

A TUMULTUOUS RELATIONSHIP: NICHOLAS MURRAY BUTLER AND GERMANY IN THE ERA OF THE TWO WORLD WARS¹

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The relationship between Germany and the United States in the first half of the twentieth century was a tumultuous one, to say the least. In the era of the two world wars, transatlantic relations oscillated between rivalry and partnership, confrontation and cooperation, resentment and reconciliation. The interactions of German and American academics encapsulated and shaped this volatile relationship: they studied and taught at each other's universities, served their respective nations as cultural diplomats and propagandists, and helped shape national images in elite discourse and public opinion.² Importantly, the academic world also embodied the sea change in international prestige and influence that characterized German-American relations at large. By the late nineteenth century, Germany still occupied a pre-eminent place in international academia, and U.S. universities vied for German contacts and connections. Half a century later, German universities were in spiritual and physical disarray, looking for support to the United States, which had become an economic, political, and academic superpower.

This article explores this tumultuous relationship through the life of one American academic, Nicholas Murray Butler. Butler, a philosophy professor and president of Columbia University from 1902 to 1945, was both a witness to and a key protagonist in German-American relations. Although largely forgotten today, Butler was among the most prominent Americans of his time. Driven by seemingly boundless energy and equally boundless ambition, Butler rose from a middle-class background to become not only Columbia University's longest-serving president but also a well-known champion of international cooperation, serving as a director (since 1910) and president (since 1925) of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and receiving the Nobel Peace prize in 1931. As an avid public speaker, interviewee and writer of opinion pieces (his bibliography includes more than 3,200 published items up to 1932 alone) Butler exerted considerable influence in the public sphere in the United States and beyond.³ So prominent was Butler in his day that the *New York Times* for decades published his annual Christmas greetings.⁴ If Butler's national standing was

- 1 I would like to thank my colleagues at the University of Manchester's Cultures of Diplomacy Reading Group, including Charlotte Faucher, Christian Goeschel, Mercedes Peñalba-Sotorrio and Tom Allcock, for commenting carefully on an earlier draft of this paper; I would also like to thank Tomás Irish and Charlotte Lerg for sharing my Butler enthusiasm over the years and Tomás for reading and carefully commenting on this paper (and many others this year). Finally, I want to express my appreciation to Axel Jansen, Claudia Roesch and Richard Wetzell of the GHI Washington, who provided useful pointers on how to revise the piece and improve its flow and argument.
- 2 Anja Werner, *The Transatlantic World of Higher Education: Americans at German Universities, 1776-1914* (New York, 2013).
- 3 Albert Marrin, *Nicholas Murray Butler* (Boston, 1976), 29.
- 4 Michael Rosenthal, *Nicholas Miraculous: The Amazing Career of the Redoubtable Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler* (New York, 2006), 10.



Figure 1. Nicholas Murray Butler in Berlin, June 1926. *Der Welt-Spiegel* Nr. 27, 3 (Beilage *Berliner Tageblatt*).

5 Quoted in Marrin, *Nicholas Murray Butler*, 13.

6 Marrin, *Nicholas Murray Butler*; Rosenthal, *Nicholas Miraculous*; Milton Halsey Thomas, *Bibliography of Nicholas Murray Butler*,

1872-1932: *A Check List* (New York, 1932); A number of focused pieces: Michael M. Sokal (2009), "James McKeen Cattell, Nicholas Murray Butler, and Academic Freedom at Columbia University, 1902-1923," *History of Psychology* 12, no. 2 (2009): 87-122; Charles F. Hewlett, "John Dewey and Nicholas Murray Butler: Contrasting Conceptions of Peace Education in the Twenties," *Educational*

impressive, his international stature was truly astounding. Over the course of his long and active life he accumulated honorary degrees and state decorations from all over Europe. On his annual visits to the Old World, he wined and dined with kings and queens, scientific and intellectual luminaries, statesmen and politicians. Wherever he went, Butler was celebrated and honored as *the* cultural ambassador of the United States. As the Progressive journalist William Allen White wrote about Butler's influence: "Probably no other citizen of this land [the United States] for the last forty years has known so many of the powerful figures of business, education and politics in Europe and the United States. ... He has made his private opinion public sentiment probably more definitely than any other living man in this country ..."⁵

And yet, surprisingly little is known about Butler's role in international relations and German-American relations in particular. In contrast to his role in domestic affairs (including Butler's long involvement in educational reform and the Republican party),⁶ his engagement with Germany has received only limited and piecemeal attention.⁷ Thus Charlotte Lerg recognizes Butler as a determined *university diplomat* who in the decade after 1900 built close ties to German universities

Theory 37, no. 4 (1987): 445-461.

7 Joseph Winn, "Nicholas Murray Butler, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the Search for Reconciliation in Europe, 1919-1933," *Peace & Change*, 31 (2006): 555-584. David Clinton, "Nicholas Murray Butler and 'The International Mind' as the Pathway to Peace," in *Progressivism and US Foreign Policy between*

the World Wars, eds. Molly Cochran and Cornelia Navari (New York, 2017) 49-72; Andrew Williams, "Waiting for Monsieur Bergson: Nicholas Murray Butler, James T. Shotwell, and the French Sage," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 23, no. 2 (2012): 236-253; Nadine Akhund and Stephane Tison, *En guerre pour la paix. Correspondance Paul d'Estournelles de Constant et Nicholas Murray-Butler 1914-1919* (Paris, 2018);

and officials (as well as Western Europe more generally) to advance his own, Columbia University's and America's prestige in the world.⁸ During the First World War, as Tomás Irish shows, Butler was at the forefront of integrating American universities in the U.S. war effort and forging a cultural alliance against Germany;⁹ from the mid-1920s onward, however, as Katharina Rietzler and Michael Wala demonstrate, Butler once again used the resources of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) and Columbia University to champion reconciliation with Germany and rebuild ties with German universities and officials.¹⁰ These ties he maintained even after 1933 and thereby, as Stephen Norwood argues, helped condone and legitimize Nazi Germany in the United States.¹¹ While existing scholarship thus conveys the intense and volatile nature of Butler's relationship with Germany, much of what we know remains episodic. Above all, Butler's engagement with Wilhelmine, Weimar and Nazi Germany is usually treated separately, even though personal and cultural relationships do not necessarily align with political periodization.

By contrast, this paper argues that Butler's relationship with Germany — and Germany's relationship with Butler — is best understood through a long-term analysis, covering the period from around 1900 to the late 1930s. What is more, this paper seeks to use Butler's life as a lens to comprehend a complicated German-American relationship beyond its better-known military and political caesura. What makes Butler such an illuminating subject of historical study is his five decade-long involvement with international (academic) relations. Unlike other university presidents of his time, who served much shorter tenures, Butler allows for a long-term perspective on a crucial half-century of German-American relations. And only such a perspective can explain, I believe, why Butler and other internationalists, staunch anti-militarists that they were, seemingly ended up condoning the Third Reich.

On the one hand, this paper treats Butler as representative of a generation of U.S. cultural internationalists, often educators, who used their access to published opinion and academic networks to pursue an informal foreign policy fostering international intellectual cooperation and, thereby, they hoped, lasting peace.¹² On the other hand, the paper explores German attitudes and ambitions towards Butler, approaching them as an indication of German attitudes and ambitions towards the United States more generally. Accordingly, the paper

8 See Charlotte Lerg, *Universitätsdiplomatie. Wissenschaft und Prestige in den transatlantischen Beziehungen, 1890–1920* (Göttingen, 2019).

9 Tomás Irish, *The University at War, 1914–25* (London, 2015), 96–97.

10 Katharina Rietzler, "Philanthropy, Peace Research and Revisionist Politics: Rockefeller and Carnegie Support for the Study of International Relations in Weimar Germany," in *Beyond the Nation: United States History in Transnational Perspective*, eds. Thomas Adam and Uwe Luebken. Supplement 5, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* (2008): 61–79; Michael Wala, "Gegen eine Vereinzelung Deutschlands'. Deutsche Kulturpolitik und akademischer Austausch mit den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika in der Zwischenkriegszeit," in *Deutschland und die USA in der internationalen Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Manfred Berg and Philipp Gassert (Stuttgart, 2004), 303–315.

11 Stephen H. Norwood, *The Third Reich in the Ivory Tower: Complicity and Conflict on American Campuses* (New York, 2009); on Columbia in particular, Stephen H. Norwood, "Complicity and Conflict: Columbia University's Response to Fascism, 1933–1937," *Modern Judaism*, 27, no. 3 (2007): 253–283.

12 On Butler's main theory in that respect see Nicholas Murray Butler, *The International Mind: An Argument for the Judicial Settlement of International Disputes* (New York, 1912); see also Clinton, "Nicholas Murray Butler and 'The International Mind.'"

relies as much on Butler's personal papers, university records and Carnegie Endowment materials at the Columbia University Archives as it does on the records of the Prussian Ministry of Culture and the German Foreign Ministry.

By sketching this tumultuous relationship, the paper is part of a larger historiographical trend in diplomatic history, which underlines the significant role of individual transnational actors in international relations. In recent decades, diplomatic historians have begun to look beyond the traditional foreign-policy establishment to ponder the actions and impact of academics, students, foundation officers, missionaries, humanitarians, musicians and even tourists as informal foreign policy actors.¹³ Butler's case offers a particularly intriguing window onto such private initiative and influence, and emphasizes the diplomatic potential of transatlantic academic relations in the early twentieth century.¹⁴

Moreover, tracing Butler's involvement with Germany opens a different perspective on a transatlantic relationship that is often recounted through major political, military, and economic events: The First World War and the Versailles peace treaty, the U.S.-brokered reparations settlements of 1924 (Dawes-Plan) and 1929 (Young-Plan), the Great Depression, and the Second World War.¹⁵ By contrast, this paper foregrounds the cultural dimension of transatlantic relations in two important ways: first, it examines the formative years of American and German cultural diplomacy, its main actors, and the (mis-)perceptions that informed them. Second, it traces the developments in the academic world that accompanied and shaped some of the key events of the period, that is, the confrontation of the era of the Great War, the process of transatlantic reconciliation in the 1920s, and Americans' initial accommodation of Nazi Germany. The paper will analyze Butler's, and the United States' volatile relationship with Germany in three chronological sections, focusing on the pre-war Wilhelmine era, the war and postwar period, including Weimar Germany, and the early Nazi years.

