obvious cost and technical expertise necessary for such a display was not lost on the German visitors, whose own manufacturing industries were either destroyed as a result of the war, or taken apart and carted away for reparations. Even surviving manufacturing concerns such as the nascent Volkswagen factory in Wolfsburg were years away from being able to produce such technical marvels. Yet the Americans could, and so shortly after the cessation of hostilities. When Philip Johnson, head of the Architecture division of the Museum of Modern Art declared that “modern art does not fight the machine age, but accepts it,” a German need look no further than an Information Center for confirmation of the claim.<sup>271</sup>

Overall, the exteriors of the early *Amerikahäuser* reveal their aesthetic indebtedness to Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe and the “skin and bones” school of modernist architecture. The emphasis was on form, not ornament, unlike “the pretentious classicism of official Soviet architecture abroad,” as one American observer described the mish-mash of historical styles employed by the Soviet Union to describe itself to the world, while Alfred Barr of the Museum of Modern Art declared Soviet efforts as the “...stylistic chaos and pomposities of the nineteenth-century in the name of proletarian taste and socialist realism.”<sup>272</sup> The desire for box-like, rectilinear shapes among modernist architects was also influenced by the gestalt school of psychology, which stressed interdependence, and that “...instead of a specifically formed part defining function, the function is determined by the way that part belongs to the whole.”<sup>273</sup> This dovetailed nicely with the Bauhaus emphasis on function as a determiner of form, simplicity, and

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<sup>271</sup> Philip Johnson, *Built to Live In* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1931), 8.

<sup>272</sup> “U.S. Architecture Abroad,” 115; Paul Willen, “Soviet Architecture: Progress and Reaction,” *Problems in Communism* 6 (1953): 24; Alfred H. Barr et al., “What Is Happening to Modern Architecture?,” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 15, no. 3 (1948): 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4058109>.

<sup>273</sup> Vittoria Di Palma, Diana Periton, and Marina Lathouri, eds., *Intimate Metropolis: Urban Subjects in the Modern City* (New York: Routledge, 2008), n. 38.

lucidity. In 1927, while Walter Gropius was still leading the Bauhaus, gestalt psychologist Rudolf Arnheim lectured at the Bauhaus, where his message resonated with faculty member Josef Albers, reinforcing his desire and that of other designers for simple shapes determined by form and free of ornamentation.<sup>274</sup> Because humans have an innately ability to group similar objects together, subscribers of gestalt psychology argued, humans were most likely to clearly remember basic shapes such as spheres, cubes, and rectangles than more complex shapes. There was widespread agreement in the State Department that, as the *Amerikahäuser* might be the most sustained contact between Germans and the United States “other than automobiles and refrigerators,” as a State Department official put it, it was important not to visually confuse the German patron with complex forms.<sup>275</sup>

A great deal of consideration was given to the interiors of the Information Centers in the resulting plans, with decidedly modern choices in furnishings and interior materials.<sup>276</sup> The look of the *Amerikahäuser* was the result of the tastes of three people: as discussed earlier, the Chief of the FBO Leland King; Anita Moeller Laird, champion of modernism who served as head of the FBO design group from 1949-1972; and the American design impresario, Florence Knoll. This group of three, two inside government and one closely associated with it, decided what the United States looked like for German visitors, providing the aesthetic first impression for countless Germans who encountered the United States at an *Amerikahäuser*.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, “Das Bauhaus in Dessau,” *Die Weltbühne*, May 31, 1927.

<sup>275</sup> Ides van der Gracht, “Ides van Der Gracht to Deputy Secretary Lourie,” August 3, 1953, RG 59, 110.4-FBO/8-353, National Archives 2.

<sup>276</sup> Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 88.

<sup>277</sup> Kathleen James-Chakraborty, “From Isolationism to Internationalism: American Acceptance of the Bauhaus,” in *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 164–65.

