

GERMAN STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1946–1952

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In the wake of World War II many politicians and educators saw understanding through personal contact as a step towards avoiding the mistakes made after World War I and securing a lasting peace. Academic and professional exchange of persons programs were regarded as a new and valuable form of diplomacy that might succeed where others had failed: "Diplomats in scattered capitals spend endless nights seeking new ways to guard the future while people of every nationality scan the headlines for encouraging words," stated one article in the magazine *Independent Woman*. "Meanwhile a new community agency, the Foundation for International Understanding Through Students, is quietly at work in the state of Washington, and a significant pattern for a happier world is there being developed. Perhaps the formula that has been found in its Laboratory for Peace, if widely put to work, can create a force that will blot out the visionary bomb that seems to cloud the horizon."¹ The Foundation for International Understanding Through Students was one of many institutions that organized exchange programs. With regard to Germans these programs were often linked to an additional goal: political reorientation.

My research focuses on the political context of these student exchange programs and on how they were presented in the contemporary press. My primary sources are located in archives,² libraries and universities. Considering the great number of American³ daily and weekly newspapers, magazines, college and university newspapers, it is impossible to evaluate all of them. However, the "Bibliography of Periodical Literature on the Exchange of Persons Program"⁴ provided a good starting point for research in different archives and universities.

Exchange of Persons Programs as an Instrument of Reorientation

A new era began in German history in 1945. Within a few years West Germany not only adopted a democratic constitution, but left behind the international isolation of the Nazi period and eventually became a member of the Western alliance. The United States has been seen as the "midwife" in this new orientation of the Federal Republic of Germany.⁵ U.S. policy not only spurred administrative changes in Germany, but also fostered changes in German society itself. In the eyes of American re-

formers, the earlier failure of German democracy was less a structural failure than the result of the prevailing authoritarian, illiberal and anti-democratic educational ideas.⁶ U.S. policy aimed at a reorientation.⁷ The aim was not to superimpose the American political system, but rather to install democratic values in the minds of Germans. Genuine reform, U.S. officials realized, had to come from the Germans themselves. Exchange programs were seen as contributing to this goal.

The first tentative steps were taken in 1946, when 50 students from Germany visited the United States. Endorsed by the Military Government for the first few years, the exchange was carried out largely at the initiative of private organizations. The exchange programs became an integral part of the American policy of democratization in Germany. In 1949 the Office of U.S. Military Government (OMGUS) launched its "German Program" which came under the auspices of the Office of the U.S. High Commissioner (HICOG) in 1950.⁸ The program was one-sided in many aspects: ". . . the German program started out as a unilateral American-initiated, American-funded, and American-directed implement of United States policy serving primarily United States interests."⁹ Less an exchange than a program to bring Germans to the States, it was intended to show Germans a democracy at work: "The Exchange Program means, primarily, that Germans sponsored by some organization, institution or group are sent to the United States for a period of study and observation of the American way of life, our institutions, the operation of constitutional government based on the democratic ideal."¹⁰

The details of the programs were in most cases left to the organizations involved with a minimum of official interference. Although the U.S. government actively sought a reorientation of Germany, the operation of the exchange programs did not much interest American officials. They believed that a first-hand view of democracy would automatically bring about the desired change of attitude, belief and behavior. As George Shuster noted: "Exchange was at first conceived of by the Occupation as an instrument for smuggling in democratic bacteria. Believing that exposure to life in the United States was the best way of producing carriers and therewith contagion, a very great many people, young and old, were dispatched to this country."¹¹

The U.S. government did, however, take an interest in the selection of the exchange participants as far as it pertained to questions of national security. Excluded from participation were persons convicted by a court of the occupational powers, former members of now banned organizations (e.g. the NSDAP or other voluntary organizations associated with the Nazi regime) or persons who had been known for an antidemocratic conviction as well as members of communist organizations. Exchange participants included children of former prisoners of war as well as of

former Nazi leaders.¹² Individuals were not held responsible for crimes committed by their family members. As the exchange programs expanded, officials paid increasing attention to individual records rather than the simple question of membership in Nazi organizations. In some cases exchange participants had to go through as many as seven security checks to obtain a military exit permit and a visitor's visa.¹³

While the program started out in the U.S. occupation zone, once the Federal Republic of Germany was founded persons from other parts of the country were allowed to apply as well.¹⁴ By the combined efforts of private and governmental organizations, about 3,000 German students visited the United States between 1946 and 1952.¹⁵ They were chosen on the basis of their knowledge of English as well as their declared willingness to return to Germany afterwards, and they needed private sponsors in the United States. Students were not the only group participating in the exchange programs but their situation differed from that of others.