I. Butler, Germany, and transatlantic cultural diplomacy at the turn of the century

Butler's involvement with Germany dates back to the 1880s. An ambitious young man, Butler acquired all the traits he believed necessary to move up in the world early on: a posh accent, immaculate dress,

13 See Jessica Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850-1920* (Chicago, 2009); Ian Tyrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2010); Heather D. Curtis, *Holy Humanitarians. American Evangelicals and Global Aid* (Cambridge, MA, 2018); Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003); on the academic context, see Ludovic Tournès and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *Global Exchanges: Scholarships and Transnational Circulations in the Modern World* (New York, 2018), Heather Ellis and Ulrike Kirchberger, eds. *Anglo-German Scholarly Networks in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, 2014); Paul Kramer, "Is the World Our Campus? International Students and U.S. Global Power in the Long Twentieth Century," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 5 (2009): 775-806.

14 See especially Thomas Adam and Charlotte Lerg, "Diplomacy on campus: the political dimensions of academic exchange in the North Atlantic," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 13, no. 4 (2015): 299-310.

15 Manfred Jonas, *The United States and Germany: A Diplomatic History* (Ithaca, NY, 1984); Werner Link, *Die amerikanische Stabilisierungspolitik in Deutschland 1921-32* (Düsseldorf, 1970); Klaus Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany and Peacemaking* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985).

a courteous and cosmopolitan demeanor — and a European education. Like 10,000 other Americans in the nineteenth century, Butler (a PhD in philosophy from Columbia University in hand) spent a year at a German university, enrolling at the University of Berlin in 1884. Although Butler would often speak of the profound impact that his German teachers (especially the Neo-Kantian professor of philosophy Friedrich Paulsen) had had on him, it is difficult to ascertain how influential, in terms of his scholarship, his time abroad truly was.¹⁶ What is certain, however, is that his European education gave him a proficiency in French and German, strengthened his interest in world affairs, and aided his steep career at Columbia. A philosophy instructor at the tender age of 23, Butler became professor and dean of the Faculty of Philosophy five years later; then, in 1902, now 39 years old, he became president of the university — a post he would hold until 1945.

At this point, at the very latest, Butler began to renew his relationship with Germany. Butler was part of a group of enterprising university presidents who sought to reform U.S. higher learning and aimed to turn their universities into leading research institutions.¹⁷ To this end, they recognized that establishing closer ties with Europe's and particularly Germany's world-renowned institutions of higher learning could help raise their universities' academic profile, global visibility and, by extension, enrollments and endowment.¹⁸ In the summer of 1905, Butler thus ventured to Germany, where he managed to meet with Emperor Wilhelm II and Friedrich Althoff, the official in charge of Prussian universities. There, he successfully concluded an agreement for a German-American professorial exchange to be based at Columbia University and the University of Berlin respectively. In the following years, Butler turned Columbia University into a U.S. hub for relations with German science and culture: In 1906 and 1907 he served as president of the recently founded Germanistic Society of America, in 1911 he opened a *Deutsches Haus* at Columbia, and he welcomed and honored German academics and ambassadors on campus on a regular basis.¹⁹

Butler's search for German ties was doubtlessly driven by real enthusiasm for Germany and German culture. Like many Americans of his class and education, Butler cherished and conspicuously consumed European culture. What is more, his conversations and lunches with Wilhelm II in the summer of 1905 had greatly flattered and impressed Butler and he would remember them fondly as late as 1939.²⁰ A second factor, however, was Butler's lively competition

16 See Butler's foreword in *Friedrich Paulsen: An Autobiography*, trans. and ed. Theodor Lorenz (New York, 1938).

17 Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, 1970)

18 This process is covered in detail in Lerg, *Universitätsdiplomatie*.

19 See Columbia University Library, Rare Books & Manuscript Library [CUL], Spec MS Coll 0255 Columbia University. Deutsches Haus Records.

20 Nicholas Murray Butler, *Across the Busy Years*, Vol 2, 56-77; A detailed account in Butler to John Burgess, August 13, 1905, CUL, Box 319/2, Burgess, John William.

with other American university presidents such as Charles W. Eliot of Harvard, William R. Harper of Chicago or Benjamin I. Wheeler of the University of California.²¹ It was Harvard University's agreement for a professorial exchange with the University of Berlin in late 1904 that prompted Butler's trip to Germany just a few months later. Yet, for Butler — and this *was* exceptional — his pursuit of German connections was also a means of *cultural diplomacy*. In the more than forty years of his Columbia presidency, Butler would use the university's resources, its access to international networks, and the prestige of academic ritual to boost not only his own and Columbia's but also the United States' visibility and influence in the world. Above all, Butler believed that intellectual exchange between Germany and the United States could help educate their respective publics to develop greater knowledge and appreciation of each other's culture and to think in terms of international cooperation — what Butler famously called “the International Mind.” Ultimately, the professorial exchange was part of a cultural initiative intended to maintain German-American “friendship” just as geopolitical conflict in Latin America began to sour their relationship around the turn of the century.²²

Butler's political agenda is evident from the set-up of Columbia's professorial exchange with Berlin, particularly those aspects in which it differed from Harvard's: unlike at Harvard, where German exchange professors taught classes in their academic specialty and in German, the exchange professorship at Columbia was geared towards a wider public impact, focusing on German current affairs, and professors taught in English. Moreover, the exchange professors did not hail from Columbia or Berlin alone but were recruited countrywide, serving as national, not institutional representatives. The exchange's self-declared *national* mission was also apparent from its name: with the consent of the German emperor and the American president, the German professor in New York held the title of *Kaiser-Wilhelm-Professor of German History and Institutions*, while the American professor in Berlin held the *Theodore-Roosevelt-Professorship of American History and Institutions*. Accordingly, as Butler himself proudly declared, the exchange was less an academic than a diplomatic arrangement. As he wrote to Friedrich Schmidt-Ott, Althoff's successor in the Prussian Ministry of Culture:

My conception of the Roosevelt Professorship is that it represents an exchange not between institutions but between nations [... and] it is this characteristic of the Roosevelt

21 On Harvard and German universities, see Franziska von Ungern-Sternberg, *Deutschland und Amerika. Das Germanische Museum in Cambridge, Mass. Kulturpolitik zwischen den Kontinenten* (Cologne, 1994).

22 Jörg Nagler, “From Culture to Kultur: Changing American Perceptions of Imperial Germany, 1870-1914,” in *Transatlantic Images and Perceptions: Germany and America since 1776*, ed. David E. Barclay and Elisabeth Glaser-Schmidt, 131-154 (New York, 1997).

Professorship that gives to it a special meaning and a special distinction.²³

For Butler, then, academic relations were always part and parcel of international politics. At a time when there was no official U.S. cultural diplomacy to speak of, informal actors like Butler confidently stepped in and used their own means — their cultural capital, access to university endowments, and broad transnational contacts — to bolster U.S. influence and visibility in the world. At least as far as Butler was concerned, this amounted to a deliberate act of informal foreign policy making. It is indicative of Butler's vision (and his ego) that he repeatedly likened Columbia to a U.S. Ministry of Culture.²⁴

At the same time these developments shed light on the early days of German cultural diplomacy. Transatlantic projects like the professorial exchange after 1900 derived from a mutuality of Butler's and German interests.²⁵ Prussian officials shared Butler's quasi-diplomatic understanding of international academic relations, or at least parts of it. Since about the turn of the century, the Prussian Ministry of Culture and Wilhelm II had begun to pursue an active cultural diplomacy towards the United States, including support for prestigious projects like the Germanic Museum at Harvard (1902), the professorial exchanges with Harvard and Columbia (1904/05), and the *Deutsches Haus* at Columbia (1911). The impetus behind these measures was clearly political, intending to use cultural ties to improve the deteriorating German-American relationship.²⁶ Prussian officials drew on what they considered Germany's unique influence at U.S. universities in the hope of swaying American elites in Germany's favor, or at least slowing their drift towards Germany's imperial rivals, France and Great Britain.²⁷ In the official German mind, well-connected alumni of German universities like Butler were seen as crucial, staunchly Germanophile partners in this task, whose promotion of and apparent devotion to German culture they rewarded with significant social courtesies and state honors. In 1910, for example, Butler received an honorary doctorate from the University of Berlin and was inducted into the Order of the Red Eagle, the highest honor the Prussian state awarded to foreigners.²⁸ Germans were not alone in considering Butler to be highly receptive to such flattery. Theodore Roosevelt, for example, found Butler one of those Americans "wholly unable to withstand contact with royalty."²⁹

23 Butler to Schmidt-Ott, Oct 6, 1910, GSPK,

NL Schmidt(-Ott), 418 Butler, New York,

Korrespondenz 1909-15.

24 Butler to Schmidt-Ott, June 16, 1911, CUL, University Archives, Rare Books & Manuscript Library, Central Files: Box 338/Friedrich Schmidt.

25 Bernhard vom Brocke, "Der Deutsch-Amerikanische Professoren-austausch. Preußische Wissenschaftspolitik, internationale Wissenschaftsbeziehungen und die Anfänge einer deutschen auswärtigen Kulturpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg," *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch* 31, no. 2 (1981): 128-182, 150.

26 See Nagler, "From Culture to Kultur," and Nancy Mitchell, *The Danger of Dreams. German and American Imperialism in Latin America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999).

27 Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase, "Die politische Funktionalisierung der Kultur: der deutsch-amerikanische Professoren-austausch 1904-1914," in *Zwei Wege in die Moderne: Aspekte der deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen 1900-1918*, eds. Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase and Jürgen Heideking (Trier, 1997), 45-88.

28 "Butler Honored By Kaiser. Prominent at Berlin Centenary", *Columbia Spectator*, Oct. 17, 1910, 6.

29 Quoted from Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase, "The Uses of 'Friendship'. The 'Personal Regime' of Wilhelm II and Theodore Roosevelt, 1901-1909," in *The Kaiser: New Research on Wilhelm II's Role in Imperial Germany*, eds. Annika Mombauer and Wilhelm Deist (Cambridge, 2003), 143-175, 150.