While not as grand as the other diplomatic buildings, the Information Centers were still quite sumptuous in comparison to the experience of most Germans and many Americans. Anita Moeller Laird, who had received her education at the Parsons School of Design was involved in almost every aspect of the interior design of the *Amerikahäuser*. She conferred with the architects and State Department officials and frequently with the American modernist furniture company, Knoll International. Taking full advantage of the foreign credits available, Laird used the most appropriate materials to convey a sense of quiet affluence within the Information Centers, using materials from around the world to complement the modernist design. Like the American consulates, the newest Information Centers were “extraordinary for the refinement of the architectural detailing, the dramatic use of modern materials... and the way in which the buildings stood out amidst the older environs.”<sup>278</sup> This designed environment was an unspoken advertisement for American affluence, but also, through the medium of displays and exhibits, a level of affluence the Germans could achieve through the quick adoption of democratic institutions, rejection of communism, and an end to what Jan Logemann describes as a “*bürgerlich* ethos of consumption,” which emphasized restraint, saving, and purchasing only “quality goods.”<sup>279</sup>

### **Furnishings**

When asked why the prominent American furniture company Knoll International did not have a storefront on one of the busiest commercial streets in West Berlin, employee Toby Rodes replied, “We do not need to be at the Kudamm to get the right people come to us.”<sup>280</sup> He was right; through the auspices of the Information Centers, which were filled with modernist

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<sup>278</sup> Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 91.

<sup>279</sup> Jan L. Logemann, *Trams or Tailfins? Public and Private Prosperity in Postwar West Germany and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 9.

<sup>280</sup> “Knoll: Im Haut- Und Knochen-Stil,” *Der Spiegel*, April 13, 1960.

furniture by Knoll designers, targeting his intended audience of German cultural elites could not have been easier. The customers did not have to come to Knoll, the company came to them. Knoll International was the probably the most forward-thinking furniture company in America after the war, a company synonymous with the new and innovative furniture produced by such luminaries as Bertoaia, Eames, and Saarinen, and also with the facility Knoll had with U.S. government contracts. Given the ubiquity of Knoll-branded furniture in U.S. Information Centers, consulates, and embassies, one American official wondered if the company “was really tied up with the CIA.”<sup>281</sup> Though their ties to the intelligence community were only commercial, the Information Centers and other facilities were essentially showrooms for Knoll products, because the head of the FBO interior design group from 1949 until 1972, Anita Moeller Laird, both appreciated modernist design and had a close working relationship with Florence Knoll, the head of the company named after her late husband.<sup>282</sup>

Florence Knoll was a major force in modern American design, who reached her creative peak after the war. The daughter of either a German-speaking Michigan engineer or the owner of a commercial bakery (biographies differ), she was orphaned at twelve, and a graduate of the prestigious Cranbrook Academy of Art, where she was befriended by Finnish modernist architect Eliel Saarinen, and went on to work at Harvard with Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius and at with Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology. She matched her design sensibilities with a personal charisma that charmed at least one reporter from the *New York Times*, who described Knoll as:

A little below average height and small-boned, she has, at 48, the slight figure and quick movements of a schoolgirl, but the poise is that of a woman used to being in command of a situation. She is frequently described as stunning or beautiful —terms inspired not so

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<sup>281</sup> Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, 67.

<sup>282</sup> Loeffler, 93.

much by rather delicate but slightly irregular features as by an inward radiance and animation. Her intelligence shows.<sup>283</sup>

She came to the attention of Hans Knoll, a German expatriate and interpreter of European modernism to American intellectuals, when he gave her the task of designing the office of Secretary of War Henry Stimson. The two married, but not before she became a full partner in the firm on her own merits.

The relationship forged between Knoll and the U.S. government, particularly within the Departments of State and War virtually guaranteed that the *Amerikahäuser* would be filled with furniture from Saarinen, Bertioia, Jens Risom, George Nakashima, Isamo Naguchi and others who we now associate with the “Mid-century Modern” design era. Indeed, given the current desirability of the furniture of this period, if the United States government had kept much of the furnishings of the Information Centers intact and in good condition, the pieces could be sold today at prices far more than the government had initially paid for it. The Americans were offering German visitors, particularly those from East Berlin and the Soviet occupation zone in general, an aesthetic alternative to East German offerings. By giving the imprimatur to modernist architecture, art, and design through the construction of the Information Centers, the Americans were staking a position in almost complete opposition to the Soviet Union and their client state, East Germany.

### **The Houses of Culture of the Soviet Union: Progressive or Reactionary?**

East German aesthetic policy was formally expressed in 1952, the result of a two-day conference in Berlin, “Issues of German Interior Design and the Design of Furniture,” in which General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) Walter Ulbricht gave the keynote address.

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<sup>283</sup> “Woman Who Led an Office Revolution Rules an Empire of Modern Design,” *The New York Times*, September 1, 1964, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/09/01/woman-who-led-an-office-revolution-rules-an-empire-of-modern-design.html>.