German Youth as an Investment in a Democratic Future

Exchange programs generally targeted "leaders" and, in the case of young people, "future leaders." The inclusion of young people was important. On the one hand, they had to be at the center of a democratic renewal if changes in German society were to last. On the other hand, National Socialism had had a bigger impact on youth than on any other group. Unlike their parents or grandparents, young people were not able to fall back on social values that had been promoted before National Socialism. All they knew was society as it had existed during the twelve years of the Nazi regime. However, adolescence is a period of evaluation. Values, norms, styles of conduct are examined, reflected upon, accepted and internalized—or discarded. During this time a young person develops a stand in favor of or against a system and its representatives. Goals and methods to achieve them are questioned.¹⁶ German youth of the postwar period needed alternative concepts of community and social behavior. This was recognized by occupation officials: "After the total bankruptcy of National Socialism, to which all young people were exposed in their formative years, there remains very little to give their lives a new direction. They live in a society characterized by political, economic, and social disorganization, where democratic ideas have not taken sufficient root to give rise to a new growth of culture and education. The importation of new ideas and methods through exchange of books, magazines, educational films, etc., while of great value to a reeducation program, cannot alone accomplish the task. It is imperative, therefore, that a large number of young Germans be brought face to face with a democratic way of life, within the United States and other countries."¹⁷

Exchange participants were chosen on the basis of several criteria relating to democratic viewpoints and qualities of leadership: "Not only scholastic records are considered but also general personality and appearance, promise of leadership, adaptability, political record, and open-mindedness."¹⁸ The meaning of leadership potential remained vague, as the Chief of the Cultural Exchange Section within the Education and Cultural Relations Division of OMGUS admitted: "'Leaders' is an elastic category including anyone who goes to attend a conference, teach or lecture, confer, receive on-the-job training or carry out planned observation—in short all types of activity in the cultural fields except matriculated study."¹⁹ Previous membership in the Hitler Youth did not necessarily exclude young people from participation in an exchange. Individual records were taken into considerations by looking at the date and age of their admission.²⁰

The German Student Exchange through the Eyes of the American Public: Reasons for Bringing German Students to the United States

The youth programs received widespread attention in the U.S. media. While newspapers referred to the purpose of the exchange of persons programs and the selection of the participants only in the broadest terms, they often gave exchanges repeated coverage. What themes and interests did the articles focus on?

The American Field Service (AFS) was the most prominent organization involved in the exchange of high school students, and its visiting students were frequently the subject of press coverage. AFS presented its exchange program to the public as follows: "The aim is to assure that young people whose records mark them as future leaders in their own lands shall learn from personal experience what the United States is really like. Part of the program is to offer these young people many opportunities to meet Americans, receive their hospitality, and to travel widely during their stay here. It is the hope of the American Field Service—and a worthy hope—that these young men and women will return to their native countries with a true understanding of American democracy and a friendship for American people."²¹ For the American Field Service, the German student exchange was part of a general exchange program. AFS saw its mandate in promoting "goodwill among nations,"²² a broader approach that tied the reorientation of Germans to the concept of international understanding as a path to maintain peace. This did not mean that AFS students from Germany were not aware of their special mission. In an interview, Klaus B. expressed his hope to take home democracy with him.²³ Eva K. explained: "My duty in coming to America . . . was to

come over and get to know the American everyday life and to see Americans all together. I am to bring a fair impression back to Germany", and she added, "to tell Americans what we are doing in Germany and what problems we have."²⁴

Newspaper articles generally gave two basic reasons for welcoming the exchange participants to the United States: to teach young Germans the value of democracy and to dispel their frequent misconceptions about Americans. There were many misconceptions, although in some cases they derived from a simple lack of knowledge.²⁵ Technical terms like re-education and reorientation were hardly ever mentioned in the media coverage, nor were the reasons for the exchange program discussed. U.S. officials emphasized that the exchange programs spread knowledge about and sympathy for the United States: "It [the exchange program] is all part of the increasing effort on the part of this nation to be correctly 'understood' by representatives of other nations which, by reason of geographic separation, may not be in position to know the motives which impel us in our international diplomacy." The article continued, however: "They [the exchange students] will help our own students to understand the problems of other lands and to appreciate the oneness of different races and nationalities." And on a critical note the article stated: "Then Americans would be more certain to step lightly in other lands, to boast less, and to talk more of our hope for peace than of the prospect of war. If other peoples knew us better, we would be more sure of ourselves."²⁶ Although this was not specifically intended, newspapers acknowledged that even a "one-sided" exchange involved two parties and just as the guests got to know their hosts, the hosts also got to know their guests. Many Americans were curious about the situation in Europe and political developments in Germany. One college paper asked: "Would Western Germany fight on the side of the U.S. in a war against Russia should such a war come? What is the attitude toward the U.S. in Germany? How strong is nationalism in Germany?"²⁷

The Exchanges as a Community Effort

Not only curiosity awaited the participants upon their arrival, but whole communities planned their welcome. Newspaper articles testified to the high degree of community involvement in the exchange programs. Individuals, groups, town councils, local Rotary and Kiwani clubs, the American Legion, and many more participated in the preparations as well as the operation of the exchange. Friends and relatives of particular German students funded individual scholarships, but churches and institutions of higher education sponsored the majority of the participants. Frank Banta, Chief of the Cultural Exchange Section, noted in 1948: "Religious groups

have been the most active in giving scholarships to German students: The National Catholic Welfare Committee, the World Council of Churches (Protestant), the Mennonites, the Quakers and the Church of Christ have each given three to 21 scholarships. The University of Kentucky and Michigan State College have each given three scholarships and others have been offered by Mississippi, Minnesota, Washington State and Massachusetts Institute of Technology."²⁸

But community involvement went far beyond scholarships. Volunteers were kept busy with fundraising, they had to find host families willing to offer board and lodging to the visitors in their homes, and they had to organize events and special activities for the guests. The response within communities was sometimes overwhelming. In Ridgewood a higher number of families responded than needed: "Fearful at first that they would have difficulty getting enough beds for them [196 exchange participants], committee members had to fight off eager residents of Ridgewood and surrounding towns . . . , all of them clamoring for a foreign student guest."²⁹ The exchange participants were swamped with invitations to give public lectures or to attend formal as well as informal dinners, lawn parties, picnics and barbecues; companies and communities outside the school district invited the foreigners to visit. With the assistance of Greyhound, the American Field Service organized bus trips around the country for their students. Many wanted to chip into and to join in the hospitality to make the guests feel welcome. In many cases, the exchange participants became a focus of discussions, planning committees, and council meetings before they even set foot on American soil.