And yet, in hindsight, Butler's relationship with Germany also encapsulates German-American misunderstandings of that period. For one, Germans fundamentally misjudged the nature of Butler's and American academia's attachment to Germany. Their actions rested on a feeling of superiority and the belief that the thousands of Americans educated at German universities had given Germany special influence in a country that the Germans regarded as an intellectual backwater, a cultural colony of Europe. As the German ambassador to Washington, Count Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff, remarked dismissively shortly before the First World War: "today an American culture does not yet exist. After a short acquaintance with any American, it is soon clear whether his culture is of English, German or French origin."³⁰ German characterization of Butler as a "Germanophile" reflected such zero-sum-thinking, and made Germans blind to the fact that U.S. academics and university presidents like Butler strove to "internationalize," not to "Germanize" the American campus.³¹ Indeed, whereas German academics hoped to maintain their allegedly exclusive position on the American campus, Butler welcomed a French house (the *Maison Française* was opened on campus in 1913), French exchange professors and French honors with equal enthusiasm.³² In the decade before the war, Butler concluded professorial exchanges not just with Germany but also with France, the Netherlands, Japan and Austria; in the same vein, he assumed the presidency not only of the *Germanistic Society*, but also of the (Anglo-American) *Pilgrims Society* and the *France-America Society* (as well as a dozen others). If anything, Butler's cultural internationalism was informed not by Germanophilia but by U.S. exceptionalism.³³ Irrespective of his regard for European culture, Butler saw American education and culture as soon to be on par with Europe, and with many of its own ideas and principles to impart on what seemed an excessively militarist Old World. It comes as no surprise, then, that Butler grew increasingly impatient with German arrogance, as can be seen from his complaints to Berlin about sending only second-rate German professors to Morningside Heights. In February 1913, for example, he complained to the Prussian Ministry about "Prof. [Felix] Krueger of Halle" whom he characterized as "an agreeable little man of very ordinary capacity [but] in no sense the intellectual or academic equal of the men who we were sending as Roosevelt-professors."³⁴ Ultimately, Butler's annoyance indicated the different premises and objectives of German and American cultural diplomacy: Whereas Germans saw initiatives like the professorial exchange as an opportunity to cement their preeminent academic position and gain public influence, Americans like Butler considered

30 German Embassy Washington to Reichskanzler von Bethmann-Hollweg, Jan. 8, 1914, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes [PA] Botschaft Washington, 1523, Bernstorff. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's.

31 On this tendency, see Elisabeth Piller, "The Transatlantic Dynamics of European Cultural Diplomacy: Germany, France and the Battle for U.S. Affections in the 1920s," *Contemporary European History*, forthcoming 2021.

32 Robert J. Young, *Marketing Marianne: French Propaganda in America, 1900-1940* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2004); German observations of French advances in: PA, Botschaft Washington 449, Akten betreffend das Schulwesen (auch Fortbildungsschulen) und Universitäten, Vol 7, 1907-1908.

33 Butler, "Are We Our Brothers' Keepers? Opening Address as Chairman of the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration, May 18, 1910," in *The International Mind*, 45-66, esp. 62-66.

34 See Butler to Wilhelm Paszkowski, February 13, 1913, GSPK VI HA NL Schmidt-Ott 481 Professorenaustausch, deutsche und amerikanische Universitäten; see also Lerg, *Universitätsdiplomatie*, 360.

it a step towards academic parity and U.S. ascendancy. These different motivations, the coexistence of competition and cooperation,³⁵ explain some of the vitality of German-American cultural relations in the decade before the First World War, just as they would inform transatlantic antagonisms after 1914.

II. War and peace in the academic world, 1914-1932

The First World War occasioned a deep rift in Butler's and America's relationship with Germany, and one that would take well over a decade to mend. American academics began to drift away from Germany and into the Allied camp well before the United States entered the war on the side of the Allies in April of 1917. Butler's case illustrates some of the dynamics and the emotions behind this wartime cultural mobilization and its complicated legacy for German-American reconciliation in the 1920s.

1. Butler and transatlantic mobilizations after 1914

Like many Americans, Butler was caught in the middle of the European conflict from August 1914. For Butler this was true in an emotional sense as well as in a physical sense — he was on vacation in Europe in early August.³⁶ The outbreak of the war shattered the academic internationalism of prewar decades and ideologically divided the scientific community.³⁷ In all belligerent countries, members of the academic community joined the national war effort as soldiers, scientists and propagandists. In the latter capacity they promoted their national cause at home and abroad and tried to win the support of the most important neutral nation, the United States.³⁸ In late August 1914 Butler returned to New York City to find his desk laden with letters from European friends and acquaintances, all of them expecting him to listen sympathetically to their arguments and, ultimately, take their side. As could be expected, German officials and academics, too, readily identified Butler as a potential asset in winning U.S. favor and consequently made him a primary addressee of their myriad pamphlets, letters, and manifestos.³⁹ In the most (in) famous of these, the *Manifesto of the Ninety-Three*, ninety-three German intellectuals and artists threw their cultural prestige behind the German war effort and tried to refute British "lies": they defended the German invasion of neutral Belgium as a military necessity, denied that any atrocities had occurred, and belabored the heroic unity of the German people.⁴⁰ Just what German academics expected their American peers to make of these proclamations was clear from one

35 On the theme of cooperation and competition in German-American academic relations see Emily J. Levine, "Baltimore Teaches, Göttingen Learns: Cooperation, Competition, and the Research University," *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 3 (2016): 780-823.

36 Nicholas Murray Butler, *Across the Busy Years*, Vol 2, (New York, 1940) 247-264.

37 See Marie-Eve Chagnon and Tomás Irish, eds. *The Academic World in the Era of the Great War* (London, 2018).

38 M. L. Sanders, "Wellington House and British Propaganda During the First World War," *The Historical Journal* 18, no. 1 (1975): 119-146; Charlotte Lerg, "Off Campus: German Propaganda Professors in America, 1914-1917," in *The Academic World*, eds. Chagnon and Irish, 21-41.

39 See for example the correspondence in GSPK, VI HA NL Schmidt-Ott 541 Amerika Verschiedenes.

40 Wolfgang and Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg, *Der Aufruf "An die Kulturwelt!": Das Manifest der 93 und die Anfänge der Kriegspropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 1996).

appeal stating that “the universities of America know what German culture means to the world, so we trust they will stand by Germany.”⁴¹

Needless to say, this turned out to be a striking misjudgment. U.S. elites, especially on the Eastern seaboard, rather quickly adopted an anti-German or at least pro-Allied position. Not only did they hold Germany responsible for the war but they were also repelled by the German invasion of neutral Belgium, the German army’s atrocities against civilians and the destruction of cultural landmarks such as the university library of Louvain.⁴² What is more, they experienced German scholars’ defense, indeed, denial of these deeds as an act of moral bankruptcy. Already by late October, the sociologist Charles Elwood (an alumnus of the University of Berlin) found that Germany had lost the favor of about 90 per cent of American academics “in spite of the traditional influence of Germany over American universities.”⁴³ Indeed, many American scholars who had previously entertained close relations with Germany, such as former Harvard President Charles W. Eliot, railed publicly against German “militarism” and accused German scholars of being complicit in a war of aggression.⁴⁴

By contrast, Butler exemplifies a more cautious academic response. He adopted a moderate position that was shaped by his German ties, pacifist conviction and belief in American exceptionalism. He considered the war a senseless tragedy, but attributed it — at least initially — not to any one nation but to European militarism more generally. When he opened the academic year at Columbia in September 1914, Butler shared his deep regret about a war that had been started “by kings and by cabinets” and had been accepted by the “masses of population” only with “grim resignation.”⁴⁵ To illustrate his point, Butler shared a personal anecdote that would prove fateful for his relationship with Germany:

The most significant statement that I heard in Europe was made to me on the third day of August last by a German railway servant, a grizzled veteran of the Franco-Prussian war. In reply to my question as to whether he would have to go to the front, the old man said: “No; I am too old. I am seventy-two. But my four boys went yesterday, God help them! and I hate to have them go.” “For, Sir,“ he added in a lowered voice, “this is not a people’s war; it is a kings’ war, and when it is over there may not be so many kings.”⁴⁶

41 “Scientists Plead Germany’s Cause. Professors Ask Universities of America to Stand by Kaiser,” *New York Tribune*. Sep 25, 1914, 3.

42 Nicoletta F. Gullace, “Sexual Violence and Family Honor: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War,” *American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (Jun. 1997): 714-747, 717.

43 Charles A. Elwood, “Germany and American Opinion,” *The Sociological Review* 8 (1915): 106-111.

44 See the correspondence between Charles Eliot and Jacob Schiff in *New York Times Current History, the European War*, Vol 1, 465-472, and Dr. Eliot’s Third Letter (Sept 28, 1914), “Why is America anti-German?” 482-486.

45 *Address of President Butler at the Opening Exercises of the Academic Year of Columbia University, Sept. 23, 1914* (New York, 1914), 6.

46 *Address of President Butler*, 6.

Although Germans would soon focus on the allegedly insulting character of this anecdote, Butler arguably told it not to indict Germany but to argue that enlightened world opinion (the “International Mind”) and U.S. mediation could facilitate a lasting peace. In an interview with the *New York Times* a few weeks later he predicted that the war would bring a more democratic future to Europe and proclaimed the United States “the first moral power in the world to-day.”⁴⁷ Like President Wilson, Butler saw the war as a chance for U.S. moral leadership and, like him, initially believed that such leadership required continued U.S. neutrality.

Acting on this conviction, Butler sought at first to play the role of honest broker between Germany and the United States. In letters, articles and interviews he tried to explain the German position to Americans and vice versa.⁴⁸ In particular, he attempted to convince his German friends that anti-German sentiment in the United States was not (as they believed) the result of British misinformation but a justified response to German actions. Holding on to the popular notion of “two Germanies,” that is, the idea that there was a lofty Germany of scholarship, music and a jovial people and another Germany of excessive military drill and autocratic government, he tried to assure his German interlocutors that Americans blamed German leaders and not the German people. As he wrote to a German friend,

the terrible war keeps me awake at night [...] There is everywhere expressed the profoundest admiration and the deepest sympathy for the German people, but at the same time American public opinion is almost unanimously in favor of the Allies (even among those who know Germany well and love her most) because it is felt that the policy of militarism has far more power in Germany, Austria and Russia than anywhere else in the world and that unless the Allies are successful the power of militarism will increase and not diminish.⁴⁹

Throughout the first months of the war, Butler thus made a clear effort to maintain a degree of even-handedness, to clear up “misunderstandings,” or at least to couch his disapproval in conciliatory language. Such a position, however, was doomed to failure.

Butler’s stance drew heavy criticism on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, the champions of preparedness, that is, advocates of U.S. war preparation, including Butler’s former friend Theodore

47 “The United States of Europe. Interview with Nicholas Murray Butler,” *New York Times Current History* Vol 1 (1915): 565-571, 571.

48 Butler to Schmidt-Ott, Oct 28, 1914, Central Files: Box 338/Friedrich Schmidt; University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

49 Butler to Paszkowski, Sept 22, 1914, VI HA NL Schmidt-Ott 418 Butler, New York, Korrespondenz 1909-15; Butler to Paszkowski, May 20, 1915, VI HA NL Schmidt-Ott 418 Butler, New York, Korrespondenz 1909-15.

