

SELLING DEMOCRACY: PRODUCTIVITY AND PROPAGANDA IN THE SERVICE OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

Discussion panel and film screening at the Goethe-Institut, Washington, DC, April 18, 2005. Co-sponsored by the GHI, the Goethe-Institut, and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Conveners: Christine von Oertzen (GHI), Sandra Schulberg (*Selling Democracy*), and Jonathan Skolnik (GHI).

Participants: Rebecca Boehling (University of Maryland, Baltimore County), Alberto Fernandez (United States Department of State, Office of Public Diplomacy, Iraq Affairs), Amy Garrett (United States Department of State, Office of the Historian), John K. Glenn (German Marshall Fund), Michael Meyer (*Newsweek*).

Included in this year's Washington, DC International Film Festival was a remarkable series showcasing American films produced to promote the European Recovery Program (ERP, the "Marshall Plan") from 1948 to 1953. "Selling Democracy," as the series was entitled, had been shown previously to great acclaim as part of the New York Film Festival. The GHI was honored to co-sponsor a discussion panel that preceded the final screenings in Washington.

John Glenn of the German Marshall Fund of the United States moderated the panel. Two historians provided a detailed framework for understanding the economic and political context of American information efforts in Western Europe during these years: Rebecca Boehling of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County and Amy Garrett of the United States Department of State's Office of the Historian. Michael Meyer, a senior editor at *Newsweek* who headed the magazine's European bureau for many years, challenged the other panelists and the audience to question some of the enduring myths about the Marshall Plan, specifically the notion that America, rather than Europe itself, was the prime mover in postwar reconstruction. Alberto Fernandez of the U.S. Department of State's Office of Iraq Affairs offered his perspective on the contrasts between the type of public diplomacy represented by the Marshall Plan films and current American efforts in the Middle East. For Fernandez, the ambitious effort to reach out to the European populace and to educate them about America after World War II is a model that contemporary planners have unfortunately neglected in favor of public diplomacy run "more like an American political campaign." The audience included many individuals who had played a role in the Marshall Plan, providing for a vibrant discussion.

The six short films that followed the panel pursued a clear anti-

Communist agenda with different emphases. *Struggle for Men's Minds* sought to transform despair into optimism by changing European mentalities regarding the relation of citizens to the state. Dark images of Communists nearly paralyzing Italy with strikes gave way to a scenario where clever individuals can overcome the chaos and enjoy productivity and prosperity. The other films included animation. While *Without Fear* used color animation for a monochrome political message, *The Shoemaker and the Hatter* and *Do Not Disturb!* used humor and a light-hearted tone to illustrate the virtues of free trade.

Jonathan Skolnik and Julia Driesen