As a result, the arrival of the exchange participants was anticipated by their host families and whole communities and regions. To satisfy public interest, media coverage followed the exchange participants. Requests from reporters, newsreel cameramen and photographers for exchange students to pose for pictures became common during their stay, but particularly while traveling. The *Sunday News* remarked: "Used to this [the media attention], they flung themselves into the spirit of the thing like veterans."³⁰ A particular active exchange participant spoke supposedly to an estimated 6,000,000 students and 15,000,000 adults, partly through personal appearances, but mainly thanks to 15 radio or television shows.³¹

The public support for the program in the United States was less the result of a successful exchange than a predisposition. Thus the newspaper articles included hardly any critical analysis of the political aims of the exchange program, but mostly human-interest stories. Readers wanted to read about the persons their community sponsored, they were looking for reports on the activities of the exchange participants and quotes on their adaptation and their impressions of the United States. Of course, they

were also interested in reading about their own good deeds: Not surprisingly, many articles mentioned host families by name and would sometimes report on admirable community efforts in a column such as "Good Citizens At Work."³² In general these efforts lasted to the very last day of the exchange participants' stay. In Lima the city presented their stop-over visitors on their final bus trip around the country with a package of souvenirs as a remembrance.³³ At the Amarillo High School students collected money to buy true Texas-style farewell gifts for their two exchange participants: Both boys received a large Western hat, a wide leather belt and real cowboy boots.³⁴ This last example showed that even peer groups involved themselves actively in the community activities.

Dealing with the German Past

While it was true that most articles, particularly in smaller newspapers, did not discuss political issues, their readers found some references to the German past in quotes from exchange participants. Many German students expressed astonishment about their warm welcome and the lack of resentments expressed by Americans upon meeting former enemy aliens. "Although many Americans view the German nation as a whole with some skepticism or at least reserve, there was scarcely any resentment against the individual German, provided he showed some tact and tolerance in human relationships," said Friedrich G.³⁵ For some the stay in the United States meant an escape from everyday confrontations with the German past. "I like it here because they don't ask you if you are Catholic or German or Jewish or Irish, but instead, if you know how to drive a truck, or write well," Manfred P. told one journalist.³⁶ An exchange particularly under the auspices of an international exchange program, like the American Field Service, which did not limit its program to Germans only, sometimes offered temporary national anonymity. Germans reflected on differences between the host country and their homes, but in their adaptation to the United States they were in the same boat as exchange participants from Belgium, Finland, France or Norway.

In their reflections on Germany the exchange participants remained fairly superficial. The German past was hardly ever addressed in a direct way. Germany was presented as a war-torn country: "Germany is extremely war-weary; the destruction of Allied bombers is still visible almost everywhere; on street corners in every city and town begging war-cripples are grim reminders to the people; and the dismantling of basic industries has only just ceased."³⁷ "Our main thought is to rebuild our country," Herwig L. emphasized.³⁸ The students projected to the American public a perception of Germany as a country that had suffered as a result of the war and was facing the consequence of losing it. The situa-

tion in Germany was not perceived as a punishment for past wrongdoings. On the contrary, while they did not attempt to justify anything that happened under the National Socialism (insofar as they touched upon these issues at all), the Nazis were often presented as the “others,” a group that was not identical with the German population and that had actually oppressed or seduced the latter, and in particular young people. “During the time of the Nazi regime, German schools (especially high schools) were completely controlled by the government and strongly influenced by the ideas of Nazism. It was the idea of the Nazi leaders to train the youth for their places and thus secure the future of the regime. When the war was over... and the Allies took over the German government and territory a tremendous chaos was left. And most of all the German youth was damaged, not materially but psychologically. Men who had been heroes, were now criminals. Things which had been good were now crimes,” Kurt B. reflected.³⁹

As frustrated as some Americans felt about the lack of guilt for Nazi crimes expressed by the German population, many newspapers were willing to put the blame on the older generations and to see the young people as “contaminated” by an authoritarian regime.⁴⁰ Membership in the Hitler Jugend was presented as a nonpolitical act: “When he was 10 years old,” one newspaper wrote about an exchange student, “he joined the Youth Movement. But to Herwig it was more of a ‘game’ than anything else. In Germany the movement was something you entered into when you came of age, ‘like going to school,’ he commented.”⁴¹ It was not concealed that they had run around in uniforms and worn the swastikas, but they had not been of age then and had not known better.⁴² At least one German exchange student believed that his background gave him the advantage of a better vantage point: “As I am coming from a country where many people have been most seriously affected by war and the evils of a totalitarian state, I may have a better eye for all those things which an American by habit takes as self-evident.”⁴³

In the United States many Germans had friendly encounters with Jews again for the first time in years. In a few cases, Jews and Jewish organizations even contributed to the operation of the exchange.⁴⁴ The encounters left an impact. Friedrich G., for example, started reflecting on guilt and responsibility: “Of special importance . . . was the meeting with Jews and citizens of those European countries that were occupied by the German army during the war. Although I never approved of, or excused, the horrible crimes committed by the Nazi regime, I was no friend to the conception of collective German guilt. But here, facing those who had been directly or indirectly discriminated against and persecuted by the Germans, I recognized the full extent of those crimes more clearly than ever before and I could not help having a personal feeling of guilt—or, at

least, a truly deep feeling of shame."⁴⁵ While he realized that he might not be guilty of having committed crimes, he began to understand that he shared a moral responsibility because the Nazi regime took place in Germany.

