

AMERICAN STUDIES IN TWENTIETH CENTURY GERMANY: ON THE HISTORY AND PRE-HISTORY OF THE GERMAN ASSOCIATION FOR AMERICAN STUDIES

GHI-sponsored panel at the 50th Annual Meeting of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien (German Association for American Studies), Amerikahaus, Munich, June 10-13, 2003. Moderator: Thomas Zeller (GHI/University of Maryland). Commentator: Hans-Jürgen Grabbe (Universität Halle-Wittenberg). Panelists: Walter Grünzweig (Universität Dortmund), Stefan L. Brandt (John F. Kennedy Institute Berlin), Philipp Gassert (Heidelberg Center for American Studies), Rainer Schnoor (Universität Potsdam), Anke Hildebrandt-Mirtschink (Universität Halle-Wittenberg), Michael Dreyer (Northwestern University).

Fifty years ago, the founding of the German Association for American Studies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien, or DGfA) in Marburg opened a new chapter in the history of American Studies in Germany. To celebrate this occasion, the DGfA devoted its 50th annual meeting to German-American relations. Focusing on the four topical issues of democracy, ethnicity, popular culture, and political culture, the annual congress also provided some space for scholarly reflection as well as eyewitness accounts concerning the history of American Studies in Germany. Organized by Philipp Gassert and chaired by Thomas Zeller, the GHI-sponsored workshop presented six papers on the history of American studies in three German states: the Third Reich, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The participants themselves represented a cross-section of the disciplines that are currently most active within the DGfA: cultural studies, history, literary studies, and political science.

A stimulating and original presentation by Walter Grünzweig entitled "‘Knight Harvard’: Friedrich Schönemann, American Studies Specialist in Nazi Germany" opened the panel. Beginning with a self-critical appraisal of his earlier research on Schönemann, Grünzweig refuted the conventional view of Schönemann as a tragic figure, as "yes, a Nazi . . . but also a prolific and outstanding *Amerikanist*." Although earlier researchers had not overlooked the fact that Schönemann had placed his scholarship in the service of Nazi Foreign Studies (*Auslandswissenschaften*), Schönemann's achievements for the institutionalization of American Studies in Germany were nevertheless highlighted. After discovering Schönemann's correspondence with the famous American cultural critic H. L. Mencken, however, Grünzweig revised his views on

Schönemann. Schönemann's letters to Mencken clearly demonstrate Schönemann's consistent antisemitism as well as his one-sided, highly nationalistic reinterpretation of American political culture. Grünzweig concluded his paper with the unsettling question whether Schönemann's "German" view forced whole generations of postwar West German American literature specialists to focus on purely American issues. This allowed them to join the international American Studies mainstream while preventing a serious coming to terms with the pre-1945 history of their field.

The second culturally and methodologically reflective paper was presented by Stefan L. Brandt. "From the Myth of German-Americans to the Enemy Image USA: American Studies in the Third Reich" placed Schönemann's life and career in the larger context of the development of American Studies in Nazi Germany. Asking himself why American Studies went through a surprising phase of rapid expansion during the Nazi era, Brandt demonstrated that the growing interest in American Studies was due to a strategic interest in the United States. Therefore, an expansion in scholarship did not entail an abandonment of highly ambiguous and ideologically charged views of the United States. Overall, the expansion of the field after 1933 and the beginning institutionalization of American Studies with its first chair at the University of Berlin was completely in harmony with the political goals of the Nazi state. American Studies became an "applied science" engaging in "enemy reconnaissance" (*Gegnerforschung*) as well as a means of propagandistic support to further the regime's ideological and political ends.

The third paper, by Philipp Gassert, continued the story beyond the year 1945. His paper was entitled "'Within the German University a New Area of Investigation': On the Problem of Continuity Within the Process of the Founding of the DGfA." Although Schönemann's role in the founding of the DGfA was rather limited, Gassert argued that the fact should not be overlooked that many of the association's original 33 members participated in Nazi foreign studies before 1945. Starting with an analysis of Arnold Bergstraesser's programmatic speech of 1953, Gassert argued that the difficulties that American Studies encountered in postwar West Germany were not just the result of a lingering anti-Americanism within a defeated country. They also stemmed from the fact that *Amerikastudien* had been tainted by the Nazi Foreign Studies paradigm. The compromise formula of American Studies as a "cooperative experiment," which Bergstraesser suggested at the founding congress in 1953, allowed the various disciplines to cooperate under the umbrella of the DGfA, yet did not fuse them into a new integrated field as Schönemann had advocated during the 1920s and 1930s.

