



**“The American Occupation of Germany in Cultural Perspective” (roundtable discussion), *Diplomatic History*, Volume 23, Issue 1 (Winter 1999)**

**Petra Goedde, “From Villains to Victims: Fraternization and the Feminization of Germany, 1945-1947,” pp. 1-20.**

**Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, “Art is Democracy and Democracy Is Art: Culture, Propaganda, and the Neue Zeitung in Germany, 1944-1947,” pp. 21-43.**

Commentary by **Carl Cavanagh Hodge**  
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Carl Cavanagh Hodge, “That Sort of Thing” A commentary on the articles and roundtable discussion of *Diplomatic History*, Vol.23, No.1, Winter 1999, “The American Occupation of Germany in Cultural Perspective”

An argument could be made against publishing work on cultural transmission in a quarterly dedicated to diplomatic history. But it would be weak in the case of Petra Goedde’s “From Villains to Victims” and Jessica Gienow-Hecht’s “Art is Democracy,” in which the differential between official American policy toward the populace of occupied Germany and the relationship of the U.S. Army with Germans under its occupation is the common theme.

The great contribution of these articles is that they stress the great disconnect between what a state, any state, intends with its foreign policy and what it gets. One can maintain that for American occupation authorities in Germany prior to the hardening of Cold War diplomacy this was bound to be true. No industrialized society had ever before been reduced to brick dust, and there was no Occupier’s Standard Handbook on how to revive and reform a people suddenly so comprehensively dependent on their conquerers. Fine. But the flip-side to that position is that the very dependency of the occupied German population after 1945 would surely have made it putty in the palm of the occupier. Whatever policy Washington decided to apply to Germany, conditions were optimal for a forthright and vigorous transformation of German society according to American purpose. Alas, this was only partly true. Volker Berghahn demonstrated this with his work on the Americanization of German industry. For their part, Goedde and Gienow-Hecht show that implementation of U.S. policy on fraternization and the press was anything but forthright or vigorous from the very outset. Personnel functioning as the formal or informal agents of U.S. occupation initiatives in Germany came up with their own policies according to their own experience.

Before and after Germany’s surrender, American GIs all but ignored the official ban on fraternization. While Washington felt the need to revise its policy once the Wehrmacht had laid down its arms --- the Warbrides Act passed Congress as early as December 1945 --- the behavior of American soldiers showed little discrimination between fraternization with German villains of aggression and genocide before the the Reich’s capitulation and German victims of the scourge

of war after military collapse. Goedde's study of fraternization is potentially an enormous contribution to the social history of occupied Germany and the demography of occupation. If the quality of her DH article is any indication, her book will become required reading for anyone concerned with the postwar social prehistory of the Federal Republic.

Goedde's article should have spent more time with this and rather less on the real and imagined influence of fraternization on American policy in Germany. In footnote 27, for example, she deals with the drill of application for marriage between GIs and German women and Washington's concern for the moral character of the prospective bride. This is not just interesting minutia. It is one of the small but real and direct administrative adjustments the government of the United States made in response to a phenomenon it was apparently helpless to control. The article also shows how Washington scrambled to present an acceptable image of fraternization to public opinion in the United States while coming to the realization that its troops in Germany were possibly uniquely effective ambassadors for the blessings of liberty in a denazified Germany. Officialdom is deeply troubled by the feeling that it is primarily a spectator in the making of history. Even major figures come up hard against the absurdities of policies contrived for wartime and applied to peace. So even as the U.S. Army clung to the notion that its soldiers would take counsel on how to approach relations with German women, Goedde notes with appropriate humor how General Eisenhower conceded that uncontrolled fraternization with small children was probably not a threat to the integrity of the American military.

Goedde could give this aspect of her study more respect in its own right. Instead, she drives her interpretation too far in claiming larger implications of fraternization for American policy in Germany more generally. Her research has made her acutely aware of the essentially unique and transitory situation into which history dropped American men and German women. But her concern with the meaning of it all, prompts Goedde to neglect the essence of it all. She forces a causal coherence on the adjustment of American policy as a consequence of fraternization. In her concluding remarks she suggests that the American soldier's revised image of Germany percolated upward and "played a crucial and heretofore neglected role" in the transformative of American policy from the punitive to the protective.

This is unlikely. Rather, at the same time as American GIs fraternized with German women, entirely separate geostrategic considerations were forcing fundamental change on US policy toward defeated Germany and its role in Europe. The fraternization meant that, over time, certain Germans and Americans established strong personal and cultural bonds while their countries formed an alliance. Good history like Goedde's has its own integrity; it need not pretend to say anything more than what it says best.

To her credit, Gienow-Hecht stays well clear of cause-and-effect conclusions --- a relationship that, where it exists, is "notoriously difficult to measure" --- in her study of *Die Neue Zeitung*. Yet she shares the same appreciation as Goedde for the massive gap between the official intent and actual impact of American policy in occupied Germany, most notably the attempt to make a newspaper the vehicle of cultural transmission for an Americanized Germany. If Gienow-Hecht is not presently working on a biography of Hans Habe, the Jewish-Hungarian emigre who served as *Die Neue Zeitung*'s first editor-in-chief, she ought to start. She has in Habe the classic agent of American foreign policy driven almost entirely by a personal agenda, not the transformation of

Germany into democratic society embracing the American way of life but the recovery of the Germany constructed around Bildung and Kultur that existed before Hitler came to power.