Designed as a program to promote transnational understanding on a personal level, the exchange showed early promise. The student program helped to create some unlikely friendships. "They had become inseparable during Eva's year, the German girl and the Jewish girl, studying, reading, swimming together. 'Eva is part of my life,' Ruth says. 'Everyone loves her. Some may have come just to learn. She came to learn and absorb. After graduation, I am going to Europe to travel and study, and in Germany we will do this together.'"⁴⁶ This friendship was extraordinary by contemporary standards, and it was not the only one that developed: "The atmosphere of good will and understanding which prevailed in the college was particularly beneficial for social intercourse with those people who had suffered under the Nazis and who had every reason to hate the Germans. Hostilities were avoided and in most cases we could find a common basis of understanding. In the course of time some of the Norwegians, Frenchmen and Netherlanders were among the best friends I made in the United States. In Europe, under less fortunate external conditions, this might not have been achieved."⁴⁷

In general, however, newspapers drew a blank on questions about dealing with the German past. If they dealt with the issue, it was not often in articles and columns on German exchange participants visiting the United States. The students were in many cases allowed, as mentioned above, to distance themselves from the National-Socialist past. The more time passed, this trend might have intensified as the focus shifted toward anticommunism: "... Western Germany is trying to forget Naziism and recover from the crippling of the last war; it is really trying democracy and definitely does not want communism."⁴⁸

Shared Anticommunism

The rejection of communism became a shared bond between West Germans and Americans in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It helped exchange participants to find acceptance during their stay, partly because of their "expertise." Some had experienced a short period of Soviet rule, or faced it in their daily lives in Berlin. Americans were curious about living in proximity to the communist regime,⁴⁹ and the students were only too willing to share their impressions: "Klaus lived in the Russian zone until a few years ago. According to him, living in the Russian zone is even worse than most Americans imagine."⁵⁰ Konrad T. "declared that 'conditions in the eastern zone are much worse than in the west, while so-

called free elections are just a farce.’⁵¹ In some situations the fear of communism was used to distract Americans from the German past. Some students maintained that the “real threat” to Germany came from communism and that Nazi ideology was “dead.”⁵²

Strengthening the bonds to the United States and building a Western alliance became a theme: “. . . Germans realistically see that without a strong Western Europe, the two and one half million Red Army soldiers now stationed just east of the Iron Curtain could sweep away German resistance like leaves before a tornado.”⁵³ Anticommunism and pro-Americanism went hand in hand: “Firm American stands against communist expansion in two instances—the Berlin Blockade and the Korean situation—have greatly boosted the attitude toward the U.S. in Western Germany.”⁵⁴ The theme was not just suggested by German exchange participants but also offered by American journalists: “We hope that these boys and girls who visited us will go home and tell their people and friends some of the great truths about America—our hopes for world peace, our desire to love our neighbors, our sense of decency in world affairs and our wish that the nations of the world solve their common problems through mutual understandings.” And as the article continued to explain: “Some of this might filter through the Iron Curtain into Russia and her unfortunate Satellites and who knows what might happen.”⁵⁵ Exchange of persons programs as an instrument to achieve detente with communism? This might be stretching the evidence for the time frame under discussion, but as an undercurrent it could be occasionally detected.

Concerns and Failures

Newspapers mentioned a few concerns about the exchange. Some of these concerns involved organizational aspects, dealing with the operation of the exchange and principles that should be followed: “A few lessons had to be learned the hard way. The commission now knows that it should not expect good results if it assigns an urban youth to a Pennsylvania farm. It has learned that however benevolent the purpose in mind, Roman Catholic students can be brought over successfully only with that church’s cooperation.”⁵⁶ Regardless of the last statement, however, the article discussed the opening of the Brethren Service Commission program to other denominations.

Another issue was the change in appearance of the exchange participants during their stay. Journalists claimed jokingly that it became nearly impossible to tell them apart from their American fellow students.⁵⁷ Their sense of fashion was “Americanized”: “After a year of living in the homes of Americans, attending American high schools, and socializing with

American teenagers, their inhibitions have become non-existent, their clothes follow the pattern perfectly, and their English is excellent. Boys clad in Stetsons and cowboy boots were outstanding among the students, although most of them had taken to blue jeans. The girls, with short hair shining in the latest styles wore shorts and not a few were barefoot as a concession to the heat. It was a bit startling to hear them chattering in the typical slang of our own teenagers, with just enough accent to make the words sound different.⁵⁸ The change of appearances of the girls were probably the most obvious. Many had arrived with braids which they would carry home in their suitcases, sometimes along with shiny new evening gowns that resembled ensembles known from the movies.⁵⁹

Such startling changes could cause problems of readaptation upon their return to Germany, as a few articles pointed out. AFS addressed the problem in its final orientation round to the students: "They discussed the necessity for un-Americanizing themselves before they reached home, so as not to shock their families. Mr. Edgell asked them to think before starting to show off as world travelers, in order not to antagonize their fellow countrymen, and thus undo the good that is expected from these student exchanges. The differences in standards of living was brought out, and they were cautioned to return as natives of their own countries still, bent on using the good things they have learned to improve them, and on avoiding such American faults as have caused misunderstandings."⁶⁰ Organizers were concerned that the success of the exchange of persons programs with regard to the exchange participants' mission upon their return, would be endangered by the change of appearance, attitude and behavior. Chosen as potential future leaders in their home country it was essential that the returnees would not alienate themselves from the other Germans, so that they would be able to maintain and build up their influence.