Roosevelt, accused him of “playing the game of the pacifists and the German-Americans in this country, who wish and who are in effect doing all they can to put our weight behind Germany.”⁵⁰ Meanwhile Butler’s German friends were equally indignant. They considered his equation of Germany with militarism and his distinction between German leaders and the German people highly offensive. To German minds, Butler’s harmless anecdote about the railroad employee was nothing short of a “falsification of the attitude of the German people” (as Schmidt-Ott reported to Wilhelm II)⁵¹ and an indication that “he has with concealed (if not with open) colors defected to the other [Allied] camp.”⁵² Despite Butler’s repeated offer to continue the professorial exchange, the Prussian Ministry chose to terminate it, and most other transatlantic interaction, in May 1915.⁵³

These experiences left a bad aftertaste for all involved. Responding to the termination of the professorial exchange, Henry Walcott Farnam of Yale University, who had also received part of his education in Germany, and was the designated Roosevelt Professor for 1915, related to Butler:

the sudden emergence of what seems almost like an opaque wall between the standards of my German friends and my own, the difficulty if not impossibility of ever again having that same feeling of interest and sympathy in German life and history which I have cherished since my boyhood, all belong to the imponderable yet very real losses of the year [...].⁵⁴

This feeling of disappointment was shared on the other side of the Atlantic. “America,” Schmidt-Ott complained to a German professor just a few weeks later, “is a hopeless case [...] You would not believe the nonsense that Mr. Butler and others have been writing in their letters. And the moral superiority of that nation has become nearly insufferable.”⁵⁵ The professorial exchange, begun as an experiment in international understanding, thus ended in discord and disillusionment.

In the broader context of the First World War, Butler’s experience is important for two reasons. First, it illustrates a larger rift in the academic world. During the first year of the war, German-American academic contact withered as both sides felt increasingly separated by an “opaque wall” of different standards and interpretations. By the time a German submarine sank the British ocean liner *Lusitania*

50 *Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Arthur Hamilton Lee*. January 22, 1915. Theodore Roosevelt Papers. LoC Manuscript Division. <http://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o211490>. Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library. Dickinson State University.

51 Schmidt-Ott to Wilhelm II, Nov 8, 1914, GSPK, I HA Rep 89 13367 Förderung der geistigen Beziehungen zu Amerika, Vol. 3, 1914–1916.

52 Kühnemann, Abschrift, Oct 3, 1914, GSPK VI HA NL Schmidt-Ott 411 Kühnemann, Berichte von amerik. Universitäten 1909–17.

53 Butler to Schmidt-Ott, November 30 1914, Central Files; Box 338/Friedrich Schmidt; University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

54 Farnam to Butler, May 27, 1915, Columbia University, Central Files; Box 665/Farnam, University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

55 Schmidt-Ott to Dobschuetz, Jun 17, 1915 NL Schmidt-Ott 420, GSPK.

in May 1915 with more than one hundred Americans on board — a turning point in U.S. sentiment towards Germany — German and American scholars had for the most part stopped communicating already.⁵⁶ Second, Butler’s case underlines an often overlooked, but defining feature of this development: its deeply emotional nature. This is particularly apparent from German (over)reactions: Butler’s harmless anecdote about the Franco-Prussian war veteran, for example, sparked an official investigation to find that railroad employee.⁵⁷ To be sure, wartime patriotism and accusations of German “war guilt” made Germans hypersensitive to criticism anyway; but they took particular offense at the disapproval emanating from U.S. universities because American academics seemed to owe so much to German universities. Thus they considered Butler’s neutralist position not just a disagreement among friends but an act of ingratitude, even betrayal.

As a consequence, the lessons many German scholars drew from U.S. rejections were radical: all efforts to win American academic favor would have to cease immediately, never to be taken up again. German prestige, a vocal group of professors argued, had only suffered from a decade’s courtship of what they saw as an academically inferior United States; the wartime animosity at Columbia and Harvard, the focal points of these efforts, had revealed its utter fruitlessness.⁵⁸ “If one should ever try to re-establish [the professorial exchange],” Eduard Meyer, a well-known historian and former German exchange professor at Harvard, declared in February 1915, “it is to be hoped that no German professor would stoop so low as to respond to a call to read at one of these universities.”⁵⁹ Ultimately, the bitter disappointment of German academics and officials demonstrated just how fundamentally they had misjudged both German influence and the “Germanophilia” of men like Butler.

American reactions, too, were the result of misperception and emotion. In particular, Americans failed to see that the myriad pronouncements of German professors were not so much the product of a uniquely militarist mindset as they were a defensive overreaction by men who felt (physically and propagandistically) “encircled” by enemies. They also failed to show much concern for the fact that German professors signed such appeals not in their capacity as scholars but as self-appointed representatives of the German nation.⁶⁰ Hence, they judged German claims about the defensive nature of the German war effort and their outright denial of German atrocities in Belgium, each of them made without any robust evidence, not only a violation

56 Carol Gruber, *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of Higher Learning in America*. (Baton Rouge, LA, 1975), 71-72; on the Lusitania: Frank Trommler, “The Lusitania Effect: America’s Mobilization against Germany in World War I,” *German Studies Review* 32, no. 2 (2009): 241-266.

57 Paszkowski to Schmidt-Ott, Dec 28, 1914, GSPK, VI HA NL Schmidt-Ott 420.

58 See “Selbststachtung vor den Neutralen!,” *Kriegshefte der Süddeutschen Monatshefte* (Dec 1914), 415; “Das Ausländer-tum an den deutschen Hochschulen,” *Der Tag*, June 15, 1915, clipping in GSPK, I HA Rep 89 13367 Förderung der geistigen Beziehungen zu Amerika, Vol 3, 1914-1916; Ludwig Fulda, *Amerika und Deutschland während des Weltkrieges* (Leipzig, 1916), 19-20.

59 Eduard Meyer, *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung*, Feb. 18, 1915, reprinted in Eduard Meyer, *Nordamerika und Deutschland*, 9-10 (Berlin, 1915).

60 Klaus Schwabe, *Wissenschaft und Kriegsmoral. Die deutschen Hochschullehrer und die politischen Grundfragen des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Göttingen, 1969).

of *moral* but also *academic* standards. Worse still, they considered German scholars' flimsy arguments (and their apparent belief that American scholars would readily swallow them) as a studied insult to their intelligence — and one symptomatic of German intellectual arrogance towards Americans. Albion Small, one of America's most influential sociologists, and, again, an alumnus of the University of Berlin, expressed just how "difficult it is for us to believe that men whom we have regarded a paragons of scientific methods can so flagrantly abandon the elements of critical procedure, unless they assume that Americans are incapable of detecting plain substitution of opinion for reality."⁶¹ In all, these academic divisions finally laid bare the different understandings of the transatlantic academic relationship: whereas Germans expected loyalty from their American "students," Americans expected intellectual respect from their German "peers." It was these disappointed assumptions that made the German-American falling out so very bitter.

This rift in the academic world held a larger significance for transatlantic affairs. As Butler's example shows, the academic and diplomatic worlds had become entangled in the prewar decades and they continued to converge after 1914. Academics figured prominently in home front mobilization the world over.⁶² Their cultural authority, international experience and access to published opinion helped shape public discourse. German observers considered former Harvard President Charles Eliot the "most dangerous, most conniving of our enemies and, because of the authority that his words carry in the United States, a hostile army corps."⁶³ Little wonder, then, that academic antagonisms percolated through to transatlantic politics. In Germany, the experience of American rejection radicalized many German scholars into increasingly uncompromising positions. U.S. ingratitude and the obvious futility of German friendship initiatives convinced them that only a "hardball" approach would get the desired results in the United States — in the academic as in the diplomatic and military worlds. It is no coincidence that an adamant nationalist like historian Eduard Meyer became a key proponent of unrestricted submarine warfare. He used his considerable scholarly authority and first-hand knowledge of the United States to help legitimize the position of those German leaders (such as Erich Ludendorff) who were eager to downplay U.S. military potential in the long debate leading up to the adoption of unrestricted submarine warfare, a policy that would eventually draw the United States into the war in April 1917.⁶⁴ Thus academic alienation came to affect German *Amerikapolitik* at large.

61 "German Professors Insult American Intelligence says Albion W. Small." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan 10, 1915; similar: "German Propaganda Answered. Dean Edgar Brandon of Miami University Resents Its Slight Upon American Intelligence." *New York Times*, Jan 13, 1915, 8; and Peabody to Schmidt-Ott, Oct 20, 1914, GSPK VI HA NL Schmidt-Ott, 420.

62 On mobilization see John Home, ed. *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge, 1997).

63 Kühnemann to Schmidt-Ott, Sep 22, 1914, GSPK VI HA, NL Schmidt-Ott, 411.

64 Manfred Nebelin, *Ludendorff. Diktator im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 2011), 300.

A similar process was observable in the United States. Many American academics culturally mobilized against Germany long before the United States entered the war, and they began to move closer to British and French universities in a way that presaged the alliance of 1917.⁶⁵ When the United States finally joined the Allied war effort, it did so not only economically and militarily but also culturally: German books were banned from libraries, the German language erased from school and university curricula and German music from concert halls. American academics, often German-trained, joined the U.S. propaganda effort, mobilizing a reluctant nation against German barbarism.⁶⁶ At Columbia, Butler erased all traces of German influence (including the closure of the *Deutsches Haus* in 1917) and transformed his campus into an ideological and physical recruiting ground for the American Expeditionary Force.⁶⁷ His volte-face resulted from emotions, convictions and ambitions alike. Clearly, Butler's personal disappointment fueled his growing belief that a defeat of Germany was tantamount to the defeat of militarism and hence every true pacifist's duty.⁶⁸ At the same time, joining the American war effort promised Butler and his university the visibility and prestige that German connections previously had.⁶⁹

2. Butler and the difficult demobilization of minds

If Butler's relationship with Germany offers insights into the transatlantic dynamics of cultural mobilization during the Great War, his slow reconciliation with the defeated nation in the 1920s underlines the difficult demobilization of minds thereafter.⁷⁰ Butler's example illustrates the psychological hurdles of finding common ground in the postwar years, just as it attests to the important role that cultural relations would eventually play in fostering transatlantic accord. It shows, too, that the German-American rapprochement of the 1920s, often attributed to financial entanglements and shared economic interests, had a notable cultural dimension.⁷¹

The demobilization of minds after the war was extremely difficult. This was the case even though there were good reasons on both sides to quickly renew transatlantic relations. Certainly, Germans and Americans alike should have had a vested interest in renewing their academic relationship. Germany, for its part, looked to win the support of a newly influential United States in revising the Versailles Treaty, particularly the reparations provisions.⁷² Since it was widely

65 German unrestricted submarine warfare, its campaign of sabotage and espionage in the United States, and a number of diplomatic blunders alienated many Americans and ultimately led the U.S. to join the war against Germany in April 1917; see Michael Neiberg, *The Path to War: How the First World War Created Modern America* (New York, 2016).

