In 1941 prominent American magazine publisher Henry Luce pro-
claimed his hopes for an “American internationalism,” led by his fel-
countrymen who would “accept wholeheartedly our duty and our
opportunity . . . to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence,
for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit.” His
call for an “American Century” found ready resonance among U.S.
politicians, pundits, and intellectuals, who during and after the war
sought to revamp transatlantic and global economic, political, military,
and cultural relations. If ever this sweeping vision was realized, it was
in the first post-World War II decades, above all but not exclusively in
Western Europe. America’s mid-century dominance there rested on its
economic prowess and model of Fordist modernity; on unchallenged
military might, conventional and nuclear; and on a pervasive trans-
atlantic consensus, at least among elites, about anti-Communism
and containment but also about Keynesianism and generous social
policies. It was also supported by Western Europeans’ admiration for
American political values and popular culture and their willingness
to be junior partners in America’s “empire by invitation.” The final
prerequisite for America’s extraordinary influence was the relative
weakness not only of its transatlantic Allies but also of its Soviet
enemy, who had suffered such enormous losses in World War II.

The American Century was, however, neither as long-lived as its
name implied, nor as hegemonic as its proponents imagined, even
in the first Cold War decades. America’s preponderance of power
in transatlantic relations must be recognized, but simultaneously,
arguments about Americanization need to be complicated, other
circuits of exchange of ideas, products, and people acknowledged,
and the Atlantic Community recontextualized in terms of its two
“others” — the socialist Second World and the Third World. This
essay will suggest some of the ways this can be done. First, it will
situate the exceptional years from 1945 until the early 1970s in a
history of transatlantic relations over the long twentieth century.
Second, it will illustrate the limits of Americanization in Western
Europe, note some of the cooperative projects and ongoing conflicts
that suggest mutual dependencies and two-way exchanges, and
highlight some European influences on postwar America in addition

1 Henry Luce, “The Ameri-
can Century,” Life, Feb. 7,
1941. Italics in original.

2 Mary Nolan, The Trans-
atlantic Century: Europe
and America, 1890-2010
(Cambridge, UK, 2012); 3,
Geir Lundestad, “Empire
by Invitation? The United
States and Western Europe,
1945-1952.” Journal of
Peace Research 23, no. 3
to those of the experts, professionals, and intellectuals who feature in the subsequent essays. Third, the complex circuits of exchange within Europe, including across the Iron Curtain, will illustrate the multidirectionality of European interests and influences and warn against an overemphasis on Atlantic crossings in whatever direction. Finally, the importance of European and American global economic aspirations and mental maps as well as of concrete interactions with the Third World will not only help situate the transatlantic within the global. They also show how central the colonial and Third Worlds were to the politics, economics, and self-definition of those in the Atlantic Community from the late nineteenth century on, even if the exact nature of the relations and self-definitions changed over the course of the long twentieth century.

**Europe’s American Century**

Sweeping narratives of the decline of the Old World and rise of the New capture elements of the shifting relationship between Europe and America in the twentieth century, but they do justice neither to the complexity of the exchanges of goods, people, institutions, and ideas in both directions across the Atlantic nor to the ambivalent and contradictory attitudes of Europeans and Americans toward one another. A history of shifting transatlantic power relations, of provisional outcomes and ongoing indeterminacies, of cooperative projects and competing visions of capitalism, modernity, and empire cannot be reduced to the inevitable triumph of the United States; such a history is much more nuanced, contingent, and contradictory. It shows the unique and transitory character of the post-1945 constellation of transatlantic relations but also suggests continuities across periods.

In the multipolar decades before 1914, the economic, imperial, and intellectual exchanges in both directions between Europe and the United States were multiplying, but U.S. dominance was neither evident nor viewed as inevitable. The United States was not a major imperial power; it was not seen as a political or military model to imitate or fear. Although American industrial production grew and its investments and goods moved into Europe — think Singer sewing machines, International Harvester reapers, and Kodak cameras — Britain remained the world’s banker, insurer, and leading trader, and Germany was an industrial rival. America was not yet viewed as an economic model to emulate. And in the arena of social policy, as Dan Rodgers has shown, Americans were the students and Europeans, often Germans, the teachers.3

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To be sure, some worried about an “Americanization of the world,” to quote the title of William Stead’s book, which was actually about U.S. threats to the British Empire. Other Brits wrote of “American invaders” and the “American threat.” German officials and industrialists, however, were, overall, confident about their ability to compete economically, and the French saw little danger. Many Europeans wrote about the puzzling “American woman,” the peculiarities of gender relations in the U.S., and lamented the lack of Kultur, but none feared that these U.S. peculiarities might be imported into Europe. In short, before 1914 there was an uncertain balance of power in transatlantic relations and mutual interest but not obsessive preoccupation; neither anti-Americanism nor anti-Europeanism existed on a significant scale. The American Century had not yet begun.