Failures were rarely reported. It seemed that in most cases the careful selection process prevented them, although a few placements did not work out, and sometimes the exchange experience caused new prejudices:

In ten cases families were changed for reasons of maladjustment. One German girl, who was too 'sophisticated' was returned home. Perhaps the main failure came with a 17-year-old boy who lived in Birmingham, Ala., studying at Philipps High School. He had arrived from Germany without a prejudice in the world. His father had died opposing the anti-Semitic program of Hitler. He had never seen a Negro. When he gave his views of life in the South, he spoke amusingly with a rich Southern accent—but what gave the accent point was that he had taken on completely

that region's social coloration. He trotted out every cliché in the bag against Negroes, calmly observing that segregation may be unconstitutional but necessary, since Negroes were slaves but eighty years ago. He scouted segregation, called Negroes ill-mannered and unable to help themselves or understand democracy . . .⁶¹

While the exchange of persons programs were intended to spread democracy by exposing participants to American democracy, the organizers had not anticipated the effect of the segregation issue on the students. The exchange participants could not help noticing this basic limitation of the American democracy, and not all internalized the regional prejudices as their own:

In these two cities [Augusta and Savannah, Ga.], I got my first realistic impression of the Negro problem in the South. I was shocked at the Negro sections which looked so unworthy of human beings. I constantly had to keep in mind what the Nazis had done with the Jews and their political enemies. Here, at least, nobody was persecuted or killed. When I stood on the highway in the Negro section of Augusta trying to get my next ride I felt strange in being the only white man on the street in a vicinity that could just as well be a part of darkest Africa. It was a feeling of being in a hopeless minority. At that moment I could understand, although not approve, some of the attitudes white people have developed in regions largely populated by Negroes. It was, of course, ignorance which produced this strange feeling, and I saw the trend which leads from ignorance to prejudice, from imaginary necessity for self-defense to 'preventive' aggression.' Later, after I became personally acquainted with some fine Negroes and learned that they are human beings, too, differing very little from me in their mentality and reactions, I lost my feeling of strangeness with them.⁶²

To prevent one-sided views on racial segregation the AFS decided "that it would be desirable to bring students up from the South for at least part of their school year and expose them to non-segregated study in our northern schools."⁶³ But this solution did not resolve the problem in its whole extent.

Mission Accomplished?

While students were encouraged to study American democracy and to observe its functioning in everyday life, there is no reliable way to mea-

sure the effectiveness of this program of reorientation. Many German exchange participants expressed their love for the host country, their hope to return. But based on their own admissions in newspapers, one cannot be sure that it was not “the amount and quality of the food, the family car, the heating system in the house, radios all over the place, and television”⁶⁴ that impressed them the most. Their awareness and appreciation would sometimes spread to their American hosts—although occasionally the German students criticized that Americans took their surrounding luxury for granted and failed to appreciate it.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, many students took an active interest in the U.S. polity, policies and politics. The students of 1952 followed the presidential election campaign keenly: “If the students had its way, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower would have no competition. It was hard to find one in the group who wasn’t sporting some sort of Ike button, badge or sticker.”⁶⁶ In general students could be found in school societies and as members of student councils.⁶⁷ They might have been elected to these councils as a gesture of welcome, but the experience of serving in a student council gave them the opportunity to observe and experiment with democracy on a micro-level.

The educational system in the United States fascinated many and was probably their favorite object for comparison:

Wolfgang said he was particularly struck by American schools, which he found far advanced over those in Europe. ‘Schools in the United States,’ he said, ‘are not just places to study. They are places where people learn how to be good citizens, how to make good homes, how to work with each other. Most of all, schools in the States are places where young people learn they are personally responsible for the society in which they live, and individually responsible for the kind of government they get.’ He spoke of student government in American schools which he said was an eye-opener. He was impressed by the existence in nearly all high schools of ‘school newspapers—which are actually prepared and published by students themselves.’ He was impressed, too, by the co-educational school system, by the large number of practical subjects studied by the pupils and by the wealth of audio-visual teaching aids and the large school auditoriums ‘which are as big as our biggest movie houses.’⁶⁸

In their own sphere the American school system symbolized the path toward democracy. The exchange students did not think that they received a better education in terms of the subject matter covered in the United States, but some believed that they learned democracy from its roots. And they learned to stand up for their beliefs and defend “democracy” in discussion groups.⁶⁹

Was the student exchange program presented as a success to the public? In some cases, newspaper articles expressed a mixture of hope and warning: "It is hoped they [the exchange participants] have learned America's lesson well for it is true that in their hands lies the destiny of Germany and perhaps the future of the world."⁷⁰ Many students were staunch supporters of the value of the exchange:

