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Antagonists, Arbiters, and Allies: West German Historians and their American Colleagues

Conventional wisdom has it that after the end of World War II, American historians of modern Germany generally sided with their few “progressive” West German colleagues and therefore contributed to the modernization of the West German historical profession. As Ernst Schulin put it succinctly, “Anglo-American critical interest in German history influenced and assisted in the modernization of West German historical writing.”¹ Virtually every single account of postwar German-American historiography echoes this point of view.² This has created the impression of American historians providing some sort of intellectual developmental aid to their German colleagues, who were slowly moving along on their “long way West.” According to this narrative, after World War II Americans consistently intervened on behalf of those German historians who proposed a “critical” perspective on the German past. During the Fischer-Kontroverse of the 1960s, concerning the origins and the course of World War I, Americans sided with Fritz Fischer, who was initially very isolated within the West German historical profession.³ During the 1970s, Americans provided important intellectual impulses for the emerging “critical” historians surrounding the Bielefelder Schule. And during the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, American historians were unanimous in their opposition to

1 Ernst Schulin, “German and American Historiography in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *An Interrupted Past: German Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and James J. Sheehan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 31.

2 See, for example, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *The Return to the Western Tradition: German Historiography since 1945* (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1991); Georg Iggers, “Introduction,” in *The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historical Writing Since 1945* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985), 1–45; Andreas Daum, “German Historiography in Transatlantic perspective: interview with Hans-Ulrich Wehler”, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.* 26 (2001): 121–123.; Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte: Begriff – Entwicklung – Probleme* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 40.

3 For an account of the debate, see Konrad H. Jarausch, “Der nationale Tabubruch. Wissenschaft, Öffentlichkeit, und Politik in der Fischer-Kontroverse,” in *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte. Grosse Kontroversen seit 1945*, ed. Martin Sabrow, Ralph Jessen and Klaus Große Kracht (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 20–40; for a focus on the American dimension of the debate see Philipp Stelzel, “Fritz Fischer and the American Historical Profession: Tracing the Transatlantic Dimension of the Fischer-Kontroverse,” *Storia della Storiografia* 44 (2003): 67–84.

Ernst Nolte's apologetics regarding the singularity of National Socialism and the Holocaust.⁴

In this essay, I suggest an alternative interpretation of the role American historians of modern Germany played for their West German colleagues. As its title suggests, American historians could serve as antagonists, arbiters, and allies for West German historians of *all* political and methodological persuasions. The exclusive emphasis on American historians' modernization efforts not only leads to an incomplete picture of postwar German-American scholarly relations, it also exaggerates the degree to which West German "modernizers" during the 1960s and 1970s relied on American historiographical assistance.

In order to illustrate my argument, I will first discuss some efforts of both conservative and left-liberal (or "progressive") historians to capitalize on their contacts with American historians. The essay then suggests a periodization of German-American scholarly relations after World War II into two distinct phases. During the first phase, lasting from the end of the war to roughly the mid-1960s, German historians had recognized the increased importance of American views on German history, but some Germans still argued that Americans (including German émigrés) tended to lack empathy for and understanding of the peculiar conditions of German history. After the mid-1960s, this argument began to appear unacceptable. Now American historians served even more as allies and arbiters, especially during the many historiographical debates. The essay's final section discusses a few examples of that discursive strategy employed by conservative Germans to dismiss disagreeable American views.

Resuming Cooperation After the War

As far as Americans were concerned, intellectual cooperation with West Germans after 1945 generally developed out of the desire to reintegrate German historians into an international scholarly community that had suffered tremendously during the interwar years and World War II. In addition, often Americans simply continued to value scholarly contacts with their German colleagues. They would therefore demonstrate considerable understanding in some cases if Germans had made certain concessions to National Socialist ideology in their writings, or had

⁴ See Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Gordon Craig, "Review of Ernst Nolte, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg*," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 36 (1988): 772–773.

even belonged to National Socialist organizations.⁵ Sometimes, their own conservative political views helped facilitate intellectual rapprochements, in particular as the new bipolar world order regrouped previous alliances. Finally, it should be kept in mind that the American historical profession at the end of World War II was much less diverse and politically more conservative than it is today.⁶

As for the West Germans, idealistic academic internationalism did not always constitute the main motivation for reaching out to the other side of the Atlantic. German historians had become acutely aware of the importance of American views on their scholarship – even if they disagreed with these views. Therefore German scholars of all political and methodological stripes – and not just the most liberal-minded – attempted to establish, or reestablish, relations with American colleagues. Many German scholars recognized all too well that a transatlantic orientation could be materially or politically advantageous, and that the conditions