World War I and its economic and political repercussions changed all that, paving the way — albeit in stops and starts — for the eclipse of European hegemony and the rise of an interventionist America. Only then did a significant transatlantic divide and the deep ambivalence that has ever since characterized Europeans’ view of America and Americans’ of Europe develop. World War I encouraged American disdain for European militarism and led the United States to see itself as Europe’s savior, entitled to prescribe the terms of peace. These contradictory assessments were to encourage both interventionism and isolationism in the interwar years. Britain and France needed American aid but resented the terms on which it was offered and promoted a very different peace settlement than Wilson wanted. The war experience on each side of the Atlantic was radically different, and these different experiences and memories of total war would complicate European-American relations throughout the twentieth century.  

The war’s economic aftermath set the stage for the 1920s. On the one hand, Europe was economically devastated, globally weakened, and heavily indebted; on the other hand, the United States was pioneering a new form of mass production and consumption: Fordism. Europe’s dramatically altered situation fueled a preoccupation with America, one that was greatest in Germany and the Soviet Union but present everywhere. It took varied forms, ranging from enthusiasm to abhorrence. For its part, the United States alternated between isolationism and unilateralism; economic engagement via loans, exports, and investments, and political distancing from individual countries and new international institutions, the League of Nations above all.


The allure of America as the land of unrivaled prosperity, unlimited growth, and unequivocal modernity dissipated during the 1930s, as the Depression devastated both sides of the Atlantic. The global economy became disarticulated, and transatlantic political divisions multiplied. The United States with its mass unemployment and escalating class conflicts seemed to be becoming Europeanized. Yet, the attraction of America did not disappear completely. Despite rhetorical condemnation of economic Americanism in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and growing critiques of American popular culture there and in the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, and especially the Soviet Union borrowed elements of the Fordist model of production but not its accompanying stress on consumption. They shared with the United States (and Sweden) more interventionist approaches to the Depression such as labor services and a penchant for giant infrastructure projects. To be sure, different countries harnessed these economic and social policies for quite different political ends. Those countries closest to the United States politically and culturally, Britain and France, were more reluctant to adopt such economic and social measures. Political divisions, ideological cleavages, and economic visions thus seemed at once sharper and more blurred, as the transatlantic world moved haltingly toward a post-liberal order whose contours were contested and uncertain. As would be the case post-1945, the European adoption of things American was selective. Things borrowed were transformed, often beyond recognition when put in different national contexts, and Europe was far from being Americanized. When Henry Luce published his famous "American Century" essay, it was less a description of America’s role in Europe and the world than a plea for Americans to take up a global mission.

World War II dramatically changed the transatlantic balance of power, devastating Europe economically, disrupting it socially, and discrediting elites and parties in many countries politically and culturally. It brought the United States and the USSR closer than at any time in the long twentieth century. Then the onset of the Cold War, for which both superpowers were responsible, ended the wartime community of interests and led Western Europeans and Americans to define the emerging Atlantic Community as separate from and opposed to the Soviet bloc. War and preparations for peace ended American ambivalence about “entangling alliances” and belief in isolationism. From the late 1940s to the early 1970s, the United States reshaped the global economic order, helped restructure political regimes across Western Europe, and experimented with

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8 The phrase, which echoed through U.S. foreign policy debates in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is from George Washington’s farewell address.
both containment and rollback toward the Soviet bloc. American businessmen, soldiers, and aid officials, American commodities, movies, music, and high culture flooded into Europe. Never had the American presence and influence been greater.

Even at the highpoint of America’s preponderance of power, however, there were significant tensions between the United States and its Western European allies over welfare and warfare, nuclear weapons and economic policies, attitudes toward the Soviet bloc and relations with the Third World. France replaced Britain and Germany as the country where ambivalence about American power and products was greatest. Europeans engaged in complex negotiations with American ideas, cultural products, and commodities and created hybrid forms of mass culture and modern living. Within European countries, between East and West, and among members of the Atlantic Community, culture wars were fought, both about American movies, music, and commodities in Europe and about whether and how politics and states should instrumentalize culture for Cold War ends.

From the 1970s onward, American influence began to erode. The protest movements of the late 1960s challenged both American hegemony and the Cold War categories central to it, and growing antinuclear movements further contested U.S. leadership. The multiple economic crises of the 1970s — the gold drain, oil shocks, and the exhaustion of Fordism — weakened America’s domination of the global economy. Détente as practiced by the United States and the USSR, on the one hand, and European states, on the other, took different forms that reflected Western Europe’s increasing autonomy. In the 1980s the United States and much of Europe grew still farther apart, as America, along with Britain, embraced neoliberalism, while continental European states defended important parts of their social democratic social policies and their particular varieties of more regulated capitalism, even as they liberalized the financial sector.