He made his views clear, and to the modernists in the audience, they were chilling. Railing against “designs that had nothing to do with beauty,” Ulbricht declared that “furniture manufactured in the Bauhaus style does not correspond to the sensitivity to beauty possessed by the new Germany’s progressive human beings.”<sup>284</sup> To Ulbricht and his supporters, formalism was the opposite of beauty and synonymous with “the so-called American lifestyle,” which was nothing more than “a direct continuation of decadence,” the only purpose of which was to “uproot human beings, making them suitable as objects of exploitation.”<sup>285</sup> Particularly galling to the East German leadership in Berlin was that these modernist architectural trends, apparently so threatening to the creation socialism in East Germany were highly visible, as they were on display in the *Amerika Haus* across the street from the popular Berlin Zoo. After the construction of the Berlin Wall (or “anti-fascist protective barrier,” in East German political rhetoric) in 1961, the location value of the *Amerika Haus* at the Zoo Station diminished greatly, but until then, American-style modernism was just a bus ride away for the residents of East Berlin.

In the popular imagination, the aesthetic often associated with East Germany is that of a technocratic modernism, with buildings such as the now-demolished Palace of the Republic and the television tower in Alexanderplatz, both in Berlin, serving as examples. However, those buildings came later in the life of the German Democratic Republic, with the *Fernsehturm* opening in 1969, while the seat of the East German parliament opened in seven years later. In the first postwar years, a different aesthetic prevailed in the official East German imagination, one where ironically, some of the most memorable architecture of the German Democratic Republic would have been criticized as contrary to socialist principles in both Berlin and Moscow

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<sup>284</sup> “Zweckmäßige, Schöne Und Billig Möbel. Arbeitstagung Der Deutschen Bauakademie Über ‘Fragen Der Innenarchitekten,’” *National-Zeitung*, March 16, 1952.

<sup>285</sup> Hans Hopp, “Gegen Den Formalismus - Für Eine Fortschrittliche Innenarchitektur,” March 14, 1952, DH2 DBA A 141, Bundesarchiv SAPMO.

immediately after the war. In the planned economy of East Germany, art and design were inherently political, and practitioners paid a price for being on the wrong side of the aesthetic argument. The interest in these questions ran to the very top rungs of the communist bureaucracies in both East Germany and the Soviet Union, where despite their other differences both Walter Ulbricht and Joseph Stalin were united in their hostility toward modernist design. In shearing the Bauhaus of left-wing origins, the Americans engaged in historical manipulation for overtly political purposes; but where the Americans were content to draw a line of continuity from pre-war Bauhaus modernism to the present day, the East Germans appropriated all of German architectural history, in which the “great masters of German building” (*große Meister des deutschen Gebäudes*) of the past would guide the creation of the East German building tradition. Of particularly ominous note for those East Germans favoring a modernist aesthetic, there an emphasis was placed on those *Meister* working “around 1800.”<sup>286</sup> By looking to the past for inspiration, the East German government hoped to gain a measure of legitimacy with both domestic and foreign audiences and draw a line of aesthetic continuity from the German past of architects such as Schinkel to the East German present. In this sense, there was no cultural “zero hour” (*Stunde null*) for the East Germans after the war. By restoring a treasured cultural artifact such as the State Opera House in Berlin, the East Germans wanted to show reluctant Germans that it was both the inheritor and guarantor of the German cultural tradition. This was in opposition to their Western brethren, who, it was claimed, had succumbed to the commercial

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<sup>286</sup> “Wäre Es Schon? Wäre Es Schon! Vorschlag Des Zentralkomitees Der Sozialisten Einheitspartei Deutschland Für Den Aufbau Berlins,” *Neues Deutschland*, November 25, 1951, 1; Simone Hain, “Berlin Ost: ‘Im Westen Wird Man Sich Wundern,’” in *Neue Städte aus Ruinen: Deutscher Städtebau der Nachkriegszeit* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1992), 44; Pugh, *Architecture, Politics & Identity*, 38; Stanford Anderson, “The Legacy of German Neoclassicism and Biedermeier: Behrens, Tessenow, Loos, and Mies,” *Assemblage*, no. 15 (1991): 67–68.

wives of the crass Americans, whose obsession with novelty was manifested in the modernist architecture of buildings such as the Information Centers.

The aesthetic differences between the *Amerikahäuser* and the Houses of Culture of the Soviet Union (*Kulturhäuser der Sowjetunion*) were starkly contradictory and challenging to any lingering vision of the Soviet Union as home to an aesthetic avant-garde. The Soviets utilized their facilities in a similar fashion to the Americans, as sites for exhibitions, film screenings, lectures, and musical performances, and they also had libraries stocked with material vetted as ideologically appropriate by Soviet, not East German, authorities. Given the German printing and poster tradition, the Soviet authorities in Moscow sent several poster art exhibitions west to Germany.<sup>287</sup> However, that was where the similarities between the two institutions ended.