5 Egmont Zechlin (University of Hamburg) in 1933 freely admitted to Harvard historian William Langer that he was writing articles for the Nazi party newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*, and that he had just joined the SA's motor squad. Even more surprising was the case of the medievalist Percy Ernst Schramm who, during a research visit to Princeton University (he had received Princeton's Benjamin Shreve Fellowship) in the spring and summer of 1933, had defended the political conditions in Germany after the Nazi takeover. Schramm insisted that the Nazi authorities were only "protecting citizens against Bolshevism" and denied the "rumors of persecution" of Jewish Germans. Yet this blatant propaganda did not keep the Princeton medievalist Gray C. Boyce from paying Schramm a complimentary research visit at Göttingen University the following year. See John L. Harvey, "The Common Adventure of Mankind: Academic Historians and an Atlantic Identity in the Twentieth Century" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2003), 497. In 1958 Schramm was considered for the honorary foreign membership of the AHA, but the selection committee chose Gerhard Ritter instead. In 1969, Gray C. Boyce made another attempt: in a letter to Julian Boyd (Princeton, Chairman of Comm.), dated August 23, 1969, suggesting the medievalist for the honorary foreign membership, Boyce wrote, "Schramm and I have been friends ever since I first met him when he came to Princeton as a visitor in 1933. I know that after the war there was some question concerning his attitudes during the trying days following 1933. When I knew him in Goettingen in 1933/35 he was active in trying to get unfortunate Jewish scholars placed outside of Germany and was not looked upon with favor by a number of the confessed Nazis." Library of Congress, AHA papers, Box 737, Committee Files.

6 Stephen Steinberg, *The Academic Melting Pot* (New York: Transaction Books, 1974), chapter 1. For egregious examples of anti-Semitism in the interwar American historical profession, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 172–174; and John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2005), 64–65.

of the Cold War made it possible for them to rally under the ideological umbrella of the “West.”⁷

Conservative Germans’ Connections

One of these historians was Gerhard Ritter, the first postwar chairman of the German Historians’ Association and one of most influential figures of the profession at least until the early 1960s. In contrast to many other Germans of his generation, Ritter was well connected with the American historical profession.⁸ In his attempt to find international partners for the journal *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, as editor Ritter joined forces in 1948 with the American church historians Roland Bainton and Harold Grimm. Both Bainton and Grimm were Germanophiles who also harbored deep reservations about ethnic and religious diversity in American historiography and society.⁹ Whereas Ritter strove to broaden the scope and the appeal of the journal, he was also clearly attracted by the similarly conservative ideological outlook of his American colleagues.

Ritter also repeatedly attempted to capitalize on his contacts to American colleagues in order to have his books published in the United States. His self-confidence in these matters continues to amaze: attempting to secure an English translation of his *Europa und die Deutsche Frage* in 1948, Ritter told Fritz T. Epstein, a German émigré historian now teaching in the United States, that he would be “very grateful if you could get Stanford [University] Press to accept it for publica-

7 See Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Toward a Global Community of Historians: The International Historical Congresses and the International Committee of Historical Sciences, 1898–2000* (New York: Berg-hahn Books, 2005), 139–195.

8 Ritter’s American contacts, listed together with the period of their correspondence, included: Roland H. Bainton (New Haven), 1947–1967; Howard K. Beale (Madison), 1948–1956; Gordon Craig (Princeton), 1949–1966; Andreas Dorpalen (Columbus), 1948–1962; C. V. Easum (Madison/Bonn), 1953–1966; Howard M. Ehrman (Michigan), 1954/1955; Fritz Epstein 1947–1965; Klaus Epstein, o.D., 1965, 1967; Sidney Fay (Cambridge, MA), 1948–1950; Guy Stanton Ford (Washington, D.C.), 1938, 1947–1948; Harold J. Grimm, 1948–1967; Felix E. Hirsch (New York), 1947–1966; Helmut Hirsch (Chicago), 1955, 1957; Hajo Holborn (New Haven), 1939, 1959–1960; Georg Iggers, 1960–1963; Henry Kissinger (Cambridge, MA), 1953–1956; William L. Langer (Cambridge, MA), 1947–1965; Arthur S. Link (Princeton), 1966; Ralph H. Lutz, 1947, 1956/1957, 1962–1964; William H. Maehl (Lincoln), 1964–1967; Henry Cord Meyer (Claremont), 1948, 1954; Armin E. Mruck (Baltimore), 1960, 1962; Peter Paret (Princeton), 1957–1959, 1967; Hans Rothfels, 1947–1967; Richard Salomon (Ohio), 1947, 1954; John L. Snell (New Orleans), 1958–1967; Alfred Vagts (Sherman, CT), 1947–1967.