For many Americans the fall of Communism represented the longed for American Cold War victory, the end of a troubled history of challenges to liberalism and capitalism, and the beginning of U.S. unilateral global dominance. For Europeans the series of events for which 1989 is shorthand were more complex; far from ending history, they opened a new era in which Europe had to redefine its identity and institutions and in which Europeans borrowed more from one another than from America. As America turned away from


Europe, Europe intensified its economic and political integration, and European states frequently dissented from American global projects, military and economic. Of equal importance, a multipolar world has come into being; the North Atlantic no longer contains all the key players, nor is it central to all exchanges and networks. The transatlantic movement of ideas, goods, investments, and cultural products in both directions will continue — and perhaps intensify if the EU-U.S. free trade agreement is implemented — just as it has over the long twentieth century, with now Europe and now America dominating in different areas. Yet, the Atlantic Community, in so far as it survives, is no longer the only or most important institutional and imagined political, military, and economic supranational entity for either Europeans or Americans.14

Limits of Americanization

In the years after 1945, American military personnel, businessmen, Marshall Plan administrators, labor leaders, foundation officials, and educators moved out across Western Europe to spread the gospel of democratic capitalism and anti-communism. They encouraged Europeans to adopt the "politics of productivity," to open their markets, integrate their economies, and allow Hollywood films, jazz, and rock 'n' roll to circulate freely. "You can be like us" was the American promise — one which many perceived as a threat.15 But did the combination of aid and investment, multinationals and foundations, consumer goods and cultural products — all varied forms of American soft and semi-hard power — transform European economies and societies in the ways anticipated?

At issue are not American ambitions but rather Western Europe’s openness to things American and its ability to adopt or adapt them. While most scholars agree that concepts such as thoroughgoing European emulation or American cultural imperialism are too crude to describe the complex transatlantic interactions, there is much room for disagreement about what postwar Americanization looked like in different areas of economy and society, in different countries, and for different generations and genders. Indeed, there is much disagreement about how to define that elusive term. Some speak of the transfer of the American model and partial convergence, while others opt for cross-fertilization and American engagements or speak of adaptation, negotiation, and the resulting creation of hybrid practices, products, and policies. The essence of the American model is equally

14 See Weisbrode’s essay in this collection for a different view on the relationship of the Atlantic Community to globalization.

open to dispute. For Victoria de Grazia, its core is American consumer culture, with its distinctive Fordized system of distribution, its new advertising techniques and messages, its democratic and egalitarian ethos and consumer citizens, and its promise of a dramatically new standard of living. For Charles Maier, the American model that was exported post-1945 was ideological as much as institutional — a politics of productivity that was promoted by mass production, organizational rationalization, new technology, an open international economic order, and also promised not only growth but an escape from the zero-sum distribution struggles and ideological politics of earlier decades. For Marie-Laure Djelic the essence of the postwar American model, a model that was historically specific but claimed universal validity, was the large multidivisional, rationalized corporation, operating under the constraints of antitrust legislation and competing in oligopolistic markets. Both Christian Kleinschmidt and the authors in the collection edited by Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel reject the idea of a unitary American model embodying the best practices for productivity. Instead, they see the United States as having offered an ensemble of organizational innovations, technologies, and management and marketing practices among which Europeans could pick and choose and which they could modify and recombine to suit local institutions, needs, preferences, and prejudices.16

America’s influence varied across European countries, depending on the amount of U.S. aid and investment, the size of the U.S. military presence, the strength of prior cultural ties and exchanges, and the depth of national resistance to imports from across the Atlantic. Germany was among the most “Americanized” countries, for example; France among the least. That said, one can generalize about the kinds and degrees of Americanization in different areas of European economic, political, and cultural life in the first Cold War decades. After 1945 American popular culture — jazz, rock ‘n’ roll, Hollywood films, Coca-Cola, and blue jeans — was enthusiastically embraced, above all by European youth on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Among traditional elites, cultural figures, religious leaders, and politicians in Christian Democratic and communist regimes, the presence of such cultural artifacts aroused great anxiety, for these quintessential symbols of American mass culture and consumption seemed to threaten established gender norms, generational hierarchies, religious and political authority, and ostensibly self-contained national cultures. Yet, consumption did not necessarily indicate full-scale

Americanization. Going to Hollywood films, for example, did not mean wanting to become American; it might be just a fun escape or akin to a visit to a familiar foreign country. If postwar popular culture began in America, it soon incorporated European influences. While Elvis dominated rock in the 1950s, for example, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones did so in the 1960s and 1970s. A European-led international music scene emerged that was part of a transatlantic youth culture. In the 1950s, the embrace of American popular culture reflected and reinforced support for American political values and practices; by the late 1960s European youth continued to consume American mass culture, but many no longer endorsed American policies in Europe or globally.17