By the end of the Second World War, little hope was left that the Soviet Union would be a place that encouraged artistic experimentation. The reality was quite the opposite, with Socialist Realism emerging as the Party-approved form of expression in all of the arts, including architecture and design, with punishment waiting for those who transgressed Moscow-imposed artistic limits.<sup>288</sup> Socialist Realism, not to be confused with Social Realism, was predicated on providing the most optimistic depiction of life under Soviet-flavored socialism, for it was little more than propaganda illustration. As such, it was the very antithesis of the art being produced and consumed virtually anywhere else in Europe and North America, art that explored issues of consumption, alienation, form and color. While German visitors to the art shows at an Amerika Haus correctly sensed that for good or for ill, the nexus of the postwar art world was inexorably

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<sup>287</sup> Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 413.

<sup>288</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "The Arts in Russia Under Stalin," *The New York Review of Books*, October 19, 2000, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2000/10/19/the-arts-in-russia-under-stalin/>; Maïke Steinkamp, "The Propagandistic Role of Modern Art in Postwar Berlin," in *Berlin Divided City, 1945-1989*, vol. 6, Culture and Society in Germany (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 27.

shifting toward New York and away from narrative painting, while those visiting a House of the Culture of the Soviet Union must have walked away from the experience with an overwhelming sense of both familiarity, obsolescence, and of having been the target of clumsily-made propaganda, an illustration of the profound misreading of the German intelligentsia that marked Soviet cultural efforts immediately after the war.<sup>289</sup>

While the State Department in Germany was appropriating the Bauhaus, (removed of any vestigial traces of the social justice context it sprung from) via the construction of the *Amerikahäuser*, the Soviet Union looked to the past for inspiration in representing itself to the Germans, choosing historicist styles we most often associate with the forces of reaction. The most notable example of this phenomenon occurred, appropriately, in Berlin, when the Soviet authorities requisitioned a palace in Berlin to house their flagship House of Culture. In both cases, American and Soviet, the exteriors of the buildings gave a clue as to what awaited the visitor inside. While the *Amerikahäuser* were filled with the latest in modernist furniture, the products of a transatlantic design culture that while elegant, was sometimes severe in appearance, Soviet Houses of Culture took the opposite tack, adapting an air of luxuriousness to their buildings. While visitors to an *Amerikahaus* would see modern furniture from the most acclaimed American designers, Soviet authorities utilized Biedermeier and Chippendale-style furniture in their public spaces, and completed the rooms with heavy curtains and thick carpets. Arguing that nothing was too good for the worker, the East Germans went in for overstuffed luxuriousness, while the furniture groupings in the *Amerikahäuser* had an elegant simplicity that belied their innovative design and production methodologies, but perhaps even more importantly, when Germans encountered the furniture in an Information Center, they saw a

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<sup>289</sup> Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, chap. 8.

reflection of their own design tradition. That was not the case in a Soviet House of Culture. The architecture and furnishings in an *Amerika Haus* was a transatlantic mix of Bauhaus design principles and American mass production, stressing the current moment and pointing toward the future; Soviet efforts at self-expression were thoroughly grounded in the European past.

### **MOMA Notices the *Amerikahäuser***

The U.S. commitment to modern design in the *Amerikahäuser* did not go completely unnoticed, especially by the American institution that championed the modernist aesthetic before most, the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA). On 7 October 1953, the exhibition “Architecture for the State Department” opened, furnished with a selection of models and large-scale photographs of the new facilities being designed and constructed around the world as part of the expanded American diplomatic footprint. Described by a museum press release as “one of the most convincing demonstrations of the vitality of American culture,” the exhibition was organized by Arthur Drexler, the Curator of the Department of Architecture and Design at MOMA, who along with Alfred Barr and Philip Johnson, perhaps did more for modernist design in the United States than anyone else.<sup>290</sup> The plans of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill for Information Centers in Germany were prominently featured, as well as photographs of the new Information Center in Cologne, which noted the extensive use of glass, and of the contrast between the auditorium housed in “solid brick... while the library, offices, and exhibition space are contained in a glass and steel wing.”<sup>291</sup> Carefully noting the cost-saving measures of using foreign credits owed the United States, the MOMA press release also pointed out that since the revitalized building

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<sup>290</sup> “Models of New State Department Buildings Abroad at Museum of Modern Art” (Museum of Modern Art, n.d.), <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2424>.

