

The Good Germans? New Transatlantic Perspectives

CONFERENCE REPORT



Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies
The Good Germans? New Transatlantic Perspectives
Report on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Alumni Conference
June 29, – July 2, 2011, Freie Universität Berlin

Keynote Address: Transatlantic Ambivalence: Germany and the United States since the 1980s

Paul Nolte (Freie Universität Berlin, Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut)

Responses by

Johannes von Moltke (Univ. of Michigan, Dept. of German), Berlin Program Fellow 2001-2002

Belinda Davis (Rutgers University, Department of History), Berlin Program Fellow 1988-1989

Gökce Yurdakul (HU Berlin, Institut für Sozialwissenschaften), Berlin Program Fellow 2008-2009

In his keynote address Paul Nolte examined the transatlantic divide through three fields in particular: political culture, demography, and lifestyle/consumerism. He used his own experiences as a German studying in the United States as a jumping-off point for his exploration of the political culture on both sides of the Atlantic and the dramatic changes these systems have experienced.

Whereas Germany has seen the evolution of a consensus and continuity-oriented system, politics in the United States are more ideologically driven. Nolte pointed to discussions on abortion as an example to illustrate this difference. Political milieus have changed in both countries. In Germany, the close link between class and voter behaviour seems to be dwindling, whereas in the U.S. conservative populism draws on notions of deeply rooted American democratic traditions.

Demography also represents another area of transatlantic divergence. Germany, a country with one of the world's lowest birth rates, has reformed its welfare state to cope with its demographic challenges. In comparison, the population of the United States is younger, a fact that has repercussions on its welfare state as well as patterns of living and consumption. Thus, Nolte pointed to the evolution of two very different kinds of neoliberalism: an engineering neoliberalism in Germany and a laissez-faire neoliberalism in the U.S.

In response to Paul Nolte, Johannes von Moltke raised the fundamental question of how we can explain the described differences in terms of the everyday organization of life, settlement, and consumption. Belinda Davis pointed to the long history of grassroots movements and *Basispolitik* in Germany, which led to the rise of the Greens and changes in parliamentary politics. Gökce Yurdakul saw a number of convergences between Germany and the U.S. today, particularly regarding immigration policies and widespread anti-Muslim sentiment.

Erika Hughes, Berlin Program Postdoctoral Fellow 2011-2012

Panel 1: Sources of German Exceptionalism

Commentator: Thomas Mergel (HU Berlin, Institut für Geschichtswissenschaften)

The ‘German Forest’ as an Emblem of Germany’s Ambivalent Modernity

Jeffrey Wilson (California State University at Sacramento, Dept. of History), Berlin Program Fellow 1996-1997

German Missionaries and the Study of Africa in the Nineteenth Century

Sara Pugach (California State University at Los Angeles, Dept. of History), Berlin Program Fellow 2000-2001

Exceptional Exceptionalism: Apprenticeship, Artisans, and their Contributions to German Development, Welfare, and Historical Self-Understanding

Hal Hansen (Quincy, MA), Berlin Program Fellow 1991-1992

Health as a Public Good: The Positive Legacies of *Volksgesundheit*

Annette Timm (University of Calgary, Dept. of History), Berlin Program Fellow 1999-2000

Genealogies of the “Unpolitical German”: Democratic Renewal and the Politics of Culture in Occupied Germany

Sean Forner (Michigan State University, Dept. of History), Berlin Program Fellow 2003-2004

In the first presentation of the panel Jeffrey Wilson addressed the German forest as a charged national symbol and a site of social struggle. In his talk he analyzed how the use of new mathematical models in forestry and the increased production which followed led to calls for more exclusive legal property rights. Prussian landowners supported the Prussian Field and Forest Law (1880) which restricted peasants’ use rights. This provoked strong reaction from a broad political spectrum. Catholics, liberals and agrarian reformers criticized the legislation, alluding to the social repercussions if access to the forest were to be restricted, e.g. social upheaval, health risks, or a national identity crisis. Thus, the insistence on access to the “deutscher Wald” was not simply another instance of referring to a highly ideological national symbol, but also a point of resistance against powerful Junkers.