Americans sought not only to sell their commodities and cultural wares but also to impart their political values, pedagogy, and associational forms. Learning about American history and contemporary life was to be an integral part of the Americanization of Western Europe. The U.S. government engaged in cultural diplomacy, seeking to win hearts and minds with radio programming, tours by American artists, and exhibits of art, technology, and kitchens. The officially nongovernmental Congress for Cultural Freedom published journals and ran conferences to woo intellectuals away from any communist sympathies, while the Ford Foundation funded the Salzburg Seminars to teach American Studies to Europeans. The government brought thousands of West German businessmen, engineers, trade unionists, and journalists to the U.S. for short study tours in the late 1940s and 1950s. Thereafter the vast Fulbright and IREX programs, as well as private fellowships, brought a growing number of foreign students to the United States — as well as sending thousands of Americans abroad.18

These efforts met with mixed success. The Congress for Cultural Freedom, for example, won many converts in the 1950s but lost credibility in the 1960s when its ties to the CIA were exposed. Trade unionists learned about the American model of business unionism but never adopted it at home. American officials and foundations argued that American art, music, and literature were as developed as that of Europe, but many Europeans were more interested in American popular culture and continued to believe that Kultur was the distinctive preserve of Europe, while American prowess lay in economics and technology. (Many Americans may well have agreed, but that is a subject still in need of exploration.)

17 Martin Klimke, The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties (Princeton, 2010); Uta Poiger, Jazz, Rock and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany (Berkeley, 2000); Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, eds., Here, There and Everywhere: The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture (Hanover, NH, 2000).
Educational exchanges have been assessed primarily in terms of whether they made Western and later Eastern Europeans more democratic and sympathetic to American interests. 19 Two questions relevant to our theme remain unanswered. First, how did those Europeans who studied in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s and returned to Europe, or who were European-educated and then made their careers in the United States from the late 1960s onward, shape American scholarship as well as American politics and culture? They were well positioned to build transatlantic networks and, in the field I know best, history, to continue the work of explaining Europe to Americans that the refugee generation began. Thomas Wheatland’s essay considers this generation, and Merel Leeman writes about the younger generation that came before the war. 20 They were enormously influential in shaping the field of European history, but European Americanists, such as Rob Kroes or David Ellwood, have been largely ignored by historians in the United States, who seem to feel American history can only be written by Americans. Second, what did all those Americans who studied and researched in Europe bring back to their work and lives in the United States? How were they shaped by the intellectual approaches, political milieus, and cultural practices they encountered?

While Americans valued their cultural and educational initiatives, they saw economic reconstruction, reform, and modernization as the prerequisite for a new Europe in a new Atlantic community. Fordism — a system of mass production and mass consumption of consumer durables, built on integrated production, minutely divided assembly-line work, high wages, and credit purchases — was, along with free trade, at the core of America’s economic message. Europeans had first encountered Fordism in the interwar years through Henry Ford’s writings and trips to his River Rouge plant in Detroit. Reactions were mixed. Conservative elites, who deplored America’s gender relations, homogeneous, standardized products, and lack of Kultur, abhorred Fordism as did industrialists and most politicians who insisted that mass consumption and high wages were impossible in war-ravaged Europe. German Social Democrats were willing to embrace the assembly line if it brought a higher standard of living, and Soviets saw socialist Fordism as a way to industrialize and modernize. Most Europeans, however, were ambivalent about Fordism, and none were able to emulate the American economic model. 21

19 See, for example, Yale Richmond, Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain (University Park, PA, 2003).

20 See the Wheatland and Leeman essays in this volume.

After 1945, the United States sought to export Fordism and Taylorism with its minute division of labor and close managerial supervision of workers via the Marshall Plan and European Productivity Agency and to promote European economic integration in order to create a large American-style market. Those historians and social scientists positing far-reaching Americanization look at the most advanced industrial sectors like steel or autos, emphasize the growing production and purchase of consumer durables, and note the adoption of American corporate organization, advertising, and management practices. Others see the persistence of varieties of capitalism and emphasize the diversity of firms, production processes, and technologies in Western Europe. They point to distinctive labor relations, worker training, and firm financing, and emphasize the prevalence of corporatist bargaining among labor, capital, and the state in countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and Britain.22 Like blind people describing an elephant, these historians and social scientists envision an utterly different beast, depending on which part of the elephant — or the economy — they touch.

