

THE UNITED STATES AND GERMANY IN THE ERA OF THE COLD WAR

Symposium at the GHI, May 17, 2004. Conveners: David Lazar (GHI) and Christof Mauch (GHI).

Participants: Harold James (Princeton University), Detlef Junker (University of Heidelberg and Heidelberg Center for American Studies), Thomas Schwartz (Vanderbilt University), Frank Smith (Cambridge University Press), Frank Trommler (University of Pennsylvania).

The terms “regime change” and “nation-building” might be recent additions to the working vocabulary of Washington’s policy-makers, but the goals they signify are anything but new. By one count, the United States made sixteen attempts at establishing democratic rule in foreign nations over the course of the twentieth century. The failure of most of those attempts makes the success of the American intervention in Germany after 1945 all the more conspicuous.

Explaining that success and the multifaceted ties it engendered was the aim of the GHI’s most ambitious project to date. During his tenure as director, Detlef Junker oversaw the compilation of a comprehensive survey of German-American relations during the decades following World War II. Over 130 scholars from both sides of the Atlantic were recruited to explore the myriad contacts, both formal and informal, between the United States and the two postwar German states. The resulting two-volume work appeared in German in 2001 under the title *Die USA und Deutschland im Zeitalter des Kalten Krieges 1945–1990: Ein Handbuch*. The English edition, *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945–1990: A Handbook*, was published in the spring of 2004 by Cambridge University Press. The first volume of both editions is devoted to the period 1945–1968, the second to 1968–1990. Each volume is in turn divided into five thematic sections: Politics, Security, Economics, Culture, and Society. Each section opens with a long survey essay that is followed by roughly ten to twenty shorter chapters on more narrowly defined topics.

To mark the publication of *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War*, the GHI organized a public panel discussion with three of the authors of survey essays, Harold James (Economics, 1968–1990), Thomas Schwartz (Politics, 1945–1968), and Frank Trommler (Culture, 1945–1968 and 1968–1990). By way of introduction, Detlef Junker and Frank Smith of Cambridge University Press described the origins and goals of *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War*. Junker called particular attention to the complexity of German-American ties

during the second half of the twentieth century and the enormous influence the United States had upon both East and West Germany. The example of the bilateral relations between the U.S. and the Federal Republic, he noted, also makes clear the increased multilateralization of international political relations and the globalization of economic ties over the past half century.

The other three panelists addressed two broad questions: What might they change if they were to write their survey essays today, and how might recent events and developments influence understanding of the Cold War era. Thomas Schwartz, the first speaker, outlined three points that he would give greater attention if he were to rewrite his contribution to the first volume of *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War*, “‘No Harder Enterprise’: Politics and Policies in the German-American Relationship, 1945–1968.” First, he would stress that the circumstances in which postwar German-American relations developed were in many respects unique, thus making comparisons to other American interventions abroad difficult. In particular, the tremendous violence and destruction of World War II had a deep and unparalleled influence on German-American relations. Secondly, Schwartz would underscore the consequences of the brutality of Soviet policy in eastern Germany during the occupation and early years of the German Democratic Republic. The Soviet presence in East Germany, he suggested, spared the United States from pressure for quick resolution of the German question and increased West Germans’ willingness to put up with the American military presence in the Federal Republic. Thirdly, Schwartz would highlight the importance of multilateralism in U.S. foreign policy during the first two decades of the Cold War, especially in matters touching upon Germany. There were certainly instances when the U.S. was strongly tempted to act unilaterally or to resort to bilateral agreements in its dealings with European nations, he noted, but on the whole Washington sought to coordinate policy with its European allies.

Looking back to the period covered by his essay “Cooperation, Competition, and Conflict: Economic Relations between the United States and Germany, 1968–1990,” Harold James suggested that less has changed in transatlantic economic relations since the end of the East-West conflict than recent talk of tensions between Europe and the United States might suggest. Current European critiques of U.S. fiscal and economic policy strongly echo arguments advanced in the mid-1960s, James noted, and American responses to those critiques likewise follow well-established lines of argument. These continuities notwithstanding, however, James does see economic developments linked to the end of the international order of the Cold War era that could have a profound impact in years ahead. First, unified Germany confronts economic problems much more

severe than the recessions the "old" Federal Republic experienced up to 1989, but its political capacity to address those problems is now limited. Secondly, doubts about the sustainability of U.S. economic and fiscal policy are probably much more justified today than when Charles de Gaulle lambasted Washington's predilection for deficit spending nearly forty years ago. Noting that the American current account was still in surplus in de Gaulle's day, James wondered aloud whether the U.S. will continue to enjoy its status as the leading "safe haven" for international investors. In general, James observed, the international economic order seemed much more stable during the Cold War than it does today.

Frank Trommler, who contributed the essay "A New Start and Old Prejudices: The Cold War and German-American Cultural Relations, 1945–1968" to volume one of *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War* and "Culture as an Arena of Transatlantic Conflict" to volume two, outlined four aspects of Cold War-era cultural life that have become increasingly evident in the fifteen years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Trommler first called attention to the importance of competition with the East bloc as a spur to German-American cultural cooperation during the Cold War; the sense of a common Western mission fostered by that competition has clearly waned since 1990. One tangible consequence of this development, according to Trommler, has been a marked reduction in state funding for bilateral cultural initiatives and growing reliance on private sponsorship. Secondly, Trommler pointed to the role of cultural relations as a form of *Ersatzpolitik* during the Cold War; a limited East-West rapprochement was possible in cultural exchange during the 1970s and 1980s as political relations, particularly between the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, stagnated. Rather than a substitute for politics, cultural relations have increasingly become a forum for "politics by other means." Thirdly, Trommler argued that the production and reception of American popular culture should be seen as one of the pivotal developments of the second half of the twentieth century. The wide-reaching influence of American popular culture is evident not least in the emergence of the concept of postmodernism, which, according to Trommler, was closely tied to the American embrace of popular culture. Finally, Trommler speculated that Germany's role in the American "economy of evil" has changed fundamentally as a result of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Before September 11, the Holocaust stood as the defining image of evil in the eyes of many Americans; in the years since, "terrorists" and "terrorism" have increasingly displaced the Holocaust as the characteristic embodiment of evil for Americans.

David Lazar