<sup>291</sup> “Models of New State Department Buildings.”

program had come online, the United States had saved nearly six million dollars in global property rental costs alone.<sup>292</sup>

The review in *The New York Times* praised the exhibition, and after making the apparently obligatory mention of the foreign credits paying for the newly-built facilities, took note of the America Houses, describing them as “library-information center-exhibition buildings,” that, like the other diplomatic buildings under construction shared

A common, twentieth-century architectural vocabulary. It is one that aims at frank expression of both structure and function; clear separation of articulation of parts; use of modern technology and such materials as steel, glass and reinforced concrete; beauty through clarity, relationships of parts and careful detailing.

One would be hard pressed to find a more concise litany of Bauhaus principles. Praising the “human scale” of the buildings, the review declared that while the various buildings might not have been “the greatest, most original or most imaginative examples of American modern architecture,” they were “without a doubt the best group of official buildings that we have seen produced by any government.”<sup>293</sup>

Architectural modernism in the tradition of the Bauhaus found a home in the United States during the interwar period, but it was particularly after the Second World War when it became more prominent to a wider public, both in the United States and Germany. The *Amerikahäuser* facilitated this resurgence as part of an unprecedented building program for the State Department that has never been replicated. 1945 to 1953 was a period of immense growth in the number of diplomatic facilities around the world, but the centrality of West Germany to U.S. plans for postwar Europe assured the primacy of German facilities in State Department plans.

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<sup>292</sup> “Models of New State Department Buildings.”

<sup>293</sup> Aline B. Louchheim, “State Department Opens Show Today,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 1953.

The State Department came through spectacularly, employing the firm Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, a firm virtually synonymous with corporate modernism, to come up with plans for the expansion of the Information Centers in Germany. In doing so, SOM employed a rigorous modernist aesthetic to the project, in keeping with building in the land of the Bauhaus. Indeed, it would have been very surprising if the Americans had built the Information Centers and other facilities in any other style than modernist. The adoption of Bauhaus-inflected modernism accomplished two goals. First, it gave Germans an aesthetic alternative to Soviet offerings, which were decidedly retrograde compared to the Americans, with their Houses of Soviet Culture looking to the past for visual references, employing a tired historicism to represent themselves to the German people. Secondly, it allowed the Americans to draw a line of continuity from the creative ferment of the Weimar period, across the lacuna of the Second World War, and on to the present day. While modernism had to go underground during the period of National Socialist rule, it had continued to flourish in the absence of the Germans. While the Soviets attempted to draw lines from German architecture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, focusing on *Meister* such as Schinkel, the Americans drew from a much nearer time period. Both the Soviet Union and the United States proclaimed themselves the defenders of the modern, but in the first years after the war the American orientation was toward the future, while the Soviet examples were a collective salute to the past.

In choosing a design for their buildings, the State Department inserted itself into a long-running discourse over the propriety of architectural modernism, with the U.S. coming out strongly in favor of the Bauhaus tradition, and putting it squarely at odds with Soviet and East German efforts. However, it was also a reinforcement of the relationship between the Bauhaus and the United States, where so many faculty and students who fled Nazi Germany found refuge.

The founders of the Bauhaus, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius found security and acclaim in the United States, with Gropius leading the Harvard architecture and design school, while van der Rohe took up residency at the Illinois Institute of Technology outside Chicago and became a titan of modernist architecture.

Foreign credits owed the United States as a result of the war paid for most of the *Amerikahäuser* during this period, with the interiors of the *Amerikahäuser* serving as literal showrooms for the leading furniture designers in the United States, funneled through the impresario Florence Knoll and her eponymous company. Because of her background and intimate familiarity with the state of European design and designers, Knoll became a transatlantic cultural bridge figure between Germany and the United States who, along with FBO chief Leland King, and Anita Moeller Laird, who was responsible for the interiors of State Department facilities around the world, including the Information Centers, where Eames desks and chairs were commonplace, along with furniture by such leading designers as Bertoia and Saarinen, who were paid a commission for each piece sold, an unusual practice for the time, and one that helped keep designers coming back to Knoll with their designs.