66 George Blakely, *Historians on the Homefront: American Propagandists for the Great War* (Lexington, KY, 1970).

67 Irish, *The University at War*, 96-97.

68 "How to obtain lasting peace: 'by victory only' declared Nicholas Murray Butler; military defeat of Germany necessary, he says; 'World is at war with an idea'—His formula", *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 17, 1918.

69 Irish, *The University at War*, 105; Lerg, *Universitätsdiplomatie*, 554.

70 Daniel Kevles, "Into Hostile Political Camps": the Reorganization of International Science in World War I," *Isis* 62, no. 1 (1971): 47-60.

71 For a detailed discussion see Piller, *Selling Weimar. German Public Diplomacy and the United States* (Stuttgart, 2020).

72 Manfred Berg, "Germany and the United States: The Concept of World Economic Interdependence," in *Genoa, Rapallo, and European Reconstruction in 1922*, eds. Carole Fink, Axel Frohn et al. (New York, 1991), 77-93.

recognized that Washington would be unwilling to exert itself on behalf of Germany as long as U.S. opinion remained hostile to Germany, this should have suggested a concerted German effort at public diplomacy, including the resumption of academic exchange.⁷³ Likewise, Butler and U.S. cultural internationalists should have had a special interest in Germany. In the early 1920s, they began to use the United States' unprecedented influence and cultural resources to pacify and stabilize an ailing continent, often acting in lieu of an "isolationist" U.S. government.⁷⁴ In light of Germany's alleged penchant for militarism and autocracy, it would have been logical to center at least part of this internationalist agenda on the fledgling Weimar Republic.

And yet, German-American academic contacts remained sparse in the postwar years. In fact, Butler's hopes for lasting peace at first rested on continued cooperation with America's wartime allies, which he pursued through myriad cultural ventures.⁷⁵ In the early 1920s, Butler used the Carnegie Endowment's and Columbia University's funds to support the reconstruction of the libraries at Reims, Louvain and Belgrade (victims of the Central Powers), established student exchange programs with British, Italian and French universities and feted Allied war heroes like Marshall Foch on and off campus.⁷⁶ At the same time, Butler kept the utmost distance from Germany and German scholars and even encouraged their exclusion from international scientific and academic organizations (and the League of Nations) in 1919, believing that they should show some repentance before being readmitted to the international community.⁷⁷ Thus Butler rebuffed a more conciliation-minded Swedish colleague in an open letter of April 1919,

We [American academics] have not forgotten the amazing prostitution of scholarship and science to national lust marked by the formal appeal to the civilized world made by German professors in September 1914. That appeal was an unmixed mess of untruths, and the stain which it placed upon the intellectual and moral integrity of German schol-

73 AA to Nadolny (Stockholm), Apr. 28, 1921, PA R 64979.

74 Butler to Stresemann, Nov 13, 1925, CEIP, Box 35 4-5 Butler Correspondence, 1908-1925, Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library Collections; on U.S. informal influence in the interwar period see Winn, "Nicholas Murray Butler"; Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York, 1982); Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Ithaca, NY, 1984); Liping Bu, *Making the World Like US. Education, Cultural Expansion and the American Century* (Westport, CT, 2003), 51-83; Helke Rausch, "Akademische Vernetzung als politische Intervention in Europa. Internationalismus-Strategien US-amerikanischer Stiftungen in den 1920er Jahren." *Jahrbuch für Universitätsgeschichte* 18 (2015): 163-186.

75 On Butler's opinion of the peace treaty, see "Calls Treaty Epoch-Making: German Militarism Dead Forever Says Nicholas Murray Butler." *New York Times*, May 08, 1919; on the "qualified internationalism" that French, British and American universities fashioned, see Tomás Irish, "From International to Interallied: Transatlantic University Relations in the Era of the First World War, 1905-1920," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 13, no. 4 (2015): 311-325.

76 Nicholas Murray Butler, *In Honor of Marshal Foch. Address as President of the France-America Society at the Banquet in Honor of Marshal Foch Hotel Waldorf Astoria, November 19,*

1921 (New York, 1921); Embassy Washington to AA, "Jahresbericht des Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924," Apr 23, 1925, PA Botschaft Washington, 1548.

77 Nicholas Murray Butler, "American Opinion and the Problems of Peace," *International Conciliation* (Special Bulletin) 134a (New York: 1919), 8.

ars and men of science will forever remain one of the most deplorable, discouraging events of the war which German militarism and Prussian autocracy forced upon the peaceful and liberty-loving nations of the world.⁷⁸

As a consequence, contacts with German universities and scholars remained rare in the early 1920s and the few American projects that invited German participation (such as the Carnegie Endowment's survey of European school textbooks in 1922) often ended up perpetuating the bias they were officially committed to overcome.⁷⁹

But Germany made no efforts to get in touch with academic opinion-shapers like Butler either. While German diplomats saw renewed scholarly exchange as highly desirable, German academics remained culturally mobilized, indeed, remobilized in response to the Versailles Treaty. Feeling wrongfully excluded from the world of scholarship, they responded to their expulsion from international scientific organizations in 1919 (what German scholars called the scientific "boycott") with an increasingly organized "counter-boycott," often demanding tokens of pro-Germanness and recognition of the "injustice" perpetrated upon Germany before deigning to reenter international cooperation.⁸⁰ Under these circumstances, no meaningful transatlantic cooperation, let alone cultural diplomacy resumed in the early 1920s. Butler's non-relationship with Germany — and Germany's non-relationship with Butler — attests to the difficulties of re-establishing cordial transatlantic ties, even and especially among those who had known each other well. As late as 1923, the German embassy in Washington considered U.S. universities a bulwark of



Figure 2. Columbia University President Nicholas Murray Butler reading a message to Marshal Foch before conferring on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, November 19, 1921. French ambassador Jusserand is seen on the left. ©Columbia University Archives.

78 "Butler Arraigns German Scholars," *New York Times*, April 19, 1919, 17.

79 Tomás Irish, "Peace through History? The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Inquiry into European Schoolbooks, 1921-24,"

History of Education 45, no. 1 (2016): 38-56.

80 Brigitte Schroeder-Gudehus, "Internationale Wissenschaftsbeziehungen und auswärtige Kulturpolitik, 1919-1933. Vom Boykott und Gegenboykott zu ihrer Wieder-

aufnahme," in *Forschung im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Gesellschaft. Geschichte und Struktur der Kaiser-Wilhelm- und Max Planck-Gesellschaft*, eds. Rudolf Vierhaus and Rüdiger vom Bruch (Stuttgart, 1990), 858-885.

anti-German sentiment. “Nowhere,” noted one official report, “are expressions of hatred of Germany still as common as in school and university circles.”⁸¹

It was only the year 1923, Germany’s year of crises, characterized by the French occupation of the Ruhr and German hyper-inflation, that effected a real change of sentiment on both sides of the Atlantic. This has long been recognized with regard to economic relations. In the fall of 1923, Germany’s impending financial and political collapse (and the specter of Bolshevism and disorder it raised) prompted U.S. foreign policy makers to “return” to Europe. Constrained by isolationist sentiment at home, they worked informally through American businessmen and financiers (the Dawes-Committee) to help settle the Franco-German reparations dispute and further a consensual revision of the peace treaty.⁸² And yet, this famous economic intervention was followed by a cultural intervention, personified by Butler. By late 1923, Butler, who had avoided Germany for nearly a decade, sought to renew contact in numerous ways: he joined a relief drive to benefit German intellectuals, supported the set-up of a German-American student exchange, opened Columbia’s doors to German professors, and publicly advocated peaceful revision of the peace treaty.⁸³ That Butler relinquished his decade-long presidency of the France-America Society shortly thereafter also shows that his change of heart — like America’s at large — was not so much an expression of sympathy for Germany as a concern over France’s military course of action in the Ruhr.⁸⁴ The events of 1923 convinced many Americans that French intransigence was a hindrance to peace in Europe and seemed to confirm their prewar contention that militarism was more of a general European phenomenon than a uniquely German problem.⁸⁵ At the same time, Butler apparently realized that his strategy of isolating Germany had not taught it a useful lesson but had almost toppled the German Republic.⁸⁶ Changing tack, Butler thus began to throw his public resources behind reintegrating Germany and German academics into the family of nations. In late 1923 he felt that a new “spirit of goodwill and cooperation” was imperative and reminded an academic audience, “that even our late enemies have an *amour propre*, and you must not treat them forever as slaves.”⁸⁷

But in Germany, too, 1923 inspired a new commitment to transatlantic cooperation. Liberal scholars, in particular, began to see the fruitlessness of German self-isolation and embraced the opportunity to renew ties with the United States. By 1924, Ernst Jäckh, a

81 German Consulate General, New York, [Kraske] to AA, Jan. 7, 1923, “Berliner Lehrergesangsverein,” PA, R 80295.

82 Patrick O. Cohrs, “The First ‘Real’ Peace Settlement after the First World War: Britain, the United States and the Accords of London and Locarno 1923–1925,” *Contemporary European History* 12, no. 1 (2003): 1–31, 2.

83 German Consulate General, San Francisco to AA, Mar 24, 1923, Graf Hugo Lerchenfeld, PA R80296.

84 Reuben Clarence Lang, “Die Meinung in den USA über Deutschland im Jahr des Ruhrkampfes und des Hitlerputsches,” *Saeculum* 17 (1966): 402–416.

85 See Butler’s 1924 announcement to the CEIP’s Board of Trustees, Winn, “Nicholas Murray Butler,” 566, fn 43.

86 The Rockefeller Foundation began to support German medical research in late 1922, see Rockefeller Foundation, *Annual Report 1922*, 338–39.

87 “Dr. Butler pleads for world concord,” *New York Times*, Nov 15, 1923, 30.

journalist-turned-professor, who had founded the reform-minded *Hochschule für Politik* in Berlin in 1920, had prepared the ground for closer cooperation with the Carnegie Endowment and its incoming president, Butler.⁸⁸ From an official perspective, too, it seemed highly desirable to win U.S. sympathy and support for a further revision of the peace treaty.⁸⁹ By the fall of 1925, the German ambassador to Washington, Adolf Georg Otto von Maltzan, advised building closer relations with Butler and the Carnegie Endowment because it offered “very remarkable opportunities to influence public opinion, especially the intellectual circles, in all countries [...] We cannot pass up the chance to work towards an attitude favorable to Germany.”⁹⁰

However, Butler’s example illustrates that even at this moment when both sides prepared to renew their contacts, finding words and gestures of reconciliation was far from easy. This was especially true for Germans, who even in the mid-1920s found it difficult to forget or forgive wartime “betrayals.” In a long 1926 report, the *Amerika-Institut* in Berlin, an institution heavily invested in transatlantic reconciliation, had to admit that Butler was the epitome of the “disloyal type.”⁹¹ Even German diplomats responded to Butler in an almost pathological manner. A letter that Butler had politely addressed to Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann in April 1925 had — as an internal memorandum admitted — been “purposefully left unanswered” by the German Foreign Ministry for more than six months.⁹² Mending relations with Butler was a complicated matter, one that required utmost tact, a measure of self-effacement and a willingness to make a new beginning — qualities that were not abundant in postwar Germany.