Gienow-Hecht gives appropriate attention to critical differences between American and German concepts of culture, but in one passage she obscures her own argument by citing Manfred George's flawed appreciation of that difference. Precisely because in the United States a constant sense of "making one's mark" is the critical ingredient of "Americanness," American culture is a part of the citizen's everyday life --- not just in some Coplandesque world of county fairs and circuses --- in a wholly more comprehensive way way than is Kultur for Germans. Because Americans confront both high and popular culture with a consumerist attitude, their experience of high culture is usually a matter of personal aesthetic preference and not bound up with a sense of national identity. What Habe's paper sought to give Germans through an appreciation for modern art, surely, was a taste for intellectual and aesthetic freedom, not democracy. German self-government was another occupation project altogether. *Die Neue Zeitung's* achievement under Habe's leadership was to remind Germans that their culture was not "apart from the rest of the world" but integral to a rich European tradition. In a sense he encouraged them to adopt a variation on the American consumerist attitude toward cultural goods. As individuals they could exalt or reject Chagall but should appreciate that the choice neither added nor subtracted from one's Germanness.

Gienow-Hecht's article is at its best where she makes her point about the role of culture with a telling episode. She brings Habe into direct contact with General Eisenhower. She notes the latter's stipulation that *Die Neue Zeitung* is not to be a German paper and his advice on how to instruct the Germans in the immorality of aggression in a language they understand. When Habe's "unqualified egocentrism and disobedience" leads him to produce a thoroughly German paper that becomes an unqualified hit with the German public, Eisenhower doesn't bother to second-guess success. One could starve the Germans all week so long as they could see an art exhibition or a ballet! Gienow-Hecht then quotes Ike's testimony to Congress on the German appreciation for "that sort of thing" and the services it incidentally rendered to the popular comfort with the American presence in Germany.

The article succeeds, moreover, because Gienow-Hecht neither avoids nor overstates the implications of Habe's story. Any serious study of the Americanization of Germany necessarily should have a significant, perhaps fundamental, biographical content. A understanding of the intention and design of policy is fine, but until one focuses "on exactly what was done and who did it," any real understanding of American influence abroad will remain preponderantly theoretical.

Here and there both Goedde and Gienow-Hecht deserved better commentary than they got. To begin with, there is Uta Poiger's claim on page 50 that Goedde convincingly shows how "U.S. policymakers themselves used the gendered narrative of American male provider and feminized German victim in order to justify the Marshall Plan." Goedde in fact suggests that fraternization influenced American policy --- and goes too far --- but she never registers a claim as silly as Poiger's. Goedde certainly is underestimating "hard-nosed considerations." It should be remembered that such considerations came very quickly to involve an official U.S. Policy to rearm Germany . If Washington had by 1947 arrived at a gendered narrative akin to Germany,

Pale Mother, then an altogether different gendered narrative had to be cooked up for putting German men back in uniform by 1955. But Goedde is clearly not at all as deluded as Poiger would like her to be. Best that we do away with “gendered narratives,” a loathsome little vector of late 20th Century jargon, altogether. Otherwise serious historians run the risk of turning themselves into not-so-serious sociologists.

The Goedde and Gienow-Hecht articles, read with regard to other recently published work on the American occupation of Germany, show us that American occupiers at every level worked with what they were given and made their own decisions concerning what seemed to work. Jean Smith’s biography of Lucius Clay and Thomas Schwartz’s study of John McCloy’s service as High Commissioner are shot through with episodes of freelancing in policy implementation. It was all more anarchic than we want to believe.

What these articles have in common beyond the place, period, and policies they address is biography. Yet they cut in different directions. Rebecca Boehling’s remark on page 61 that the American troops occupying Germany were in large part not the same as those who had invaded is possibly of critical importance. These troops and the German women they encountered had no biography with each other. They had only the unique circumstance that history had landed in their laps. There was for them a very real *Stunde Null* of opportunity to change fundamentally the course of their lives without fear of the veto of a burdened history. The opposite was true for the editors and writers of the *Neue Zeitung*. They all had a history with Germany predating the Third Reich, and thus their self-appointed mission was quite different from that assigned them by Washington. Rather than promoting democracy and the American way of life according to Washington’s master plan, they undertook something of a restoration to Germany of European culture, the best of them understanding that the nationalist claims of German Kultur were in large part fiction. Germany had always been a European crossroads of cultural exchange.

Without a doubt, the soldiers educated Germans in the American way of life more effectively than any newspaper could hope to, while the *Die Neue Zeitung*’s mounting popularity testified to its work in restoring German self-respect and morale. To me these are satisfying conclusions in themselves. The extent to which either fraternization or *Die Neue Zeitung* in any way made the United States a political or cultural model for Germany is, as Gienow-Hecht’s points out, grist for the speculation of theory ... if you like that sort of thing.

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