A reading of the literatures on both Americanization and varieties of capitalism, however, enables some generalizations. “Selective adaptation, creative modification and innovative hybridization” most accurately captures European developments, for although Western European economies were significantly modified postwar, distinctive varieties of capitalism nonetheless persisted.23 Europeans negotiated with American products, processes and practices, but they also drew on their own traditions and visions of the future. Western Europeans accorded the state a much greater economic role than did Americans. After World War II they either lived with inherited nationalized industries, as in Italy, or nationalized key sectors of industry, finance and transport, as in Britain and France. Planning and state subsidies were embraced. What Jan Logemann has argued for West Germany holds more broadly: Europeans accorded much more importance to public goods than did Americans, who prioritized private consumption at the expense of social and economic policy.24 Although European growth rates were higher than those in the United States, the overall level of consumption was much lower, especially in the 1950s. Western Europe began purchasing consumer durables — washing machines, refrigerators, TVs, and cars — on a massive scale at decade’s end, and Eastern Europe followed in the 1970s.25 But, as the Swedish anthropologist Orvar Löfgren has perceptively noted, American visitors to Sweden found that the use of appliances, the


25 For statistics on this rapid increase, see Nolan, Transatlantic Century, 261, 263.
preferred color schemes of homes and offices, the shape of brooms, even the smell of multinational disinfectant, was different. Everyday modernity was at once American, international, and profoundly if often elusively national.26

To be sure, the concept of Americanization cannot be dispensed with entirely, when looking at production and consumption. It captures the postwar power relations that made America the model against which Western Europeans defined their economic practices, especially in the early postwar period. By the late 1960s, however, America accounted for only 35 percent of global manufacturing and was failing to improve productivity, while European nations regained competitiveness and enjoyed unprecedented prosperity.27 They no longer felt impelled to look to America. They were not only producing for their own domestic markets and those of other European states; they were exporting to the United States as well.

The late 1960s and early 1970s marked the apogee of Americanization because of Europe’s recovery and growing autonomy and because of the multiple economic and political crises the United States suffered in the 1970s. Of equal importance, the American model itself changed. It came to stand for a post-Fordist, information-technology- and finance-based economy, neoliberal economic policies, and an ownership society that drastically curbed social rights and social infrastructure. After the 1970s Western Europe did not make the sharp neoliberal turn that the United States and Great Britain did. The resulting market gap contributed to a widening of the Atlantic and tensions within the Atlantic Community.

Joint Ventures and American Borrowings

European-American relations in the first postwar decades are often written as a story of Western European immaturity and dependence on the United States — for political tutelage; for military protection via NATO, U.S. forces, and the American nuclear umbrella; and for economic assistance via the Bretton Woods monetary system, the Marshall Plan, investment, and technological education. That certainly captures the first postwar decade, but even then America believed it needed an open and prosperous Europe as a market for U.S. goods and investments. Other American dependencies followed. Let’s take one example. The United States developed a balance-of-payments problem in the 1950s as American imports from Europe exceeded exports to the continent, stationing hundreds of thousands


27 Schnöter, Americanization, 123.
of troops was costly, multinationals invested heavily, and tourists spent freely. The resulting dollar drain put pressure on America’s gold reserves, and the United States had to negotiate “offset” payments from West Germany to help cover military costs and beg both France and Germany not to cash in their dollar holdings for gold.  

The exchangeability of currencies and tariff rates were also a constant source of friction.

Americans expected Western Europeans to comply with American wishes for freer trade or more military spending or protection of U.S. gold reserves out of gratitude for all the United States had done for Europe, even though they did not wish to share decision-making power. In practice, there was an ongoing renegotiation of American hegemony that made the relationship within the Atlantic Community more equal and the interests of different partners more distinct. The 1971 American decision to abandon the Bretton Woods monetary system, the 1973 oil crisis, and the end of the postwar boom created bitter transatlantic conflicts and separate policy paths. Nonetheless, the creation of the G7 and the deliberations of the Trilateral Commission, composed of businessmen, government officials, and social scientists from the United States, Western Europe, and Japan revealed ongoing efforts to keep the Atlantic Community — now expanded to include Japan — relevant to a world that little resembled that of the late 1940s. America wanted both to assert its interests and to remain a European power — no easy task, even before the end of the Cold War.

Americans not only solicited European help; they received European goods and ideas. The modern home provides one example. Before and after World War I, America pioneered the discipline of home economics and the productions of household technology, but Europeans did more to advance the design of the modern home as evidenced by the Bauhaus, the Frankfurter Kitchen, and the functional furniture and apartments displayed at the 1930 Stockholm exhibition. International modernism was a transatlantic project but one which always had distinctive national inflections. Initially, Europe led the way until many of its proponents were forced into exile due to Nazism’s and Stalinism’s hostility to that architectural vision. When Americans embraced modernism and developed large, modern, appliance-filled kitchens for postwar suburban homes, they claimed these as proudly and exclusively American. The State Department and Marshall Plan exhibited modern kitchens and homes in postwar Europe, describing


them as a distinctively American invention to which, however, Europeans could aspire.  