That reconciliation proved ultimately successful was due to the fact that all involved knew just how complicated a task it would be. Butler, in particular, showed an excellent grasp of German psychology, acknowledging the Germans’ immense desire for foreign recognition. After 1924, he strategically expressed his admiration for German learning and culture on every public and private occasion.⁹³ Opening a German Book Exhibition at Columbia in mid-1925, Butler acknowledged Germany’s intellectual influence on his life and declared: “thank God, the War is over. The time has come for liberal and broad-minded men and women to begin to build a new and peaceful civilization upon the ruins of that which was overturned with as much sorrow and suffering and destruction [...]”⁹⁴ In a similar vein, Butler welcomed Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff, counselor of the German embassy in Washington, to Morningside Heights in November of 1925 and, as Dieckhoff

88 On Jäckh and his U.S. reception see Rose C. Feld, “New University Trains Germans for Politics,” *New York Times*, Dec 20 1925, XX8; Ernst Jäckh, American Cooperation for the support of Democratic Organization in Germany ca. Dec 1924, PA 80297; Ernst Jäckh, *Amerika und Wir. Amerikanisch-Deutsches Ideenbündnis* (Stuttgart, 1929).

89 Amerika-Institut to AA, Nov 14, 1925, PA R 64999.

90 German Embassy to AA, “Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,” Sep 11, 1925, PA, Botschaft Washington, 1548.

91 Amerika-Institut [Dr. Bertling] Memorandum II, May 26, 1926, PA R 64909

92 German Embassy Washington to AA, Oct 14, 1925, PA Botschaft Washington, 1548; on the deliberate nature of this delay: Aufzeichnung (Fuehr), Jun 21 1926, PA, R 80299.

93 Amerika-Institut, Memorandum II, May 26 1926, PA R 64909 and AA to German Embassy Washington, Jul 27 1925, PA Botschaft Washington, 1548.

94 Remarks by Nicholas Murray Butler at the opening of the German Book Exhibit at Earl Hall, Oct 3, 1925, copy in, PA R 65043.

reported, “came to speak of his old teachers and friends in Berlin. He showed me pictures of Paulsen and Althoff on his office walls and related anecdotes of himself, Althoff and the Kaiser.”⁹⁵

Efforts to reestablish relations culminated in Butler’s carefully prepared visit to Berlin in June 1926, his first since 1912. On the American side, the visit was intended to acquaint Butler with Weimar leaders, a prerequisite to Carnegie work in Europe.⁹⁶ On the German side, the motivation was to renew Germany’s access to Carnegie funds, U.S. universities and the hearts and minds of the American people — all of which Butler was believed to be able to facilitate.⁹⁷ Karl Oscar Bertling, director of the Amerika-Institut, characterized Butler as a real “power factor” in transatlantic affairs and as a key to unlock academic and scientific relations with the United States.⁹⁸ Weighing in on Butler’s visit, the German Foreign Ministry’s expert on the United States agreed and advised

given his great standing in the United States as well as in Paris and London, we only stand to benefit from having good, or at least, normal relations with Dr. Butler. It is thus politically important that his upcoming visit to Berlin — where he can expect no less and no more than what is commensurate with his standing and importance — proceeds in an entirely harmonious way.⁹⁹

Ultimately, Butler and Germany’s mutual interest in transatlantic rapprochement produced just that desired harmony. The dinners and receptions given in Butler’s honor gathered the top tier of German bureaucrats, businessmen and science organizers, and Foreign Minister Stresemann met with Columbia University’s president for an hour-long conversation, which greatly impressed Butler.¹⁰⁰ His trip to Berlin put Butler’s relationship with Germany on an entirely new footing and produced astonishingly immediate and far-reaching results. Butler now fully embraced Weimar Germany. Henceforth, he praised the reliability of its government, commended Germany’s successful spiritual disarmament and even championed peaceful revision of its Eastern borders.¹⁰¹ Moreover, as he told a German newspaper, he had committed himself to making sure “that Germany once again has the rightful place in American public life which she has had for more than 100 years.”¹⁰² In the coming years, Butler would use the Carnegie Endowment and Columbia’s considerable resources to this end: He invited prominent Germans like the author Thomas Mann to lecture across the United States, established

95 Attachment to Embassy Report, Nov 18, 1925, PA, Botschaft Washington, 1548 Stiftung “Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,” Vol 1, 1925-1932.

96 Katharina Rietzler, “Before the Cultural Cold Wars: American philanthropy and cultural diplomacy in the inter-war years,” *Historical Research* 84, no. 223 (2011): 148-164, 162.

97 A detailed description of German aims in Aufzeichnung (Fuehr), Jun 21, 1926, PA, R 80299; Stresemann to German Embassy, Washington, May 10, 1926; German Embassy Washington to AA, May 18, 1926, PA, Botschaft Washington, 1551.

98 Amerika-Institut, Memorandum II, May 26, 1926, PA R 64909.

99 Aufzeichnung (Fuehr), Jun 21, 1926 PA, R 80299.

100 In 1930 Butler would initiate a Stresemann Memorial in Berlin; see CEIP, Box 324 Folder Stresemann Memorial, Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library Collections.

101 “War spirit is gone Dr. Butler Asserts,” *Columbia Spectator* 49, no 165, June 30 1926, 1.

102 “Eine Unterredung mit Präsident Butler,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, Jun 24, 1926, PA Botschaft Washington, 1548.

a Carnegie Chair at the Hochschule für Politik to bring experts on international relations to Berlin, and in 1929/30 reopened the *Deutsches Haus* at Columbia as well as the Roosevelt-Professorship in Berlin.¹⁰³ In 1932, it was Butler who presided over the Goethe Centenary in the United States, welcoming Germany's most famous living author, Gerhart Hauptmann, in a splendid on-campus ceremony. By the end of the postwar decade, few Americans were as committed, or as important, to giving form and substance to renewed transatlantic friendship as Butler.

These developments, I would argue, are crucial to understanding interwar transatlantic relations in general. First, they elucidate the cultural component of transatlantic politics in the 1920s. One cannot help but notice how closely American cultural initiatives paralleled the course of transatlantic politics. Alongside U.S. economic intervention in 1923/24, America's cultural intervention in Germany constituted yet another, equally informal way to stabilize Europe. After the mid-1920s, U.S. cultural internationalists like Butler began to play an important role in reconciling the American public with Germany and reintegrating Germany into the family of nations. Their cultivation of transatlantic educational and intellectual exchanges reflected America's pursuit of "peaceful change" in Europe no less than its involvement in the reparations settlement. At the same time, this American policy dovetailed with German desire to use its remaining cultural capital to peacefully undo the Versailles Treaty. The astonishing attention that German diplomats paid to a non-state actor like Butler shows that they comprehended the unique power of informal cultural relations in the United States, a country that was politically isolationist and devoid of official cultural diplomacy.¹⁰⁴ It is telling that despite the German Foreign Ministry's close attention to protocol, Butler was welcomed in Berlin with hardly less fanfare than was Anatole de Monzie, the French Minister of Culture, just a few months earlier.¹⁰⁵ As Butler's example shows, the American commitment to "peaceful change" and the German desire for a "peaceful revision" aligned also in the cultural field.

At the same time, a focus on cultural relations lays bare the profound psychological legacy of the war. Even where transatlantic interests overlapped, the demobilization of minds proved slow and difficult. If overcoming wartime resentments was not easy for Butler, for a defeated and humiliated Germany cultural demobilization was more arduous still. This was true individually as well as structurally. For

103 Statement by the President of the Carnegie Endowment regarding the new work of the Endowment in Europe, Aug 23, 1926, CEIP, Box 97, Report, Butler, Columbia University, Rare Book & Manuscript Library Collections; "Columbia to have new German House," *Columbia Daily Spectator* 52, no. 64, Jan 9, 1929, 1; these and other initiatives in Wala, "Gegen eine Vereinzellung Deutschlands"; Butler to Woodbridge, September 23, 1931, Central Files; Box 342/8 Woodbridge; University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library.

104 Kurt Düwell, "Die Gründung der Kulturpolitischen Abteilung im Auswärtigen Amt 1919/20 als Neuanfang," In *Deutsche auswärtige Kulturpolitik seit 1871*, eds. Kurt Düwell and Werner Link (Köln, 1981), 46–61; German Embassy Washington to AA, Oct 30, 1928 "Stand der Beziehungen zwischen Deutschland und den Vereinigten Staaten" PA R 80145; for a general analysis: Piller, *Selling Weimar*

105 Katja Marmetschke, "Ein Wendepunkt für die deutsch-französische Verständigung. Das Treffen zwischen dem preußischen Kultusminister C.H. Becker und dem französischen Erziehungsminister Anatole de Monzie im September 1925 in Berlin," in *Französische Kultur im Berlin der Weimarer Republik. Kultureller Austausch und diplomatische Beziehungen*, eds. Hans Manfred Bock (Tübingen, 2005), 37–51.



Figure 3. Butler welcomes Gerhart Hauptmann to New York, February 26, 1932. The photo shows (from left to right): Butler, Margarete Hauptmann, Gerhart Hauptmann, New York mayor James J. Walker. ©Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-U0928-507.

example, German officials were initially hesitant to invite Butler to Berlin because they feared nationalist attacks if they were seen to take a “first step” towards him. Only once Butler had provided public tokens of goodwill were they willing to welcome him back because, as a Foreign Ministry report noted, “it is entirely ruled out that we could be accused of pursuing

him.”¹⁰⁶ Nor, and this too has to be acknowledged, did German and American academics ever (again) enjoy a fully harmonious relationship. In the interwar period, even liberal German academics harbored some uneasiness about economic and cultural “Americanization” and worried about the corrupting influence of an allegedly shallow American mass culture.¹⁰⁷ Butler and his immense resources seemed to embody this threat. Moritz Julius Bonn, a German academic and associate of Butler’s at the Carnegie Endowment’s Paris office tellingly characterized him as “the greatest creator and disseminator of platitudes I have ever experienced. From his office he churned out standardized intellectual mass products with the same speed that a Ford car rolled out [of] its factory.”¹⁰⁸ Germany’s conservative academic establishment, for its part, kept its distance from Butler and other “disloyal types.” They never fully reconciled themselves to German defeat, the Republic or the increasingly prominent role the United States played in the (academic) world. As late as 1929, Eduard Meyer (admittedly a particularly resentful character) considered America, “with its inner dishonesty and moralistic arrogance” — clearly, Butler’s America — “the most disgusting of our enemies.”¹⁰⁹ In Butler’s tumultuous relationship with Germany, reconciliation and resentment were never far apart.