9 John L. Harvey, “Reformationsgeschichte Reformed? The Rebirth of *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* from Five Decades Past,” paper delivered at the Annual Conference of the Society of Reformation Research, Minneapolis, October 24–28, 2007.

tion. After all, my views represent the *communis opinio* of all German academic historians.”¹⁰ In reality, Ritter did not even represent all *conservative* scholars in postwar Germany, as one could see through his failure to achieve a more prominent role within the newly established *Institut für Zeitgeschichte*.¹¹ And yet, some Americans accepted Ritter’s self-confident claim to speak for the entire postwar German historical profession. Andreas Dorpalen, one of the leading observers of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German historiography, even argued that “the combination of adaptability in foreign affairs and conservatism in domestic policy which his [Ritter’s] speeches and writings reveal seems characteristic of the climate of opinion in the Bonn Republic. Thus Ritter’s work continues not only to deal with German history but to be a representative part of that history.”¹²

One last example: in 1965 Ohio State University Press published Ritter’s *The German Problem*, a collection of essays that had previously appeared in German (this was in fact the English translation of *Das deutsche Problem*, which had appeared in 1962 and was an updated version of *Europa und die deutsche Frage*). And some Americans saw this publication as overdue, for example Ralph Lutz of Stanford University who in a letter to Ritter emphasized the significance of having Ritter’s essays available in English, since “Prussian militarism is still a subject which few American historians can present objectively to our present generation.”¹³

These examples illustrate that Ritter’s selection as honorary foreign member of the American Historical Association (AHA) was less surprising than it seems in retrospect. In fact, the AHA’s secretary, Guy Stanton Ford, had already suggested Ritter in 1952, but the committee chose Franz Schnabel, a Catholic yet liberal outsider among the West German historians.¹⁴ When Ritter’s name came up again in

10 Letter, Gerhard Ritter to Fritz T. Epstein, October 8, 1948, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK), NL Epstein, Box 82. In 1949, the publishing house Regnery, politically very much in tune with Ritter, signaled interest, but eventually decided not to publish Ritter’s book since Hans Rothfels’s study on the German resistance had turned out to be an economic disappointment. See letter from Ritter to Epstein, December 23, 1949, BAK, NL Epstein, Box 82.

11 See Christoph Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter: Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2001), 534–545; Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1989), 229–234.

12 Andreas Dorpalen, “Historiography as History: The Work of Gerhard Ritter,” *Journal of Modern History* 34 (1962): 18.

13 Ralph Lutz to Gerhard Ritter, November 16, 1962, BAK, NL Gerhard Ritter, Box 353.

14 Raymond Sontag vetoed Ritter’s nomination in the AHA’s selection committee. See the meeting report by the committee’s chairman, Richard H. Shyrock to Guy Stanton Ford, May 28, 1952: “Dr. Ford notes that the question of possible German representation – presumably West German – will come up; and suggests Schnabel and Ritter in this connection. Dr. Carroll apparently thinks

1958 (along with those of the medievalists Walter Goetz and Percy Ernst Schramm), the Selection Committee discussed Ritter's mixed record during the Nazi years and emphasized that "he was very much a German Nationalist and went along with the Nazis for quite a while although he then went into opposition and was even placed in prison."¹⁵ Eventually, the Committee did not let these political considerations affect their decision in choosing Ritter.¹⁶ Of course, one should not overrate the significance of such honorary gestures, as they were certainly influenced by a number of very different factors – scholarly as well as political. Yet it remains remarkable that a historian like Ritter, labeled even by his sympathetic biographer as a *wissenschaftspolitischer Frontkämpfer*, could receive such an honor only a decade and a half after the end of the war.¹⁷

While Ritter in the was fairly representative of the West German conservative-nationalist academic establishment, even an arch-conservative such as Walther Hubatsch, a specialist in naval history at the University of Bonn who throughout his career remained a rather marginal figure within the West German historical profession, received an opportunity to teach in the United States: Hubatsch spent the spring semester of 1960 at the University of Kansas. Hubatsch's guest professorship also made possible the translation of his study on the Central Powers in World War I, based on the lectures he had given while at Kansas as well as on an earlier contribution to a handbook on German history.¹⁸ This was a study that at times downplayed, at times simply denied the German Empire's territorial ambitions. Yet Henry Cord Meyer, a former student of Hajo Holborn's at Yale, who had written his dissertation on the history of the *Mitteleuropa* concept in Germany, provided a surprisingly sympathetic preface to the study.¹⁹ He conceded that Hubatsch's views by no means constituted the consensus among German historians, mentioning Ludwig Dehio and Fritz Fischer (who had just published his mag-

both of these worthy of discussion; Dr. Sontag supports Schnabel but not Ritter." LoC, AHA papers, Box 173, Secretary File.