The transatlantic crossings that went into these “American” products and the values underlying them were erased. Europeans, however, were in touch with the national and pan-European roots of modernism, and the kitchens and homes they built in the first postwar decades looked less like the American models offered than the pioneering European designs of the prewar decades. In 1959, in Moscow Soviet Premier Khrushchev and US Vice-President Nixon held their famous debate about the respective merits of American and Soviet household consumer durables in front of models of extravagant American kitchens. As Ruth Oldenziel and Karin Zachmann have argued, it was not America that won the famous Kitchen Debate; rather, it was Sweden along with other European countries that produced austere functionalist modern kitchens.

The first postwar decades, like the interwar ones, were an era of diminished economic globalization in comparison to the period before 1914 and after the 1970s.  

But transatlantic trade did increase and not all of it consisted of exports from the United States to Europe. Take cars, for example. The Big Three automakers — Ford, GM, and Chrysler — dominated the American market until the mid-1950s, with foreign cars accounting for only 1 percent of sales. By 1959, 10 percent of cars sold were foreign, with Volkswagen leading the way but many other European manufacturers represented. A decade later, 15 percent were, and for the first time the United States imported more cars than it exported. Moreover, it was the popularity of the VW Beatle that pushed American manufacturers to develop their own economy cars.

Much more work needs to be done to explore which European consumer goods, foods, furniture, and clothing styles were popular among whom and how they shaped American tastes and gained a presence in everyday life. Did Americans greet these imports as harbingers of growing cosmopolitanism and Europeization or as a threatening intrusion, as they later did Japanese imports?

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32 Frieden, Global Capitalism.


assume that Americans could take what they wanted from Europe and the world without being changed in the process.35

Intra-European Circuits

Historians of transatlantic exchanges and networks in the American Century, or more accurately, quarter century, have focused almost exclusively on the North Atlantic. This is hardly surprising given American hegemony coming out of World War II. To be sure, U.S. global interests are acknowledged, even though the primacy of European ones are usually assumed, and Western European integration is discussed, although mainly in terms of whether Americans or Europeans were most responsible and whether it fostered or fractured transatlantic connections. Historians have concentrated on developing more nuanced understandings of the reception of American ideas, products, policies, and practices, and, as this collection shows, are beginning to explore what flowed from Europe to the United States in these decades. These are welcome developments, but how else might transatlantic relations be approached? David Armitage has suggested that historians of the early modern Atlantic world have been guided by three conceptual approaches — a transatlantic one that compares different areas, a circum-Atlantic one that focuses on the Atlantic itself as “a particular zone of exchange and interchange, circulation and transmission,” and a cis-Atlantic history that situates particular places and institutions within their broader Atlantic context.36 Twentieth-century historians can fruitfully borrow from all three but also need to move beyond them. At issue is not only how to study the Atlantic world, but equally, what other networks and circuits of exchange and what other areas of the globe it should be studied in relation to.37 Two would be particularly useful for evaluating the importance of transatlantic relations in comparison to other interests, exchanges, and networks in the first Cold War decades and for understanding the distinctive if not conflicting interests of different parts of the Atlantic Community: exchanges and networks within Europe, including across the Iron Curtain, and relations with the Third World.

In the U.S. Cold War geographic imaginary, Europe ended where Soviet control began. Wendell Willkie’s wartime vision of one world had been replaced by the tripartite division among the first or free world, dominated by the United States and its Atlantic Allies, a second enslaved communist world that had to be contained if not rolled...
back, and a Third World over whose loyalty the two superpowers would compete. For Americans, Europe and the Western European states of the Atlantic Community were identical, and severing trade, travel, and cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union and the countries of East Central Europe was a useful Cold War weapon and, in the age of McCarthyism, politically expedient. Western Europeans carried different mental maps, in which the socialist east was still a part of Europe, even if an internal other of a different sort than in earlier centuries. One might detest the ruling regimes but did not wish to cut that part of Europe off completely — Adenauer’s Germany being the main exception.

These different geographic imaginaries led to repeated conflicts about relations between Western and Eastern Europe. In the 1950s, for example, there were bitter disagreements about the so-called COCOM (Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls) list of goods that the U.S. government prohibited from being sold to communist countries. These covered 30 to 50 percent of all commodities in international trade. German industrialists and British politicians complained vociferously over these restrictions, agreeing with Le Monde that “The economies of Eastern and Western Europe needed one another...” Western European states eventually capitulated for fear of losing American aid. Nonetheless, disputes over whether political isolation or economic trade and investment was the proper way to deal with communist countries resurfaced with Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik and again with the Conference for Cooperation and Security in Europe’s negotiations that led to the 1975 Helsinki Accord. They erupted as well over nuclear weapons, especially Euro missiles in the late 1970s. Geography is not destiny, but geographical proximity and long-standing economic and cultural ties created different interests vis-à-vis Eastern Europe on the two sides of the Atlantic.