106 Aufzeichnung (Fuehr), Jun 21, 1926, PA, R 80299.

107 Adelheid von Saldern, “Überfremdungsängste. Gegen die Amerikanisierung der deutschen Kultur in den zwanziger Jahren,” in *Amerikanisierung: Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts*, eds. Alf Lüdtke, Ingo Marssolek, Adelheid von Saldern (Stuttgart, 1996), 213-243.

108 Bonn, *So macht man Geschichte*, 295-96.

109 Alexander Demandt “Eduard Meyer und Oswald Spengler,” in

Eduard Meyer. Leben und Leistung eines Universalhistorikers, eds. William

M. Calder III and Alexander Demandt (Leiden, 1990), 159-181, 169.

III. Butler, U.S. internationalists and American appeasement, 1933-1937

The ascent of the Nazis was yet another turning point in German-American relations, albeit not as immediately or unequivocally as one might expect in hindsight. In the years after January 1933 Americans were trying to make sense of Nazism and of what, if anything, it might mean for German-American relations. Their attitude, however, was not simply one of rejection. Rather, U.S. opinions remained ambivalent for long, influenced by longer-standing images of Germans and Germany, by the lessons of the First World War as well as continued leisure and educational travel to the Third Reich.¹¹⁰ American academics like Butler were an important part of this “American debate on Nazism,” as Michaela Hoenicke-Moore has called it, and for years advocated the maintenance of normal relations with Nazi Germany.¹¹¹ The final section of this article will use Butler’s example to understand the reasoning behind this cultural variant of “American appeasement.”¹¹²

The American debate of what the Nazi takeover would mean for Germany and for the United States began immediately in early 1933. Diplomatic missions and news correspondents reported on the substantial changes taking place in Germany, including in German higher education. The newly appointed American ambassador to Germany, William E. Dodd, a Chicago historian, wrote with great distress about the dismissal of professors, the radicalization of the German student body and the political coordination of German universities.¹¹³ Already in early March, his predecessor, U.S. Ambassador Frederic Sackett, had predicted that “[d]emocracy in Germany has received a blow from which it may never recover. Germany has been submerged under a huge Nazi wave. The much heralded Third Reich has become a reality.”¹¹⁴ And yet, American academics by and large mustered only a lukewarm condemnation of Nazi Germany, leaving public protest to religious organizations and their students. Butler embodied this American accommodation. Although he discontinued the Carnegie lectures at the Hochschule für Politik after the Nazi takeover of that institution in early 1933 and also suspended the Roosevelt Professorship at the University of Berlin in 1934 (citing financial reasons), he avoided public criticism of the regime and maintained other forms of academic exchange: he continued to welcome German students, scholars and ambassadors on campus, participated in public events at the *Deutsches Haus* and in 1936 sent a delegate to the 550th anniversary of Heidelberg University, organized under the aegis of the German Ministry of Propaganda. As Stephen Norwood has shown,

110 Michaela Hoenicke-Moore, *Know Your Enemy. The American Debate on Nazism, 1933-1945* (New York, 2010); Philipp Gassert, *Amerika im Dritten Reich: Ideologie, Propaganda und Volksmeinung 1933-1945* (Stuttgart, 1997).

111 Helke Rausch, “Sympathy for the devil? American support for German sciences after 1933,” in *Intellectual Collaboration with the Third Reich: Treason or Reason?*, eds. Maria Björkman, Patrik Lundell, and Sven Widmalm (New York, 2019), 119-133.

112 Arnold A. Offner, *American Appeasement: United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1938* (Cambridge, MA, 1969).

113 William Dodd to Nicholas Murray Butler, Jan 17, 1934, Box 43, Library of Congress (LoC) MSS18697, William Edward Dodd Papers.

114 The Ambassador in Germany (Sackett) to the Secretary of State, Mar 9, 1933, FRUS, The British Commonwealth, Europe, Near East and Africa, Vol II, 206-209, 209.

many other American university presidents and academics took similar positions. According to Norwood, “Butler and leading members of his administration failed to grasp the impact of Nazism on German higher education, and they participated in high-profile events and programs the Hitler regime sponsored to improve its image in the West.”¹¹⁵ He therefore regards Butler as representative of American higher education, which was “complicit in enhancing the prestige of the Hitler regime by seeking and maintaining friendly and respectful relations with Nazi universities and leaders.”¹¹⁶

Still, Norwood’s explanation for Butler’s complicity — his antisemitism and his ignorance of, and indifference to, the brutal nature of Nazism¹¹⁷ — clouds the influence of other factors that informed the decisions of men like Butler in light of their long relationship with Germany. This is not to doubt the truth of Norwood’s observations. Butler’s antisemitism is well-documented and showed itself on many occasions. For example, prior to the First World War Butler refused to regularly appoint a Jewish scholar as Theodore Roosevelt Professor (as he had originally promised James Speyer, one of the exchange’s benefactors) and it was under Butler’s aegis that Columbia introduced admission quotas to restrict the number of Jewish students.¹¹⁸ In addition, Butler, part of the conservative wing of the U.S. peace movement, was far more concerned with the dangers posed by militarism and socialism than those posed by social inequity or racial bias. Whereas Butler, for example, carefully eschewed any contact with Bolshevik Russia, he actively cultivated ties with fascist Italy until the mid-1930s. No doubt, Butler’s antisemitism and conservatism partly explain his apparent moral indifference to the Nazi persecutions of Jews and political opponents.

And yet, an all too exclusive focus on these factors obscures other considerations that shaped American cultural internationalists’ attitudes towards — and their public accommodation of — Nazi Germany. For one, there is plenty of evidence that Butler neither ignored nor accepted Nazi transgressions. He was genuinely shocked when Moritz Julius Bonn, who had been on the Carnegie Endowment’s Paris board since 1927, was dismissed as rector of the Berlin Commercial College and he reflected, it seems, quite extensively on the position to take towards Nazi Germany. One of the best-informed Americans of his time, Butler had followed German events closely for years and continued to keep abreast of the German situation through a variety of informants, including Carnegie representatives,

115 Norwood, *Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, 79.

116 Norwood, *Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, 73.

117 See Norwood, “Complicity and Conflict: Columbia University’s Response to Fascism, 1933-1937,” *Modern Judaism*, 27, no. 3 (2007): 253-283.

118 See correspondence in Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Box 391, Folder James Speyer, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library; Rosenthal, *Nicholas Miraculous*, 332-352.

American scholars and ambassadors.¹¹⁹ In fact, Butler's lukewarm initial response seems not to have grown out of ignorance of Nazi brutalities but out of uncertainty about the future of the regime. Even from Butler's privileged position it was difficult to gain a clear picture of German events. While it was apparent that wide-ranging changes and horrific persecutions were taking place, just what they meant or for how long they would last was not. German governments had changed rapidly in previous years and it was, at least in 1933 and 1934, not unreasonable to think that the Nazi government, too, might soon topple.¹²⁰

In fact, even those American internationalists that assumed that the Nazis would stay in power were hopeful that the repressive nature of the regime would soon ease. The former ambassador to Germany, Alanson B. Houghton, having just returned from a month-long stay in Germany in May 1933, wrote to Butler: "[...] a year ago Germany seemed under crumbling morale — now spirits are high [...] facing the future with confidence and evidently determined that Germany must again and shall again take her old place among the nations of the world. A definite revolution has taken place." He acknowledged that there was "no freedom of speech, no freedom of the press" and that "the present government stands frankly on force and will use it unhesitatingly." The treatment of Jews he found "objectionable from every tolerant or decent point of view." At the same time, however, he was hopeful that force and repression would ease once the government was firmly established.¹²¹ In any case, it seemed to men like Butler unwise to imperil their relationship with Germany — a relationship they had just painstakingly repaired — for what might well be a fleeting period of repression.

For Butler this position was strongly reinforced by the fact that many of his long-standing partners (at first) retained their posts. Ernst Jäckh at the Hochschule für Politik, with whom he had worked since 1924, or Karl Oscar Bertling at the Amerika-Institut, whom he had known since 1910, were initially confident that they could arrive at a *modus vivendi* with the new government.¹²² The German foreign service, too, presented a picture of consistency, not radical change. Although Ambassador von Prittwitz resigned in 1933 — the only high-ranking German diplomat to take that step — his right hand man, Hans-Heinrich Dieckhoff, who had been in Washington throughout the 1920s (and had sat in Butler's office in 1925), continued to head the foreign ministry's America department before he eventually was appointed ambassador to Washington in 1937. In

119 Butler to Woodbridge, Dec 23, 1931, MS#1375 Frederick James Eugene Woodbridge Papers, Box 1, Correspondence, Folder: Butler/Woodbridge, 1931, Columbia University Archives; Nicholas Murray Butler to William Dodd, Dec 18, 1933, Box 43, LoC, Dodd Papers.

120 Norwood, *Third Reich in the Ivory Tower*, 79.

121 Alanson B. Houghton to Nicholas Murray Butler, June 1, 1933, Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Box 122, Alanson B. Houghton, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library; this was echoed with regard to German universities by Dodd to Nicholas Murray Butler, March 8, 1934, Box 43, LoC, Dodd Papers.