There is no doubt that the exchange of persons is one of the most effective means of establishing friendly relations between Germany and the United States. Germany has given a striking example in the past how separation from the outside world can breed intolerance, overestimation of one's own abilities, and receptiveness to wicked propaganda. The sphere of influence of a single exchange person may be rather small when he returns to his country. However, if we succeed in increasing the exchange of persons of good will so that these single spheres add up to a considerable power, the attitude of a whole nation might be influenced in a positive way. This seems particularly important for a country like Germany, which is in a state of transition and hence fairly susceptible.⁷¹

Gertrude Samuels of the *New York Times* recognized and admired the sense of mission of these students: "Yet one—after witnessing the human ravages of the concentration camps, the equivocal attitude of older Germans today, the neo-nazism stirring in regions like Bavaria—wonders what will become of the idealism of these youngsters as they return to their old environments. They, too, are puzzled as to how they are going to make their new information known and their influence felt back home."⁷² After all they were a small group, facing generations who might turn out resistant against change: "You could only hope that their year's experience had given them some immunity against the fatherland's political disease, and courage to face up to stubborn resistance to change."⁷³ The reformers involved in the exchange expressed a qualified success: "As might have been anticipated, the results were both good and bad, but I am myself convinced that the good predominated. The [democratic] bacteria were not scattered about in such profusion as had been hoped, and yet their presence can be easily detected."⁷⁴ Frank Banta stated: "The real fruits of the present program will be borne two and three decades later, when the students now in classrooms and laboratories, studying and observing a way of life easier and freer and happier than they have ever seen before, will be leaders in a future Germany."⁷⁵ Henry Kellermann concluded about two decades later: "The program indeed has become a success. It had provided an impulse for democratic reform."⁷⁶

Since the reorientation scheme at the heart of the exchange of persons programs arose from the belief that rubbing elbows with a democracy would spread Western democratic values, its success was highly dependent on individuals and what they made of the opportunities offered to them through the exchange. Reorientation might have been the goal, but in the end it was often more of a byproduct.

Questions for Future Research

In my future research I intend to focus on internal evaluations of the student exchange by a participating organization like the National Catholic Welfare Conference which collected reports and letters for internal evaluations of their program. Do these contemporary reports give insight on the way the students digested their impressions and experiences? Did the students change their perspective regarding life-style, consumption and education etc.? In-depth research on the internal evaluations might also reveal themes and topics that the organizations asked students to reflect on. Provisional archival findings suggest that individual Americans were indeed concerned about an exchange program that brought former enemies to their country. Questions regarding the usefulness of the expenses arose: "I can think of many less expensive ways of 'selling democracy' to Western Germany! We might start with cleaning up Landsberg prison [. . .]"⁷⁷ The alleged anti-Semitism of a German exchange student resulted in a public protest and an investigation by the Department of State.⁷⁸ How did organizations respond to such public concerns? These are some of the questions I wish to pursue in my follow-up research.

Notes

¹ Esther W. Hymer, "Laboratory for Peace Finds a Formula," in *Independent Woman*, vol. 25, no. 7, July 1950, p. 194.

² For this research project I have visited the National Archives, Catholic University of America Archives, American Field Service Archives and the Rockefeller Archive. I also corresponded with dozens archivists from different universities, colleges and schools across the country.

³ In this article "American" is used as referring to the United States only.

⁴ Henry P. Pilgert, "The Exchange of Persons Program in Western Germany," Appendix 4, p. 87ff.

⁵ Marcel Machill and Sebastian Lorenz, "Nicht Amerikanisierung, sondern Transfer: Ein interdisziplinärer Forschungsansatz zur Analyse der transatlantischen Beziehungen," in Marcel Machill and Sebastian Lorenz, eds., *Transatlantik. Transfer von Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur* (Opladen/Wiesbaden, 1999), p. 14-22, here p. 14; on the British and French role, see Adolf M. Birke's and Jérôme Vaillant's articles in Heinrich Oberreuter and Jürgen Weber, eds., *Freundliche Feinde* (München, 1996), p. 217-229 and p. 231-237.

⁶ See Hermann-Josef Rupieper, *Die Wurzeln der westdeutschen Nachkriegsdemokratie: Die amerikanische Besatzung 1945–1952* (Opladen, 1993), p. 422.

⁷ The term reorientation asserted itself eventually against the term re-education.

⁸ In 1952 the Federal Republic of Germany signed the Fulbright Agreement and the German Program converted into an integrated part of the Fulbright Program. Following Ulrich Littmann's argument, the inclusion of Germany as an integrated part of the Fulbright Program resulted in a change of intentions involved. (See Ulrich Littmann, *Gute Partner–Schwierige Partner. Anmerkungen zur akademischen Mobilität zwischen Deutschland und den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, 1923–1993* [Bonn, 1996], p. 86.) Thus my research ends in 1952.

⁹ Henry J. Kellermann, *Cultural Relations as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy: The Educational Exchange Program Between the United States and Germany 1945–1954* (Washington D.C., 1974), p. 4.

¹⁰ Interdivisional Reorientation Committee (OMGUS), Cultural Exchange Program (February 1949), Foreword.

¹¹ George N. Shuster, "The American Occupation and German Education," in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 97 (1953), p. 161.