Usually set off the road so as not to compete with other attractions, the Information Centers were destinations in their own right. Outside, they were often sheathed in glass curtain walls running the length of a building, the glass reinforcing messages of both transparency and strength. Above all, the Americans wanted to project a message of forthrightness and honesty. Glass was the material that fronted the libraries, where pedestrians observed patrons roaming the library stacks, a literal personification of the free access to information promised by the Americans in charge of the Information Centers. Glass was both expensive and also hard to produce in the quantities used by the Americans, another message for the Germans as well. The

Amerikahäuser were an advertisement for the American future, and in utilizing Bauhaus modernism, a link to the German modernist tradition. While it was born in Germany during the intensely creative period of the Weimar Republic and took a hiatus during National Socialism, architectural modernism returned to the place where it began, but this time with an American accent.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

On November 26, 1947, Ray Moseley, an insurance broker from Missouri, wrote a letter to his friend, President Harry Truman. Acquaintances of Moseley had returned from Sweden after attending a meeting of the Baptist World Alliance, and while in Europe they also toured England, Norway, Denmark and several other countries, but apparently not Occupied Germany. Moseley felt obligated to share the consensus opinion of the travelling Baptists, whose judgment challenged media representations of postwar Europe as a place of hunger and privation. Moseley believed that Europe was in better shape than newspaper reports indicated, and that perhaps those living there “were not in want as badly as has been stated.” This led Moseley to conclude that when it came to the rebuilding of Europe, there was “a limit as to what we should do in the way of draining our own resources, and certainly if the need is not any more apparent... we may be making a mistake.”<sup>294</sup> Instead of a form letter from the White House acknowledging receipt of the correspondence, Truman replied to the appeal from his friend with a personal note.

The President took exception to the findings of the Baptists. In a rather terse response to Moseley, Truman corrected his friend regarding the current state of Europe, only two years removed from a devastating war. “Germany,” Truman wrote, “was almost completely destroyed so far as its industries and homes are concerned,” and told Moseley get a broader perspective on European events, advising him that he needed “a picture of the whole thing before you can make a decision on any of it.” Unsurprisingly, as far as the President was concerned the United States

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<sup>294</sup> “Correspondence between Ray Moseley and Harry S. Truman (1947) - CVCE Website,” accessed April 9, 2015, [http://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/correspondence\\_between\\_ray\\_moseley\\_and\\_harry\\_s\\_truman\\_1947-en-1b00c014-7558-4f64-8202-3440a9e394e3.html](http://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/correspondence_between_ray_moseley_and_harry_s_truman_1947-en-1b00c014-7558-4f64-8202-3440a9e394e3.html).

was dealing with the question of European recovery “in the right way.”<sup>295</sup> On the face of it, the presumption of Moseley to lecture the President on the state of postwar Europe seems laughable, but the concerns of Moseley over how to approach the reconstruction of Europe, and Occupied Germany in particular, were among the most vexing foreign policy issues the United States faced immediately after the Second World War.

Some Americans, such as former U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, advocated for the so-called “pastoralization” of West Germany, which entailed reorienting the German economy away from heavy industry, “towards agriculture and other activities directly related to the satisfaction of civilian wants.”<sup>296</sup> There would be no heavy industry for export, and an emphasis was placed on a seemingly autarchic level of self-sufficiency. Morgenthau and his supporters saw German business, particularly the large cartels that dominated certain sectors of the German economy as the prime enablers of the Nazi regime. If allowed to remain, it was argued, the cartels would form a “system of commercial interrelationships penetrating the economies of other nations, all of which would help Germany restore a war economy.”<sup>297</sup> Consequently, the former Treasury Secretary and others saw the dismantling of the industrial cartels as a matter of extreme necessity.

Conversely, there were those who saw the restoration of the German export economy as a necessity, for it was to provide the fuel for postwar European economic growth as well as markets for American products. “Do you think permanent peace lies in the direction of subduing and keeping these people from doing business and participating in world trade?” was the

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Henry Morgenthau, “Postwar Treatment of Germany,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 246 (1946): 127.

<sup>297</sup> Wolfgang Schlauch, “American Policy Towards Germany, 1945,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 4 (October 1, 1970): 119.

question one Senator asked of his colleagues.<sup>298</sup> In 1945, the House Special Committee on Postwar Economic Policy and Planning argued against artificially limiting the growth of the West German economy to only subsistence levels would break an already fragile European economy.<sup>299</sup> The realities of life in German cities in particular, were stark. When the Allies occupied Berlin, for example, General Lucius Clay, the American Military Governor, noted that “three million people were packed into the remaining buildings of a city which had suffered frightful destruction.”<sup>300</sup> The official rations of 1240 calories a day “was being met by only two-thirds that amount. Workmen...fainted from exhaustion until we brought in sufficient food to provide them with hot noon meals.”<sup>301</sup> Keeping the West Germans at a subsistence economy was not a tenable policy going forward, either for West Germany or the larger European economy.