They also created different circuits of exchange. The COCOM restrictions failed to weaken the Soviet economy substantially and ironically enabled the USSR to integrate Eastern European economies more closely within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. In the 1960s, Western Europe traded goods, made investments, and lent money to Eastern Europe, and these exchanges were to increase significantly in the 1970s. Fiat built an automobile factory in Togliattigrad in the Soviet Union in 1970, for example, and Western European countries marketed some of their least expensive household consumer durables in Eastern Europe. While the Soviet Union did not


borrow money, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and the GDR did steadily from the late 1960s on in order to procure Western technology but above all to meet the growing demand for consumer goods. Western Europe was the primary source of these products and funds, not the United States, which preferred to loan to Latin America and viewed such intra-European exchanges with ambivalence. Officials and citizens of the GDR viewed the FRG as the West with whom it competed, and elsewhere in East Central Europe, Scandinavia and the Ulm Institute for Design shaped socialist modern design. The Soviets looked to the Baltic States, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the GDR as a “West” that was not only friendlier but easier to imagine emulating, for consumer goods there were smaller, less expensive, and less ostentatious than American ones.

Some trade moved the other way. Eastern European consumer goods failed to gain access to Western European markets — who after all would buy a Trabant or a Yugo, when owning a Fiat or a VW was possible? From the early 1960s on, however, the Soviet Union exported oil to countries such as Austria, Sweden, Italy, and Greece, and by the 1980s was sending natural gas to West Germany, despite U.S. opposition to its export, and Germany helped construct a pipeline. President Reagan imposed economic sanctions on Poland in the wake of the 1981 declaration of martial law; while his Western European allies condemned Jaruzelski, they refused to cut economic ties — Margaret Thatcher included. Different ideas about the place of the Soviet bloc in an imagined Europe and about the use of economic weapons in the Cold War were a repeated source of tension within the Atlantic Community, and from the 1970s on the United States was ever less able to impose its preferred solutions.

More important than exchanges across the increasingly permeable Iron Curtain were those within the European Community (EC) (whose initial six members grew to nine by the early 1970s and to twelve before the post 1989 eastward expansion pushed membership to 27), and between the EC and other non-communist European countries. The creation of a common market by the late 1950s fostered intra-European trade much more than its transatlantic counterpart. In 1955, the six founding EC members sent 32 percent of their exports to other EC countries and 59 percent overall to Western Europe; by 1970 the proportion of exports to EC members was 49 percent and to Western Europe 69 percent. Western Europe, in turn, sent 28 percent of its exports to the EC six in 1955, but 41 percent in 1970. In


1955, over half of Western European exports were within the region; by 1960 two-thirds were. In the late 1950s, Western European countries entered a new phase of mass consumption with cars, TVs, and especially household consumer durables becoming a common feature of everyday life. These were not made in the United States, whose designs were deemed too large, streamlined, and expensive, but rather by domestic manufacturers or other European producers. Bosch, Siemens, and AEG exported appliances across Western Europe, Italy’s Vespa scooters were popular in many countries, and Scandinavian design circulated widely. These intra-European circuits of goods and models of modern housing were more important than transatlantic ones. They contributed to the emergence of a European version of modernity with distinctive varieties of capitalism, social policy, underlying social values, and patterns of consumption. European identity was and may well still be thin, economic, and pragmatic or rational, rather than robust, multifaceted, and emotional, but beginning in the 1960s European ways of living came to resemble one another more than they did American ones.

Atlantic Community and the Third World

Even though U.S. leaders have insisted that America has global interests and responsibilities while Europe has only regional ones, concern with the global economic and political order, in fact, occupied European states as much as the United States in the first postwar decades. The postwar settlements in Europe and Japan were negotiated separately and America controlled the latter, yet France, Britain, and the Netherlands, who all had colonies in East and Southeast Asia, were vitally interested in arrangements there. Thereafter, decolonization, development, and the impact of the Third World on the security and economic prosperity of the Atlantic Community were issues that concerned individual states and prompted contention as much as cooperation across the Atlantic.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s early wartime condemnation of colonialism as immoral and outdated softened considerably by 1945, as the United States sought to gain trusteeships over key Pacific Islands, on the one hand, and to promote the recovery of European colonial powers and cultivate their friendship. American policy proved to be inconsistent in practice as well as in principal. Officials criticized colonialism but relegated decolonization to a distant future, thereby alienating both European powers and national liberation movements.

