

**Bulletin of the GHI Washington**

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### **III. Joint Program in Post-War German History with the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies**

#### **The Americanization of Germany: Historical Process and Contemporary Consequences.**

Workshop held at the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies on February 10, 1995, with the support of the German Marshall Fund.

As part of its ongoing seminar series supported by the German Marshall Fund and in the framework of the joint AICGS-GHI program, the American Institute hosted a one-day workshop that explored the topic of Americanization in Germany. The general term "Americanization," to be sure, lacks a clear definition. Its connotations range from depictions as a modernist *bête noire* to ideas of constructive reform efforts. The paradigm of Americanization thus includes multiple and often contradictory notions of political and cultural hegemony, (re)education, economic modernization, and cultural change. Historians and political scientists discussed the broad scope of resulting questions in a controversial and stimulating meeting.

Michael Ermarth (Dartmouth College) examined how some German authors and intellectuals, among them self-proclaimed spokespersons of Germany's cultural identity, such as Botho Strauss, perceived German unification as self-inflicted Americanization. This use of statements by selected German authors with regard to German unification or American influence in Germany triggered a methodological discussion that addressed the problem of whether it was possible to generalize from this empirical basis. Ermarth's insightful presentation underscored that "Americanization" should be understood, in his context, as modernity's anxious simplification of itself. America, "the other," serves as a focal point for broad criticisms of modernization and hegemonic impulses, not necessarily of American origin but rather rooted in aggressive moods of German cultural assertiveness; it is also used as an imaginary orientation in the search for a new meaning of political and moral authority in the post-Cold War world.

Still, apart from questionable German perceptions of American cultural hegemony, there remains a clear record of America's contribution to the construction of a democratic West German state after 1945.

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Karl-Heinz Füssl, one of this year's fellows in the joint program, examined the educational policy and the youth program of the United States in post-war Germany. Füssl chronicled the organizational development of the American Youth Program as well as American scholarly and educational exchange programs that proved to be instrumental in the instruction of post-war Germany's cultural elites. Füssl examined the impact of youth indoctrination under National Socialism and thus illustrated the immense challenge Americans encountered when trying to formulate and implement a democratic educational philosophy in post-war Germany. American educational reforms introduced new concepts of individual autonomy in a democratic state to German youth, such as individual planning of leisure, and successfully weakened the notion of total domination of youth activities by the state.

Rebecca Boehling (University of Maryland, Baltimore County), a fellow in the joint program in 1993-94, gave a presentation on American plans for the democratization of German society after 1945. Boehling emphasized the discrepancy between the liberal agenda of OMGUS's Women's Affairs Section, established in 1948, and its actual implementation. The Women's Affairs Section sought to broaden the political sphere of women from the antimodern, narrow Nazi definition of women's legitimate domain circumscribed by "*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*." Yet, as Boehling showed, the impact of the Cold War shifted the aim of political education from the broadening of political participation to the defense against communism. Subsequently, the role of German women on city councils came to correspond more to the notion of women's political activism in their traditional roles as housewives than to embracing a broad reform program that questioned traditional role models. Boehling's case study thus provided insights that strongly questioned the claim of American cultural hegemony in post-war Germany.

In their comments, Hans-Georg Betz (School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University) and Brigitte Young (Center for German and European Studies, Georgetown University) discussed the origins and aims of German criticisms of the United States and of concepts of Americanization articulated by the New Left. Both speakers addressed contemporary German views of America's role in international and German politics and pointed to the ambivalence of Germany's quest for a new identity, defining itself as a disciple of America that has come of age, now bold enough to rebel at least occasionally

against its foster parent. The ensuing discussion illustrated that Americanization presents a paradigm that often raises more questions than it answers. Still, the concept provides a useful point of departure for exploring the expansion of American influence in post-war Germany. American reform efforts after 1945, as the workshop made clear, responded to the distinct German need for a democratic role model and subsequently initiated a bilateral process of political and cultural change that left ample room for autonomous German reforms. The debate about the Americanization of Germany thus touches on a rich area for future research that should test prevailing notions of modernization and identity formation in post-war Germany by a rigorous examination of historical and contemporary case studies.

The contributions to the workshop will be published under the auspices of the joint AICGS-GHI program.

*Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt*

### **Germans and Jews: Continuity and Change in Attitudes and Relationships over Five Decades.**

Workshop at the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies on April 6, 1995.  
Supported by the German Marshall Fund.

As part of its ongoing seminar series supported by the German Marshall Fund and in the framework of the joint AICGS-GHI program, the American Institute also hosted a one-day workshop that examined the interactions between Germans and Jews in the immediate post-war period and since 1989. German-Jewish relations after 1945 form a special relationship between Germany, Israel, American Jews, and a multitude of other Jewish communities. Germany's relations with the state of Israel and with other Jewish communities, and Germany's dealing with the Holocaust and its resulting obligations to the Jews, form major aspects of Germany's democratization after 1945 and test its commitment to democratic values. These questions served as the agenda of a meeting that aimed to discuss the state of a field of research that has been surprisingly unexplored.

Frank Stern (Tel Aviv University and Columbia University) described Jewish life in Germany after the end of the war. Drawing on his research over many years, Stern depicted the continuity of anti-Semitism in post-1945 Germany; the difficult quest of Jewish communi-