15 Letter, Felix Gilbert to Boyd Shafer, November 14, 1958, LoC, AHA papers, Box 489, Secretary File.

16 Committee chairman Paul H. Clyde reported to Boyd Shafer that in the second round of votes "one committee member preferred to abstain from voting in the case of Ritter." Shafer replied, "I think you should recommend Ritter with the explanation that one member declined to vote." Letters of October 13 and 16, 1959, LoC, AHA papers, Box 661, Secretary's and Executive Secretary's File.

17 Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter*, 457.

18 Walter Leo and Walter Bussmann, eds., *Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte, Vol. IV part 2* (Konstanz: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1955). The chair of Kansas' history department, George Anderson, likely was instrumental in this case.

19 Henry Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action, 1815–1945* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1955).

num opus *Griff nach der Weltmacht*) as differing markedly from Hubatsch.²⁰ Yet Meyer claimed that by engaging Hubatsch's interpretations, American readers would "stand to lose only two expandable qualities – our ignorance and our prejudice."²¹

Unfortunately for Hubatsch, not all American historians agreed. Reviewing the book in the *Journal of Modern History*, Hans Gatzke labeled it an example of apologist historiography still rampant in West Germany: "Reading the works of some German historians since World War II, one is impressed with the open-mindedness and objectivity with which they tackle touchy subjects in their nation's past. But there are also still those who prefer to sweep under the rug that which they cannot face."²² Gatzke's damning evaluation referred to Hubatsch's questionable assertions, such as the claim that the brutal Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 should be regarded as "an attempt to establish a provisional order along certain structural lines determined by the principle of recognizing nationalities as well as by the interests of state of the Central Powers."²³ In addition, in his discussion of the German Empire's war aims, Hubatsch categorically declared that "no chancellor adopted a program of annexations during the war" – a statement that was simply incorrect.²⁴ That at least some American historians took offense to such a blatant apologia was not surprising. After all, even among those German historians tending toward a rather sympathetic evaluation of the German Empire's foreign policies, Hubatsch occupied a fringe position. But despite such negative responses, it is evident that a pluralistic American historical profession offered space to German scholars of different backgrounds. One did not have to be politically progressive or even a historiographical iconoclast to find some like-minded colleagues on the other side of the Atlantic.

20 Interestingly, in *Germany and the Central Powers in the World War 1914–1918* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1963), Hubatsch claimed that "few eras have been studied as thoroughly as the period from 1914 to 1918" and that "as a consequence historians can write about the war from a reasonably firm and definitive basis" (14). However, two years earlier Fritz Fischer had proved that the opposite was the case.

21 Henry Cord Meyer, "Introduction," in Hubatsch, *Germany and the Central Powers in the World War*, xi.

22 Hans W. Gatzke, "Review of Walther Hubatsch, *Germany and the Central Powers in the World War, 1914–1918*," *Journal of Modern History* 36 (1964): 101.

23 Hubatsch, *Germany and the Central Powers in the World War 1914–1918*, 108.

24 Hubatsch, *Germany and the Central Powers in the World War 1914–1918*, 64.

The Bielefelder Schule and Its Allies

Of course, West German historians of left-liberal political persuasions also established and entertained contacts with their American colleagues, and arguably more so than West German conservatives. Similarly, they were at least as intent as their conservative counterparts on enlisting American historians for the historiographical enterprises. And since historians associated with – or sympathetic to – the Bielefelder Schule have written most of the texts surveying the development of the West German historical profession during the last decades, the Bielefelders' transatlantic progressive connection has become conventional wisdom.²⁵

When Hans-Ulrich Wehler in 1971 launched the series *Deutsche Historiker*, he assembled a group of younger historians, thus emphasizing the project's distance from the West German historiographical establishment. In addition, several foreign – mostly American – scholars became part of the team, thus symbolizing not just a generational change but also the internationalization of the discipline. For an essay on Gerhard Ritter, for example, Wehler turned to Andreas Dorpalen, who had already published widely on German historiography, including Heinrich von Treitschke and Gerhard Ritter.²⁶

Similarly, as Wehler and others launched their new journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, and applied for financial support from the Volkswagen Foundation, they noted not only that *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* intended to fill a gap in the landscape of academic journals: whereas sociological publications tended to neglect the historical dimension, their historical counterparts either focused too narrowly on a particular epoch or failed to grant the “new kind” of social history appropriate space. Just as importantly, Wehler emphasized in particular the support his undertaking had received abroad and listed an advisory committee consisting of nineteen scholars from six countries and various disciplines. With nine members, American historians and social scientists constituted by far the largest group.²⁷

25 Mommsen, *Return to the Western Tradition*; Iggers, “Introduction”; Schulin, “German and American Historiography.”

26 Andreas Dorpalen, *Heinrich von Treitschke* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957); Dorpalen, “Historiography as History.” Dorpalen later published the first comprehensive account of East German historiography, *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985).