44 Barry Eichengreen, The European Economy since 1945: Coordinated Capitalism and Beyond (Princeton, 2008), 178.
45 Nolan, Transatlantic Century, 259-62.
The United States forced the Dutch to leave Indonesia but allowed France to return to Indochina and pressured neither the French, the British, the Belgians, nor the Portuguese to give up their vast African holdings. The United States refused to back Britain and France in the 1956 Suez crisis to the dismay of both, but it quickly took on its own neocolonial role, proclaiming the Eisenhower Doctrine to support democratic states in the Middle East — of which there were few — and sending troops to Lebanon. In both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the United States pressured its Western European allies to support its military endeavors, at the very least with money. The responses, disappointing to the Americans, were sources of ongoing transatlantic tensions. In short, transatlantic diplomatic, military, and economic relations were constantly triangulated in and through a Third World undergoing dramatic changes.48

At issue was not merely political subordination or independence but also economic development. Modernization and development were first discussed in relationship to postwar Europe, especially Italy — although reconstruction was usually the preferred term — then in terms of Latin America from the late 1940s and more globally by the 1960s. U.S. social scientists, along with Latin American ones, pioneered modernization theory, but Europeans, East and West, launched development projects from the mid-1950s on. The Soviets under Khrushchev lent money to Egypt to help Nasser build the Aswan High Dam once the Americans pulled out and built infrastructure and factories as well as educational institutions in Afghanistan at the same time the United States was constructing vast irrigation projects in other parts of that nation. India took aid from both superpowers but tried to steer a nonaligned course.49 In her forthcoming book, Young-sun Hong reconstructs the complex involvement of East and West Germany in development policies in the Third World in the 1950s and 1960s. Each Germany competed with the other for influence and diplomatic recognition by developing public health programs in Vietnam, Korea, and Tanzania. Each sought to promote its particular ideology about democratic or socialist public health and to train health workers to practice it.50 Other states in Western and Eastern Europe established their own development programs as well as supporting UN ones. Each promoted national interests and visions and joined in larger Cold War ones. We know too little about how much conflict over development there was — not between blocs where the competition was open and evident to all — but within them.51
Guiliano Garavini’s *After Empires* suggests that Europe had a distinctive economic approach to the Third World until the 1980s. Europe’s first response to decolonization was to turn inward and focus on retaining ties to former colonies through bilateral arrangements and agreements such as the Yaoundé Convention between African states and the EEC. From the late 1960s, European politicians, socialist parties, NGOs, students, and the Catholic Church all to varying degrees supported Third World efforts for new kinds of development aid and a more equitable global division of resources. The EEC and Western European countries spearheaded international economic cooperation via the North-South Dialogue, which met from 1975 to 1977, at a time when both the United States and the Soviet Union were not interested in a cooperative solution to the multiple problems of that troubled decade.

In 1975, with encouragement from some Western Europeans, the G7, supported by the UN Conference on Trade and Development, proposed a New International Economic Order (NIEO), which laid out a blueprint for a more equitable division not only of resources but also of decision-making power in international economic institutions. Although the General Assembly passed it, the United States opposed it, providing one more source of transatlantic tension. By the 1980s, however, the cooperation between the EC and UNCTAD was fraying and the creation of the G7 and imposition of the Washington Consensus had defeated any hopes for a NIEO. In Garavini’s assessment, Europe had successfully abandoned its imperial illusions without finding a meaningful new relationship to the global south. Its efforts to do so, however, and the resulting disagreements with the United States, suggest that relations with the Third World were as likely to cause divisions within the Atlantic Community as to unite it against an “other.” As the following essays by Quinn Slobodian and Christian Albrecht show, neoliberal economists, businessmen, and politicians from a variety of perspectives worried intensely about how development or lack thereof in the Third World would rebound on Europe. They seldom agreed on either the nature of the problem or the desirability of proposed solutions. What historians of the Atlantic Community need to consider, however, is that these debates were ongoing and central to both transatlantic relations and the self-definition of individual states and different political orientations.

**Open Questions**

Historians of transatlantic relations have often posited two breaks in the direction and character of networks and exchanges: the first


53 See the Slobodian and Albrecht essays in this volume.
and sharpest is World War II; the second and more contested is the long 1970s. There is much to be said for each, but both need to be questioned. As some of the essays that follow suggest, there are many continuities in the networks and ideas that moved across the Atlantic before and after 1945, and there were more European influences than have been assumed. Other authors show that some phenomena that are held to be markers of rupture, such as neoliberalism, in fact have deep roots in the interwar era and earlier transatlantic exchanges. And how do we periodize the Atlantic Community and the global order? Were they always intertwined by colonialism, decolonization, and development? Did Japan’s 1964 membership in the OECD and its 1970s participation in the Trilateral Commission mark a new phase? Has the Atlantic Community been superseded by an American dominated global order or by something else entirely? Rethinking transatlantic relations in the first Cold War decades raises as many questions as it answers.

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