What both sides agreed on though, was the importance of a democratic West Germany to European stability and later, as a defense against further Soviet expansion into Central Europe. The task of transforming West Germany into a democracy was enormous and was not a short-term undertaking. Consequently, it required the Americans to formulate novel approaches to the task of political reeducation. A hungry West Germany would not be up to the task of reconstituting itself, and it is to the credit of the Americans that they realized West Germans, particularly West German elites, were hungry for culture as well as for food. The Americans were in a position to make themselves indispensable to the rebirth of culture in postwar West German society, and it was in West Germany that the Information Centers were the most visible

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<sup>298</sup> United States et al., *Elimination of German Resources for War. Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Military Affairs*, (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1945), 28.

<sup>299</sup> United States, *Economic Reconstruction in Europe* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1945), 12.

<sup>300</sup> Lucius D. Clay, *Decision in Germany* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1950), 31.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

product of this new American effort at public diplomacy. In creating the Information Centers, the Americans drew lessons from previous U.S. attempts at public diplomacy in the twentieth century, efforts with very mixed results.

Prior attempts by the United States at public diplomacy, particularly the Committee on Public Information (CPI) during the First World War, left many people both inside and outside of government ambivalent toward the use of propaganda, finding it a necessary evil at best. The intrusiveness of the CPI, as well as the reputation it held for exaggeration, led many in the United States to associate propaganda with, if not lies, then a flexible approach to the truth. However, as the Second World War began to loom larger in the imagination of Americans, so did interest in propaganda as a tool of both persuasion and statecraft. In 1940, "one of the most talked-about courses at Radcliffe College," according to *The New York Times*, was "Public Opinion and Propaganda," taught by the influential German émigré scholar, Carl J. Friedrich, who took a position as Professor of Government at the College after his arrival in the U.S.<sup>302</sup> By the end of the decade, "persuasion, communication, and information were the favored locutions for what formerly had been called propaganda," and those Americans in the military stationed overseas were intimately familiar with the practice of propaganda through the English-language radio broadcasts of "Tokyo Rose," or "Lord Haw-Haw," organs of the respective Japanese and German governments.<sup>303</sup>

Victory in the Second World War forced the American government to come to terms with the reality that the United States had displaced Europe as the economic and political center of

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<sup>302</sup> "Girls Study Rise of Propaganda: Learning to Estimate Public Opinion," *The New York Times*, April 21, 1940.

<sup>303</sup> J. Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion*, Cambridge Studies in the History of Mass Communications (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 192.

gravity in the North Atlantic, and it was in the interest of the United States to attempt to shape a national image for export, particularly in West Germany, which was on the front lines of international communism, and the Americans believed, needing tutelage in the ways of democracy. By 1953, when the construction of *Amerikahäuser* was peaking, even the most hardened isolationist recognized that the United States was in a position of economic and global ascendancy and settling in for an ideological effort against the Soviet Union in West Germany that in terms of duration and sheer repetitiveness, seemed akin to the trench warfare of the First World War.

The policy document governing the Americans at the start of the occupation, JCS 1067, emphasized the segregation of Americans from West Germans, as befitting “a defeated enemy nation” being occupied, not liberated.<sup>304</sup> Regardless of the draconian tone of the document, the reality of life in occupied Germany immediately after the war was one of frequent contact, both licit and illicit, between Americans and West Germans. Of course, it was the illicit contacts that were problematic for the Americans. High rates of sexually transmitted infections among American troops and West German women, and a flourishing black market with American cigarettes functioning as an alternate currency with enough value to ensnare more than one soldier, was enough evidence to move American policies in West Germany to a more realistic basis.<sup>305</sup> From the beginning of the program, the ethos informing the Information Centers was one of inclusion, and ran counter to both the spirit and policy of JCS 1067. The *Amerikahäuser* existed to facilitate contact between Americans and West Germans in a space tailored around the interests of postwar West German elites both transfixed by the products of their own culture, and after the experience of National Socialism, curious about American society.

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<sup>304</sup> “JCS 1067.”

<sup>305</sup> J. Reinisch, “Public Health Work in the American Occupation Zone.”