¹² See for example AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The South Bend Tribune*, July 6, 1952, "Foreign Students Given Look at Rural Community Life"; "Reise zur Versöhnung", in *Stern Spezial*, no. 21, summer 2001, p. 15–17.

¹³ See Frank G. Banta, "Student Exchange," in *Information Bulletin: Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, November 30, 1948, p. 10.

¹⁴ The portion of exchangees from (West) Berlin was always higher than from any other area. Polls indicated that they were more pro-American and anticommunist before their arrival in the States than West Germans. See Rupieper, *Nachkriegsdemokratie*, p. 404.

¹⁵ The number is an estimate taking into account the exchangees of 1946 as well as Kellermann's records of the later years. See Kellermann, *Cultural Relations*, p. 261.

¹⁶ Walter Jaide and Barbara Hille, "Einleitung," in Walter Jaide and Barbara Hille, eds., *Jugend im doppelten Deutschland* (Opladen 1977), p. 20.

¹⁷ Interdivisional Reorientation Committee (OMGUS), Cultural Exchange Program (February 1949), p. 18: See also Rockefeller Archive Center: RF, record group 1.1, series 717 R, box 7, folder 37, excerpt from R.S. Morison diary of June 2, 1949; Friedhelm Boll, *Auf der Suche nach Demokratie. Britische und deutsche Jugendinitiativen in Niedersachsen nach 1945* (Bonn, 1995), p. 11; Karl-Heinz Füssl, *Die Umerziehung der Deutschen: Jugend und Schule unter den Siegermächten des Zweiten Weltkriegs 1945–1955* (Paderborn, 1994).

¹⁸ Frank G. Banta, "Student Exchange," in *Information Bulletin: Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, November 30, 1948, p. 10; See also AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, "Foreign Students Find What Makes U.S. Click."

¹⁹ Frank G. Banta, "Student Exchange," in *Information Bulletin: Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, November 30, 1948, p. 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.* The Hitler Youth was founded in 1926. The Reichsjugendgesetz of 1936 laid down that all German youth should be organized in it. Pressure to join increased thereafter and in 1939 membership became mandatory for German youth between the age of 10 and 18. Thus the date and age of admission was significant. For a timetable see Arno Klönne, *Jugend im Dritten Reich: Die Hitler-Jugend und ihre Gegner* (Düsseldorf, 1984), p. 303f.

²¹ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Sunday Telegram*, March 18, 1951, "Boston Ball For Field Service Project"; See also AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Springfield Daily Eagle*, July 5, 1952, "Visitors From West Europe"; AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, Gertrude Samuels, "Can German Youth Teach Its Elders?" reprinted from the *New York Times* by the AFS.

- ²² AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, "The American Field Service," pamphlet, July 13, 1952, Chapter One, History and Aims.
- ²³ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Gloucester Daily Times*, March 11, 1952, "German Viewpoint By Exchange Students."
- ²⁴ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Pittsburgh Press*, June 1, 1952, "We Don't Appreciate U.S., German Student Here Says."
- ²⁵ In one case, e.g., an exchangee admitted that she had expected to see shooting cowboys and natives. AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, "Europeans Tour Parks, Players Guild, Hartville."
- ²⁶ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Iron Mountain News*, "Welcome Import."
- ²⁷ *Spectator–Hamilton College*, October 27, 1950, "Exchange Students Discuss Homeland at IRC Meeting."
- ²⁸ Frank G. Banta, "Student Exchange", in *Information Bulletin: Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, November 30, 1948, p. 10.
- ²⁹ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Sunday News*, Ridgewood, N.J., July 20, 1952, "196 Foreign Students Invade Town."
- ³⁰ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Sunday News*, Ridgewood, N.J., July 20, 1952, "196 Foreign Students Invade Town"; Even Jacqueline Bouvier, later known as Jacky Kennedy, wrote a column about the student exchange. AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Washington Times Herald*, "Inquiring Photographer," in AFS Scrapbook clippings, Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952.
- ³¹ *Information Bulletin: Monthly Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, February 1951, "Message from America."
- ³² See *World Week*, September 24, 1952, vol. 21, no. 2, p. 18.
- ³³ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Lima News*, July 11, 1952, "Traveling European Students Guests in Lima Homes after Tour of Area."
- ³⁴ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Amarillo Daily News*, Amarillo, Texas, May 30, 1952, "Year's School Term in Amarillo Ends for Germans-Made-Texans."
- ³⁵ Friedrich G.K. Grohe, "America Is Different," in *Information Bulletin: Monthly Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, September 1950, p. 25.
- ³⁶ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *New Trier News*, February 29, 1952, "From Germany, at N.T. he's just plain Fred."
- ³⁷ *Spectator–Hamilton College*, October 27, 1950, "Exchange Students Discuss Homeland at IRC Meeting."
- ³⁸ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Erie Dispatch*, May 11, 1952, "Exchange Student Says: 'German People Tired of Marching.'"
- ³⁹ Kurt Biedenkopf, "BIKO"-column, October 14, 1950, in *The Davidsonian*.
- ⁴⁰ AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, Gertrude Samuels, "Can German Youth Teach Its Elders?", reprinted from the *New York Times* by the AFS. For the complex discussion of guilt see Raimund Lammersdorf, "The Question of Guilt, 1945-47: German and American Answers," published under <http://www.ghi-dc.org/conpotweb/westernpapers/lammersdorf.pdf>
- ⁴¹ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Erie Dispatch*, May 11, 1952, "Exchange Student Says: 'German People Tired of Marching.'"
- ⁴² AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, Gertrude Samuels, "Can German Youth Teach Its Elders?" reprinted from the *New York Times* by the AFS.