Sara Pugach’s paper was a fascinating account of early German missionaries and their work on Africa, which produced the first African-language dictionary in 1814. The author, Gustavus Reinhold Nyländer, was a member of the London-based Church Missionary Society. Surprisingly, throughout the early nineteenth century the CMS was dominated by Germans who were steeped in comparative philology. The intriguing results Sara Pugach presented stressed that these early missionaries believed in the unity of humankind. Although they understood difference in terms of language and civilization and clearly thought that not all civilizations have reached the same level of development, Sara Pugach warned us not to understand these views simply as precursors of eugenic or fascist beliefs.

Hal Hansen attempted to correct the prevailing view on two well-known forms of German exceptionalism: the apprenticeship model and regulated Handwerk which both have been decried as “medieval residues”, “illiberal” and “backward”. In his illuminating presentation he argued that 19th century organizational change, the introduction of vocational schools, and the Handicraft Law have adapted the “backward” model to technological challenges and ultimately extended the reach of the apprenticeship system to industry. Today, Hal Hansen argues, the dual system works well and may even trump American approaches which do not offer many choices to students less academically inclined.

How is one to evaluate the history of the world's first public health care system? Annette Timm's talk started out by touching on recent debates about Obama's health care reform and discussions which linked public care to "death panels" (Glen Beck). Have historians who have made similar - albeit more sophisticated - arguments highlighting the dangers of state-run health care systems largely disregarded the achievements of *Volksgesundheit*? Annette Timm makes the case that in evaluating the history of Germany's health care system the inclusionary aspects (e.g. general access to health care, advances in public hygiene and sexology) need to be recognized. Collectivist attitudes towards health care need not be totalitarian. The Canadian and German systems contribute to the well-being of populations which consider access to health care be their basic rights.

In his presentation Sean Forner traced a group of "engaged democrats" who after 1945 sought to extract the democratizing potential of German cultural values. Through their work in prominent journals such as *Aufbau* in Berlin, the *Frankfurter Hefte*, and *Die Wandlung* in Heidelberg and organizations such as the *Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung* they sought to link cultural and political renewal in a unique "third path between East and West". Although the space for such a discourse soon declined due to growing Cold War pressures, Sean Forner reminded us how these organizations and journals offered a unique space for debates that impacted important cultural and political countercurrents in the early years of both postwar German states.

Karin Gohl and Dominik Fungipani, Berlin Program

Panel 2: Creative Tensions in German Culture

Commentator: Claudia Albert (FU Berlin, Institut für Deutsche und Niederländische Philologie)

Photographic Returns, 1945-53

Claire Zimmerman (University of Michigan, Dept. of the History of Art), Berlin Program Fellow 2002-2003

Moving Memories of Post-War Germany and Its Cinema History

Sara Hall (University of Illinois at Chicago, Dept. of German Studies), Berlin Program Fellow 1998-1999

Atlantic Transfers of Critical Theory: Alexander Kluge and the U.S. in Fiction

Matthew Miller (Colgate University, Dept. of German Studies), Berlin Program Fellow 2005-2006

***Heisse Waren* (Hot Commodities): Black Music and African Americanization in Aggro Berlin**

Griff Rollefson (University of California, Berkeley, Dept. of Music), Berlin Program Fellow 2006-2007