Combining the authentic views of the eyewitness with the experience of the seasoned scholar, Rainer Schnoor presented a paper entitled "Left Deviations: Scenes from More than 40 Years of East German and GDR American Studies." Reminding the audience of the pioneering work of Robert Weimann, Eberhard Brüning, and Karl-Heinz Schönfelder, Schnoor argued that during the 1950s GDR American Studies took place under pictures of Stalin yet in a space that was relatively free of ideological intrusions. Especially during the 1960s, GDR American Studies had an almost subversive character. Young East German America specialists such as Heinz Wüstenhagen discovered the voices of the "other America" of racially and socially discriminated groups, while the official party line railed against a "formalistic and decadent" Western culture. Supported by colorful reminiscences, Schnoor suggested that East German *Amerikanisten* were living in an almost schizophrenic world—dividing themselves between their enthusiasm for American pop culture and their serious political and social involvement in the building of a socialist dictatorship.

Anke Hildebrandt-Mirtschink then presented the audience with a well-researched and informative paper entitled "Continuity and Change in the 'Cooperative Experiment': On the History of the DGfA since the late 1950s." Building on her exhaustive research in the DGfA archives in Mainz, Hildebrandt-Mirtschink looked at how interdisciplinary cooperation has withstood the test of time. Since Arnold Bergstraesser's programmatic 1953 speech, interdisciplinary cooperation has been defined as the most promising venue for the organization to prosper. Except for the DGfA's first decade, however, the DGfA has mostly had to live with a preponderance of literary studies scholars. At times this was perceived as a problem leading to bitter conflicts such as the notorious battle of Tutzing (1976), when historians were denied any representation on the DGfA's advisory board. In recent years, however, these conflicts have receded and the DGfA has coped rather well. It expanded the circulation of its journal *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, it successfully incorporated East German representatives of American Studies in 1990, and it continues to recruit increasing numbers of younger scholars and students. As Hildebrandt-Mirtschink concluded, not all problems may have been dealt with in detail; nevertheless, in reaching maturity and stability, the DGfA is no longer the "cooperative experiment" it once was, but has rather become a successful "cooperative venture" (*kooperatives Unternehmen*).

Michael Dreyer's precise overview "Promised Land or Temple of Methodologies? The Role of the US for German Political Science" began with the premise that there would be no political science in Germany without the United States. This holds true for the methodological basis of the discipline (which is less prevalent among political scientists special-

izing in the history of ideas and strongest in the subfield of international relations), for most of its thematic interests, and for the professional training of political scientists themselves. The organizational impact was most visible during the founding phase, when occupation authorities promoted political science as "democracy science." Since then, however, successive generations of political scientists have had firsthand experience studying or researching in the United States. Despite the importance of the United States for the development of the discipline's methodological and organizational background, only a handful of German political scientists themselves carry out research on the United States. Only within the subdiscipline of international relations is there a larger number of political scientists specializing in U.S. foreign policy. Furthermore, because of the astounding number of political scientists working in the United States, the American dominance of political science is not going to disappear any time in the near future.

In his informed commentary, Hans-Jürgen Grabbe asked about the parallels between the early twentieth-century emergence of the foreign studies paradigm in Germany and the arrival of American Studies in the United States at about the same time. Arguing that the importance of Bergstraesser's 1953 speech should not be overstated, he saw the emergence of a new generation of scholars in the 1960s as the real turning point toward what Walter Grünzweig has termed "an approach based on empathy" (as opposed to the "enemy reconnaissance" scholarship of the pre-1945 period). Concerning personal continuities beyond 1945, Grabbe reminded the audience that many who had joined the Nazi party in 1933 later became members of the anti-Nazi resistance. With regard to the GDR, Grabbe argued that historians specializing in the history of the United States seemed to have enjoyed less room to maneuver than representatives of American literary studies. A very lively discussion ensued that was augmented by the recollections of eyewitnesses such as Berndt Ostendorff (Munich University), who came in contact with East German *Amerikanisten* as a student during the 1960s, and Ulrich Littmann (a former head of the *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst*), who highlighted the importance of the United States for the development of American Studies in Germany. Although history does not provide a guide for the future, the varied and sometimes controversial experience of German *Amerikanisten*, and also the successes of German *Amerikastudien* as well as the growth of the DGfA, suggest that American Studies will have a future in Germany that will hopefully be as interesting and stimulating as its past.

Philipp Gassert