122 Amerika-Institut to Schmidt-Ott, May 23 1933, GSPK, VI HA NL Schmidt-Ott 540 Amerika-Institut.

a sea of conflicting information and interpretations, such personal continuities — which Nazi Germany cultivated for just that reason — proved highly meaningful.¹²³ That they can at least partly account for Butler’s accommodation is illustrated by his relationship with Hans Luther, the German ambassador to Washington from 1933 to 1936. Luther, a bourgeois politician through and through, had served in various Weimar governments in the 1920s, including as Weimar Germany’s Chancellor in 1925 and 1926. When Luther’s visit to Columbia in late 1933 sparked widespread student protest Butler was indignant — not because Luther was a Nazi, but because, in Butler’s mind, he was *not*. In fact, to Butler, ambassador Luther — a descendent of Martin Luther — was not so much a representative of the Nazi government as he was a representative of German culture and history. Butler rebuffed student protesters with the telling insistence that Luther was a perfect “gentleman” and hence deserved a cordial welcome on campus.¹²⁴

But Butler’s accommodation was not only the result of uncertainty or apparent continuity. Arguably it was also the product of some of the assumptions inherent in U.S. internationalism. Many U.S. internationalists believed that after 1933, more than ever, it was important to maintain friendly contact with Germany, not least to offer encouragement to those Germans suddenly trapped in a dictatorship. This was one reason why American universities continued to welcome German students on campus. As Stephen Duggan, the director of the Institute of International Education, wrote to Henry Pritchett, a Carnegie trustee (both of them associated with Butler) in late 1933, “I am wholly opposed to isolating Germany. On the contrary I believe the Germans are now in particular need of contact, and personal contact, of the right kind.”¹²⁵ Secondly, American internationalists always conceived of relations with Germany as part of a broader *European* agenda. While this had proven frustrating to Wilhelmine Germans, it proved beneficial to the Nazis. In fact, American internationalists countered criticism of their continued engagement with Germany with the telling response that if they restricted their contacts only to European democracies there would be few countries left to deal with. When Columbia’s attendance at the Heidelberg university jubilee in 1936 sparked heavy public criticism, the Columbia delegate, Professor Arthur Remy, rebuked (well-founded) accusations of the jubilee being a Nazi propaganda event noting that, “with the atmosphere prevailing in the Europe of today no great celebration will be held anywhere without some political or social bias present.”¹²⁶ Last but

123 Offner, *American Appeasement*, 30; on these continuities see Piller, *Selling Weimar*, Chapter 8.

124 “Butler denies plea for ban on Luther,” *Columbia Spectator*, Nov 20, 1933, 1.

125 Duggan to Pritchett, Nov. 20, 1933, quoted in Halpern, “The Institute of International Education,” 156; see also Stephen P. Duggan to William Dodd, July 21, 1934, Box 44, LoC, Dodd Papers.

126 A Report of the Celebration of the 550th Anniversary of Heidelberg University, June 27th to July 1936, by Arthur F. J. Remy, 5, Columbia University Archives Central Files, Box 549 Heidelberg.

not least, U.S. accommodation was part of U.S. disillusionment with the Paris peace, which had successively moved Americans closer to Germany's desire for revision.¹²⁷ As much as Butler, for example, disliked the Nazi government and its insistence on re-armament,¹²⁸ he initially considered German actions at least partly understandable. After all, no other country had seriously disarmed in the preceding decade. In fact, for Butler who had vainly campaigned for universal disarmament in the 1920s, German re-armament seemed an almost logical consequence of the world's failure in that respect. The fact that many U.S. academics were also avid (cultural) internationalists and peace advocates hence shaped their initial responses to Germany and turned them into champions of American "appeasement."

And yet, even as U.S. accommodation rested on uncertainty about the German future, personal continuities and internationalist assumptions, it cannot be understood without considering Butler's long relationship with Germany, in particular, the experience of the First World War. I would argue that Butler's accommodation of Nazi Germany was motivated by an honest desire not to repeat past mistakes. Indeed, no matter how different 1914 and 1933 appear in hindsight, Butler felt that he was facing similar mechanisms of public outrage and pressures to isolate Germany. While he disagreed with Nazi Germany, he was careful not to fall back into the war's divisive rhetoric, which he had clearly come to regret.¹²⁹ His major lesson of the First World War, when culture and politics had been fatefully intertwined, seems to have been to insist that the two had nothing to do with each other. Butler, who had built an entire career on the fusion of academic and diplomatic affairs, now claimed that German exchange students, the Heidelberg jubilee, even the visit of German ambassadors to campus were purely academic, not political matters.¹³⁰ In a joint statement with presidents A. Lawrence Lowell of Harvard and James Rowland Angell of Yale, Butler tried to justify the participation at the Heidelberg jubilee stating that "our participation in this celebration bore witness to the unity of the world of scholarship, which is independent of the political conditions prevailing in any country at any particular moment."¹³¹ Butler himself implicitly connected his response to the cultural purges and overreactions of the Great War, when he defended his continued association with Nazi Germany shortly thereafter:

We may next expect to be told that we must not read Goethe's FAUST, or hear Wagner's LOHENGRIN, or visit

127 Selig Adler, "The War-Guilt Question and American Disillusionment, 1918-1928," *Journal of Modern History* 23 (March 1951): 1-28.

128 Rosenthal, *Nicholas Miraculous*, 392.

129 While Butler was not one to admit past mistakes, his change of heart is indicated by the fact that in his 1940 autobiography Butler considerably changed the story about the railway servant in 1914. He now declared him to have been "German Swiss" and his three sons being called to serve in the *Swiss* army, mobilized to defend the country against an Austrian invasion; Butler, *Across the Busy Years*, Vol 2, 251-252.

130 This desire was also evident in Professor Stephen Remy's report, Columbia's representative at the Heidelberg celebrations, Columbia University Archives, Central Files, Box 549 Heidelberg, A Report of the Celebrations of the 550th Anniversary of Heidelberg University, June 27th to July 1st, 1936, by Arthur F. J. Remy, 4.

131 Statement about the University of Heidelberg Celebration, Columbia University Archives, Central Files, Box 549 Heidelberg, CUL, Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

the great picture galleries at Dresden or study Kant's KRITIK because we so heartily disapprove of the present form of government in Germany [...] The public has yet to learn that our academic relationships have no political implications of any kind.¹³²

Of course, coming from Butler one might dismiss such statements as disingenuous, as a rhetorical sleight-of-hand to deflect public criticism. But it is also likely that Butler insisted on the separation of culture and politics because he had come to realize how much their unfettered alliance during the First World War had undermined the prospects of international understanding. Even if Butler's antisemitism and conservatism partly explain his accommodation of Germany, the experience of the First World War and its aftermath also convinced Butler that abstaining from public criticism and maintaining at least a modicum of academic exchange might ultimately be more conducive to world peace than the cultural mobilizations of past decades. That culture and politics could not be so neatly separated when dealing with a totalitarian regime dawned only slowly on Butler and other cultural internationalists. Certainly, to fully grasp Butler's, and American academia's response to Nazism demands not only an understanding of the 1930s but also of the 1920s, even the 1910s. Only this longer trajectory of disappointments and hard-won reconciliation make American cultural appeasement comprehensible, and, in a sense, consequential.

This is not to say that Butler did not ultimately distance himself from Nazi Germany. True to his internationalist priorities, it was Nazi Germany's ever more apparent military aggression, not its policy of political and racial persecution that alienated Butler. 1936/37, in particular, proved a turning point for Butler and U.S. public opinion more generally. Germany's remilitarization of the Rhineland (1936), its rearmament plans, and its military alliance with Italy and then Japan in 1936/1937 proved too much for the Nobel peace laureate.¹³³ While Columbia had still sent a delegate to the Heidelberg University jubilee in 1936, it sent none to the University of Göttingen's jubilee a year later. In his 1937 Carnegie report Butler warned of the rise of those illiberal ideologies, which "have taken possession of the peoples of Japan, of Russia, of Germany and of Italy" and pointed to the need to "keep the world safe for democracy."¹³⁴ That President Franklin Delano Roosevelt would soon echo these notions in his famous quarantine speech shows that Butler, now in his seventies,

132 Nicholas Murray Butler to Hubert Beck, May 29, 1936, Columbia University Archives, Central Files, Box 549 Heidelberg, CUL, Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

133 Rosenthal, *Nicholas Miraculous*, 390-391.

134 "Dr. Butler assails neutrality in war," *New York Times*, Mar 1, 1937, 10.

had not lost his feel for U.S. public sentiment.¹³⁵ In the last decade of his life, Butler would once more oversee Columbia's war effort, preach U.S. responsibility for the world and ponder the conditions of lasting peace. By the time he finally retired from the Columbia presidency in October 1945, nearly blind and deaf, German universities lay in ruins and the United States had become that "first moral power in the world" which Butler had known it to be all along.

Conclusion: Butler, Germany and the coming of the American century

Butler's lifetime, 1862-1947, coincided with U.S. ascendancy on the world stage. As this paper shows, Butler embraced and shaped this development. He was part of a generation of U.S. internationalists who believed in and preached American responsibility in the world. What is more, they used the immense resources of university and foundation endowments (larger than that of many a European ministry of culture) to forge international intellectual cooperation, albeit on American terms. In fact, while Butler was driven by an honest desire for world peace, his approach to international cooperation reflected a belief in U.S. moral superiority. Over the course of his lifetime, Butler created and cultivated intellectual networks that pivoted on U.S. expertise and money, thereby making sure that his nation grew not only into a military and economic but also an academic superpower. Long before the United States ever developed an official cultural diplomacy in the very late 1930s, men like Butler pursued an informal cultural diplomacy and laid the foundations of the cultural cold wars.

Apart from this general insight, Butler's relationship with Germany brings into relief the impressive cultural dimension of transatlantic politics in the first half of the twentieth century. The economic, political and military developments that are traditionally seen to define German-American relations were accompanied *and* shaped by cultural interactions. Initiatives like the professorial exchange exacerbated German-American competition and cooperation around the turn of the century; the academic falling-out after 1914 colored and arguably radicalized both countries' war efforts; from the mid-1920s, U.S. cultural politics, alongside financial involvement, became an informal American means to stabilize and reconcile with the Weimar Republic. By the late 1920s, Butler and other educators facilitated German-American reconciliation on campus, thereby reinforcing and expressing the transatlantic rapprochement at large. Their strenuous efforts to this end shaped U.S. appeasement well

135 Americans were largely out of sympathy with Nazi Germany after the mid-1930s, see the Gallup data on Germany in Detlef Junker, *Kampf um die Weltmacht. Die USA und das Dritte Reich, 1933-1945* (Düsseldorf, 1988), 70-78.

into the late 1930s. While Butler's antisemitism and conservatism were significant factors in his (and many others') moral indifference to Nazi repression, so, too, did his experience of the First World War inform his public accommodation. Butler's example, in short, shows that U.S. reactions to the rise of Nazi Germany cannot be fully understood without a long-term perspective.

This said, Butler's relationship with Germany — exceptionally well-documented on the German side — illustrates that U.S. ascendancy happened not simply on U.S. terms. To be sure, Butler always played on European desires to gain the favor of an increasingly important United States. But Germans and Europeans, too, always played on Butler's ambitions and harnessed his search for personal and national acclaim to their interests. Importantly, while Butler might have *acted* as U.S. informal ambassador to Europe, Europeans also *accepted* him as such, and for their very own reasons. As Butler's example shows, U.S. expansion was never a unilateral or one-dimensional process, but often a mutually beneficial agreement. In a way, the countless honors, awards and social courtesies that Europeans showered upon Butler were a strategic investment in transatlantic relations — and a means to position themselves favorably in the coming American century.

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