In the second panel, titled "Creative Tensions in German Culture," Claire Zimmerman, Sara Hall, Matthew D. Miller and J. Griffith Rollefson discussed the productive exchanges between Germany and the United States in the arts of photography, film, literature, and music, respectively. Zimmerman began with an exploration of the ways in which German architects received and responded to photographs of buildings designed by German émigré architects in the United States during the immediate postwar era. Looking at specific examples that appeared in German publications and museum exhibitions, Zimmerman emphasized the discrepancies between the modern, abstract architecture depicted in the photographs and the real destroyed cityscapes of postwar Germany where the images later served as models for architectural production. Reversing the order of reception, Sara Hall focused on a contemporary German film, *Bella Martha* (Sandra Nettelbeck, 2001), that American director Scott Hicks remade in post-9/11 New York City under the title *No Reservations* (2007). After acknowledging that neither of the films directly addresses the traumatic pasts that mark their particular national histories, namely the Nazi past and 9/11, respectively, Hall demonstrated how Hicks's film appropriates and

reworks the cinematographic aesthetics of mourning in Nettelbeck's film as it engages, however indirectly, with the traumatic experience of 9/11. She pointed out that *No Reservations* transforms the aesthetics of mourning and loss in the original in ways that reveal its tendencies to evoke the past "accidentally" while focusing resolutely on the future, a quality typical of the American commercial film.

Matthew D. Miller shifted the focus of the panel toward literature, discussing German author Alexander Kluge's "devil tales" as they relate to the politics of the Bush administration and the "war on terror" in the Middle East after 9/11. In emphasizing the role of Frankfurt School Critical Theory in Kluge's fiction, Miller illustrated how the stories critically reframe transatlantic exchanges between Europe and the U.S. regarding America's post-9/11 politics.

J. Griffith Rollefson concluded the panel by examining how the hip-hop music of Aggro Berlin recording artists B-Tight and Tony D functions as a form of political resistance that simultaneously, and somewhat paradoxically, conforms to the rules of mainstream commercialism in order to acquire its political force in the first place. In elaborating his use of the term "(African) Americanization," Rollefson demonstrated how Aggro Berlin's marketing strategies are based on circulating images of "blackness" that are politically subversive yet also mainstream-conformist as popular commercial products.

Lisa Haegele, Berlin Program Fellow 2010-2011

Distinguished Lecture: Bridges and Barriers: Reflections on Transatlantic Academic Exchanges

David Barclay (Kalamazoo College & German Studies Association)

Responses by

Helga Haftendorn (FU Berlin, Center for Transnational Relations, Foreign and Security Policy)

Tom Haakenson (Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Dept. of Liberal Arts), Berlin Program Fellow 2003-2004

Rolf Hoffmann (German-American Fulbright Commission)

Wedigo de Vivanco (Ernst-Reuter-Gesellschaft der Freunde, Förderer und Ehemaligen der Freien Universität Berlin e. V. & de vivanco consulting international)

What does the future hold for German Studies in the U.S.? In his Distinguished Lecture, David Barclay addressed the topic by reminding us of the history of academic transatlantic exchanges. Since the 1920s organizations such as the Institute for International Education (IIE), Fulbright, and the DAAD have allowed many generations of students and scholars to enjoy extended research stays abroad which often resulted in life-changing experiences. However, David Barclay argues, the heyday of transatlantic academic exchange is coming to an end.

Nowadays, we encounter a range of problems from both sides of the Atlantic. Unresolved tensions between different goals of this exchange, i.e. between *Wissenschaftsförderung* und *auswärtiger Kulturpolitik* (cultural diplomacy) remain unresolved. On the German side, the aspect of *Wissenschaftsförderung* may have been successful, but the persistence of cultural stereotypes among academics about the U.S. seems to indicate an unwillingness to let go of old clichés. Furthermore, the focus on ivy-league institutions and an ignorance of other excellent institutions of higher learning outside the ivy-league system, limit the potential of such an exchange.

Among the barriers on the American side, highlighted by David Barclay, are the cultural and demographic shifts which are reducing the significance of Europe and Germany for Americans. The crisis

in the humanities, with its severe cuts in departments, stipend and language programs have added more restrictions on that exchange.

What is to be done to face these formidable challenges? David Barclay calls on us to get involved and explain why Germany and Europe still matter in academic exchanges and leaves us to ponder if programs such as the Berlin Program are even more important today.