The Information Centers used culture as a means of establishing an emotional connection between West Germans and the United States, with the ultimate goal of securing elite West German support for American occupation policies. The Americans knew it was impossible to compete with the Germanic cultural tradition, but instead of directly challenging the West Germans in the cultural sphere, the programming at the *Amerikahäuser* acknowledged the cultural debt the West owed to Germanic culture. The American promotion of Germanic artistic contributions alongside those of Americans allowed the U.S. to position itself as both the promoter and defender of *Kultur* against the threat of an allegedly culturally-homogenizing East German state.

The American manipulation of culture was not limited to music and the other arts. In choosing the modernist aesthetic for the Information Centers in Germany, the Americans effectively paid homage to the influential German architectural school, the Bauhaus. Again, the Americans positioned themselves as the defender of the West German cultural tradition. Closed by the Nazis for “degeneracy” and condemned by the East Germans as a school for “formalism,” the Bauhaus had great cultural weight among West German elites, and the Americans saw the influential design school a vehicle for demonstrating U.S. commitment to freedom of expression. Indeed, American support for modernism and non-representational art in the Information Centers was, the U.S. argued, was an example of the American commitment to freedom of expression, with the work of sculptor Alexander Calder frequently displayed.<sup>306</sup> His large, amorphous *Hextopus*, made of welded steel, was prominently displayed in the courtyard of the Frankfurt *Amerika Haus*, “visible through the building’s glass facades that literalized the transparency of

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<sup>306</sup> Castillo, “The Bauhaus in Cold War Germany,” 182.

American democracy,” in the words of one critic.<sup>307</sup> The very buildings of the Information Centers, as well as their contents, reinforced the American commitment to the defense of culture in West Germany.

In April, May, and June 1944, a college of Physicians and Surgeons was called at Columbia University in New York City for a conference, “Germany After the War.” Those attending were interested in what made Germans into Nazis. As if they were epidemiologists, they wanted to find the symptoms of Nazism, so the underlying disease could be isolated and studied like any other pathogen. The conference findings urged the Army to conduct behavioral experiments on German prisoners as soon as possible, for “...It could be of high importance to observe such individuals, talk to them, study them, and discover who among them might be most and least subject to change and by what methods.”<sup>308</sup> In addition to discussions on possible causes of Nazism and an exploration of the “authoritarian personality,” the conference report published in the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* concluded that to keep future Germans from becoming Nazis was going to be more than a matter of regime change. According to the doctors, the embrace of democracy had to come from a change of heart in the German individual, an assertion the Americans running the Information Centers wholeheartedly agreed with. When it came to the possibility of political reform in whatever remained of Germany after the war, the authors of the conference report were frank:

... it is plain that it would be folly to think of managing postwar Germany merely by encouraging her to change ideologies... The only democratic point of view which could have any value would have to spring from a new kind of character. The Germans would

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<sup>307</sup> Alex J. Taylor, “Unstable Motives: Propaganda, Politics, and the Late Work of Alexander Calder,” *American Art* 26, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 32.

<sup>308</sup> “Germany After the War: Round Table—1945,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 15, no. 3 (July 1945): 381.

have to develop in such a way as to think of democracy themselves, to conceive it, want it and create it.<sup>309</sup>

What the Americans wanted to avoid was a repeat of the politics of the interwar Weimar Republic, where a member of the German cultural elite supported democracy as a matter of reason, a so-called *Vernunftrepublikaner*, as opposed to forming an emotional bond with democratic self-rule. The *Amerikahäuser* existed to help West Germans “conceive, want, and create” a better future for themselves and their progeny.

The Information Centers in West Germany were in at least a superficial way, analogous to a church. Both were buildings of contemplation and devotion; in the case of the *Amerikahäuser*, visitors were urged to compare their national past to that of the United States, and the gleaming modernist edifices housing the Information Centers could not help but invite comparisons to the West German present. Visitors were nudged to contemplate the wickedness of their recent national history, while also being offered a democratic alternative to the hells of National Socialism and Stalinism. While the patrons of a local *Amerika Haus* were not promised eternal life in the hereafter, they were told that with the adoption of democratic reforms they would enjoy a better life here on Earth, the measure of which was a standard of living far surpassing anything in their experience. While the analogy might be tortuous, the Information Centers were the indisputable focal point for American efforts in reconstructing civil society in West Germany. The Information Centers were more than displays of American affluence, their centrality to the American enterprise in West Germany, while now mostly forgotten, deserves to be recognized and studied. While they were arguably “the best group of official buildings that we have seen produced by any government,” the Information Centers were more than that. They were political actors in their own right.

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 396–97.

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