⁴³ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, “Let’s Be Frank About Fair Lawn,” column by a German Exchange Student at Fair Lawn High School.

⁴⁴ See AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Duluth News Tribune*, July 5, 1952, “Foreign Students Greeted”; A Jewish family even offered to take in Hildegard Speer, the daughter of Albert Speer. She was put up with a Quaker family, but only the intervention of the Jewish family might have secured her participation in the exchange program. See “Reise zur Versöhnung,” in *Stern Spezial*, no. 21, summer 2001, p. 15-17.

⁴⁵ Friedrich G.K. Grohe, “America Is Different,” in *Information Bulletin: Monthly Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, September 1950, p. 27.

⁴⁶ AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, Gertrude Samuels, “Can German Youth Teach Its Elders?” reprinted from the *New York Times* by the AFS.

⁴⁷ Friedrich G.K. Grohe, “America Is Different,” in *Information Bulletin: Monthly Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, September 1950, p. 27.

⁴⁸ *Spectator–Hamilton College*, October 27, 1950, “Exchange Students Discuss Homeland at IRC Meeting.”

⁴⁹ *Information Bulletin: Monthly Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, February 1951, “Message from America.”

⁵⁰ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Oak Ridger*, July 7, 1952, “German Youth Says Yanks Easy To Be Friends With.”

⁵¹ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, “Foreigners Speak–Democratic System of Schools Lauded”; See also AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Manitowoc Herald Times*, “Foreign Students Tour Manitowoc, Leave Tuesday”; AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Erie Dispatch*, May 11, 1952, “Exchange Student Says: ‘German People Tired of Marching.’”

⁵² AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, Gertrude Samuels, “Can German Youth Teach Its Elders?,” reprinted from the *New York Times* by the AFS.

⁵³ *Spectator–Hamilton College*, October 27, 1950, “Exchange Students Discuss Homeland at IRC Meeting.”

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Springfield Daily Eagle*, July 5, 1952, “Visitors From West Europe.”

⁵⁶ *The Christian Century*, vol. LXVII, no. 27, July 5, 1950, “Open Opportunities to German Youth,” p. 814.

⁵⁷ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Springfield Daily Eagle*, July 5, 1952, “Visitors From West Europe”; AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, Gertrude Samuels, “Can German Youth Teach Its Elders?” reprinted from the *New York Times* by the AFS; AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Amarillo Daily News*, Amarillo, Texas, May 30, 1952, “Year’s School Term in Amarillo Ends for Germans-Made-Texans.”

⁵⁸ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Sunday News*, Ridgewood, N.J., July 20, 1952, “196 Foreign Students Invade Town.”

⁵⁹ See AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, “Students from Germany Are in Homestretch of Studies Here Under Scholarships,” April 20, 1951; AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Redbook—The Magazine for Young Adults*, August 1952, “The Taffeta Dress.”

⁶⁰ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Sunday News*, Ridgewood, N.J., July 20, 1952, “196 Foreign Students Invade Town.”

- ⁶¹ AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, Gertrude Samuels, "Can German Youth Teach Its Elders?" reprinted from the *New York Times* by the AFS.
- ⁶² Friedrich G.K. Grohe, "America Is Different," in *Information Bulletin: Monthly Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, September 1950, p. 26.
- ⁶³ AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, Gertrude Samuels, "Can German Youth Teach Its Elders?" reprinted from the *New York Times* by the AFS.
- ⁶⁴ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, "Let's Be Frank About Fair Lawn" column by a German Exchange Student at Fair Lawn High School.
- ⁶⁵ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *Redbook—The Magazine for Young Adults*, August 1952, "The Taffeta Dress"; See also AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Lima News*, July 11, 1952, "Traveling European Students Guests in Lima Homes after Tour of Area."
- ⁶⁶ AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Lima News*, July 11, 1952, "Traveling European Students Guests in Lima Homes after Tour of Area."
- ⁶⁷ See for example AFS Archives: scrapbook (Dec 13, 1951–July 11, 1952), RG 4, box 1, *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, "Benefits Go Both Ways."
- ⁶⁸ *Information Bulletin: Monthly Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, February 1951, "Message from America."
- ⁶⁹ AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, Gertrude Samuels, "Can German Youth Teach Its Elders?", reprinted from the *New York Times* by the AFS.
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- ⁷¹ Friedrich G.K. Grohe, "America Is Different", in *Information Bulletin: Monthly Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, September 1950, p. 29.
- ⁷² AFS Archives: RG 4, box 1, Gertrude Samuels, "Can German Youth Teach Its Elders?" reprinted from the *New York Times* by the AFS.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ Shuster, "German Education," p. 161.
- ⁷⁵ Frank G. Banta, "Student Exchange", in *Information Bulletin: Magazine of the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany*, November 30, 1948, p. 11.
- ⁷⁶ Kellermann, *Cultural Relations*, p. 243.
- ⁷⁷ National Archives: RG59, Stacks 250, Row 39, Compartment 17, Box 2435, File 511.623/1-50, letter, dated March 29, 1950.
- ⁷⁸ See National Archives: RG 59, Stacks 250, Row 39, Compartment 17, Box 2435, File 511.623/5-50, Assistant Secretary's response to Senator Warren G. Magnuson, dated July 14, 1950.