Helga Haftendorn opened with some personal remarks about her first stay in the U.S. state of Arkansas in the early 1950s. Research stays that followed read like a history book and illustrate what David Barclay had just hinted at before: life-changing experiences. Being at U.S. universities during the heyday of desegregation and the Vietnam War has allowed the young scholar Helga Haftendorn to grow both academically and personally. Inspired by the McCloy Program, she initiated the Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies in 1986 at the Freie Universität Berlin.

Tom Haakenson reflected on the international and interdisciplinary capital in these programs which are necessary to develop both individual and collective creativity crucial in arts and sciences.

Rolf Hoffman provided us with insights into the German side of the exchange. The Bologna process and the emphasis on professional training have deeply changed the outgoing flows of student exchange. Currently, the Netherlands is the prime destination for German outgoing students, followed by Austria and the U.K.

The panel concluded with remarks from Wedigo de Vivanco who stressed the need for deep emersion into a culture, which cannot be achieved without a high level of language competence.

Karin Goihl, Berlin Program, Academic Coordinator

Panel 3: Postwar German Redemption: A Manual for Success?

Commentator: Martin Sabrow (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam)

Reconfiguring Antifascism in Postwar Berlin: A Study of Actors and Places of Myth Making

Clara Oberle (University of San Diego, Dept. of History), Berlin Program Fellow 2002-2003

“Lasting Reform Must Come From Within”: Education and Democratization in Adenauer’s Germany

Brian Puaca (Christopher Newport Univ., Dept. of History), Berlin Program Fellow 2002-2003

Human Rights without Pluralism: the East German Example and the Problem of Democratization

Ned Richardson-Little (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Dept. of History), Berlin Program Fellow 2010-2011

***Vergangenheitsbewältigung*– Deliberate Policies, Unintended Consequences, and Global Proliferation**

Julian Dierkes (University of British Columbia, Institute of Asian Research), Berlin Program Fellow 1997-1998

Redemptive and Reflective Cosmopolitanism in Reunited Germany

Michael Meng (Clemson University, Dept. of History), Berlin Program Fellow 2005-2006

This panel engaged with the complex set of issues surrounding democratization/westernization in postwar Germany. Some of the panelists explored the historical emergence of these redemptory narratives in the early postwar years, arguing that it was in the realm of the everyday that concepts like democracy and antifascism first took root. Clara Oberle, for example, utilized postwar housing policies and the activities of the Kulturbund to illustrate the oftentimes banal genesis of the myths of antifascism. Similarly, Brian Puaca focused on school reforms in the postwar years and argued that such reforms

functioned as a crash course in democracy for West German students. Julian Dierkes, Ned Richardson-Little, and Michael Meng all presented papers which to varying degrees critiqued the narrative of postwar German democratization. Richardson-Little's contribution investigated the emergence of a specifically socialist version of human rights in the GDR, thus undermining the accepted narrative in which human rights are inevitably coupled with democratization. Dierkes utilized a comparative perspective in order to argue that West Germany's famed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* emerged out of a unique institutional environment and thus might not be the easily exportable model it is often made out to be. Meng took a critical stance on Germany's engagement with the past, arguing that all too often it plays only a "redemptive" rather than a "reflective" role in modern German society. Unsurprisingly, given the nature of the topic, the presentations initiated a lively debate involving the panel members and the audience.

Jake Smith, Berlin Program Fellow 2010-2011

Panel 4: The Resilience of the German Model in Politics, Economy and Society

Commentator: Harald Wenzel (FU Berlin, John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien)

The 'German Model' in Renewable Energy Development

Carol Hager (Bryn Mawr College, Dept. of Political Science), Berlin Program Fellow 1991-1992

Intergenerational Returns from a Move to Germany? Comparing the Educational Performance of Youth on Both Sides of the German Border

Renee Reichl Luthra (University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research), Berlin Program Fellow 2008-2009

How do Bailouts fit within German and American Models of Capitalism?

Mark Cassell (Kent State University, Dept. of Political Science), Berlin Program Fellow 1995-1996

The European Sovereign Debt Crisis: Is Germany to Blame?

