"Transatlantic History and American Exceptionalism: A Symposium in Memory and in Honor of Erich Angermann"


Prof. Dr. Erich Angermann (1927-1992) was a German historian of America and founding father of the German Historical Institute in Washington. His scholarly work and teachings at the University of Cologne centered on an understanding of American history as an integral part of European and world history. From the mid-1970s onward, he developed and encouraged research concepts that used comparative analysis and multilateral enquiries.

Thus, "Transatlantic History and American Exceptionalism" provided an opportunity to discuss significant common aspects of nineteenth- and twentieth-century American and European history and to examine the concepts of comparative historical developments suggested by Angermann. The paradigm of "American exceptionalism" served as the investigative counterpart. The broad range of topics discussed included religion, ideologies, migration, foreign policy, and economics.

The conference brought together students, friends, and colleagues of Erich Angermann's from the United States, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, many of whom met each other for the first time on this occasion. Thanks to the presence of Ursula Angermann, the meeting also came to be an opportunity to exchange personal recollections.

The opening session recalled Angermann's instrumental contributions to the founding of the Institute in 1987 that evolved from a series of symposia on comparative aspects of German and American history between 1980 and 1986. With most of the American historians present who, throughout the founding phase of the Institute, had furnished indispensable help and advice, these brief tributes testified to the continuing importance of fostering and maintaining a transatlantic scholarly community.

Particular highlights of the symposium included Hartmut Lehmann's comparative assessment of secularization in Europe and Christianization in the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and Wolfgang Mommsen's discussion of Max Weber's perception of America. Perhaps not surprisingly, the uniqueness of American exceptionalism was questioned by many participants, most notably by Hans Guggisberg. Carl Degler's contribution emphasized the common nature of reli-
igious objections to Darwinism in Germany and the United States. Gerald Stourzh, in his rich exposition on comparative constitutional developments in England, the United States, and continental Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, called attention both to the English roots of American constitutional law and the separate American constitutionalization of individual rights. The evolving theme of the complementary character of exceptionalism and common transnational developments was reinforced by Karl Otmar von Aretin's discussion of ideology as an institutional defense of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European monaracies as well as by Gerhard Weinberg's lucid comparison of Hitler and Roosevelt.

The participants of the meeting conducted their deliberations in terms that were largely independent from categories of the respective national historiographies. Hence, the fifth panel, as well as the concluding roundtable discussion, turned to the subject of national history. A final assessment of the influence of the various concepts constant throughout the conference was given, and Hermann Wellenreuther presented a summary of Angermann's "historical world."

The proceedings thus elucidated material on the complementary nature of comparative historical research in regard to its relationship to the study of national history. The underlying questions of the conference referred more to the multifaceted nature of comparative historical research rather than attempting to outline a strict methodological canon. The array of historical case studies presented seeks to encourage further comparative research along these lines.

Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt

Conference Program:

Session I: Transatlantic Faiths and Beliefs
Chair: Eberhard Weis
Old Religions, New Religions and the Role of Religion in Europe and America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Hartmut Lehmann; Darwinism: A Challenge to Christianity and Science in Europe and America, Carl Degler; Nationalism as a Civil Religion in the Thoughts of Abraham Lincoln, Carl Schurz and Bismarck, Hans L. Trefousse; Comments: Hans R. Guggisberg, Reinhard R. Doerries

Session II: Transatlantic Ideologies and the Perception of the Other
Chair: Gerhard A. Ritter
Liberal Democracy as a Culture of Rights: Great Britain, the United States and Continental Europe, Gerald Stourzh; American Exceptionalism: Republicanism as