Brigitte Young (Westfälische Wilhelms Universität Münster, Institut für Politikwissenschaft), Berlin Program Fellow 1989-1990

The Good Germans: Not a Foregone Conclusion

Katja Weber (Georgia Institute of Technology, Sam Nunn School of International Affairs), Berlin Program Fellow 1990-1991

The presenters on Panel 4, "The Resilience of the German Model in Politics, Economy, and Society" hailed from the social sciences, providing unique perspectives on the question of German "goodness" by examining diverse topics such as energy policy, financial reform, and education. Political scientist Carol Hager's presentation described how the grassroots engagement of the German citizenry in energy policy has spurred the embrace of alternative energy in Germany, with important implications for the corporatist model of policy-making. Renee Luthra, a sociologist, argued that, when assessing immigrant educational outcomes, an oft-ignored yet crucial question is how immigrant children's educational attainment compares with educational attainment in their parents' home countries. When one asks this question, one observes that immigrants in Germany achieve substantial educational gains. Economic specialist Brigitte Young focused on the positive economic performance of Germany amidst the European sovereign debt crisis. She described how Germany's recent prosperity fueled accusations that Germany benefits unfairly from the Eurozone, which in turn has led to increasing doubt about the viability of the Euro within Germany's borders. Mark Cassell's presentation complemented this question by providing an intriguing overview of the bailout discussions in German and American newspapers, noting that the reasons given for government intervention differed in unexpected ways between these two economic giants. Finally, Katja Weber, presenting her work via Skype, explored how Germany

constructed a global role for itself in the wake of the atrocities of the Second World War by analyzing the speeches of German politicians in the post-war period. Throughout this panel, the presentations examined what the German approach offers as a model for other nations, with a balanced and nuanced assessment of Germany's achievements.

Alicia VandeVusse, Berlin Program Fellow 2010-2011

Panel 5: Wall Memories and Celluloid Traces

Commentator: Prof. Dr. Dorothee Brantz, Center for Metropolitan Studies, TU Berlin

The Berlin Wall as a Site of Memory since 1989

Hope Harrison (George Washington University, The Elliott School of International Affairs), Berlin Program Fellow 1991-1992

(In)visible Migrants: Public Memory and German Nationhood in the Shadow of the Berlin Wall

Jeffrey Jurgens (Bard College, Dept. of Anthropology), Berlin Program Fellow 1999-2000

It was cold and rainy on Saturday, July 2nd, but at Potsdamer Platz that did not bother the participants assembling in the cozy chairs of cinema 2. Just meters away from where the Wall once stood, Kino Arsenal seemed a perfect venue for this panel exploring memories of the Berlin Wall.

First, Hope M. Harrison spoke on "The Berlin Wall as a Site of Memory since 1989". Having witnessed history unfold by arriving in Berlin for the first time precisely on November 9th, 1989, Harrison not only investigates how the Berlin Wall came to be built, but also how it is remembered more than twenty years later. Focussing on anniversaries, she analyzed how Germany deals with the remnants of the Berlin Wall and its victims. In addition, she demonstrated that debates about how to remember the Berlin Wall are still ongoing and that many lessons can be drawn for future generations.

"(In)visible Migrants" was the topic of Jeffrey Jurgens' talk in which he touched upon the issue of West Berliners dying at the Wall, specifically one boy of Turkish descent who drowned in May 1975 near Oberbaumbrücke. Jurgens argues that non-German immigrants are largely excluded from Wall memories, but it was the aspect of how to commemorate Western victims of the Wall that tied both talks together that afternoon and engaged the audience.

After a very lively discussion on official and unofficial commemoration, panel and conference concluded with the screening of two film essays made twenty years apart. "Cycling the Frame" (1988) and "The Invisible Frame" (2009) both feature actress Tilda Swinton cycling along border landscapes.

Dominik Fungipani, Berlin Program, Program Assistant

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