27 Letter, Hans-Ulrich Wehler to Stiftung Volkswagenwerk, July 25, 1974, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 1301. The list included the historians Gerald D. Feldman, David S. Landes, Charles S. Maier, Arno Mayer, Hans Rosenberg, James J. Sheehan, and Henry A. Turner; the sociologist Dietrich Rüschemeyer, a German who had come to the United States after receiving his PhD and taught at

Finally, an episode from the 1972 Historikertag in Regensburg illustrates the issue of supposed American support for West German social historians very well. On a general level, this conference saw debates between those historians who believed the West German historical profession to be under-theorized and those who did not.²⁸ A particularly good example was the discussion surrounding the concept of “Organized Capitalism” that Wehler, Kocka, and others first promoted for the study of the German economy from the 1870s to the early 1920s.²⁹ They invited two younger American historians, Gerald Feldman of Berkeley and Charles S. Maier, then at Harvard. This was in itself remarkable, since foreign historians participating in panels at the Historikertag still constituted somewhat of an exception. Yet, as Maier recalls, the Americans arrived at Regensburg feeling “enlisted” by the Bielefelder to support their new historiographical direction.³⁰ Ultimately, Maier and Feldman became the contributors most critical of the concept, and they made their skepticism quite explicit. Feldman articulated “serious terminological and conceptual reservations” and criticized that “in many ways the term organized capitalism, as Wehler and Kocka use it, is so all-encompassing that it loses almost all its meaning.”³¹ Still, the impression such episodes left on other West German historians was that the Bielefelder and other progressives were in methodological and interpretive agreement with their American colleagues, and the Bielefelder in their writings did everything to corroborate this impression.

To emphasize this strategic dimension should not be understood as merely a cynical reduction of innocent and even idealistic international scholarly cooperation to academic politics. Of course, German historians often reached out to their colleagues on the other side of the Atlantic because of shared interests and approaches. But American historians could *also* assume the role of useful allies or

Brown University for thirty years; and Guido Goldman, a sociologist who in 1979 became the founding director of the Center for European Studies at Harvard University.

28 Volker R. Berghahn, “Fritz Fischer und seine Schüler,” *Neue Politische Literatur* 19, special edition (1974): 148.

29 See Gerald D. Feldman, “Der deutsche Organisierte Kapitalismus während der Kriegs- und Inflationsjahre,” in *Organisierter Kapitalismus. Voraussetzungen und Anfänge*, ed. Heinrich August Winkler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 150–171; see also the contributions in the same volume by Wehler, “Der Aufstieg des Organisierten Kapitalismus und Interventionsstaates in Deutschland,” 36–57; Kocka, “Organisierter Kapitalismus oder Staatsmonopolistischer Kapitalismus? Begriffliche Vorbemerkungen,” 19–35; and Winkler, “Einleitende Bemerkungen zu Hilferdings Theorie des Organisierten Kapitalismus,” 9–18.

30 Charles S. Maier, interview with the author, October 30–November 1, 2006.

31 Feldman, “Der deutsche Organisierte Kapitalismus während der Kriegs- und Inflationsjahre,” 150, 152.

“court of appeals,” in particular during the many hard-fought historiographical debates.³²

For the Bielefelder in particular, the often-emphasized American connection served a specific purpose during the inner-German controversies that accompanied the establishment of their *Schule* within the German historical profession in the late 1960s and afterwards. The protagonists of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* labeled their enterprise “critical,” interdisciplinary, and internationally oriented, namely part of a transatlantic network of historians. Accordingly, the Bielefelder’s opponents, “avowed historicists” such as Thomas Nipperdey and traditional diplomatic historians such as Andreas Hillgruber could only embody the opposite. A closer look at the numerous programmatic statements by Wehler, Kocka, and others reveals a repeated emphasis of their opponents’ lacking a critical stance, an interdisciplinary orientation, and a sufficient international perspective.³³ When the Bielefelder’s opponents took issue with the labeling of history as a social science, the Bielefelder responded that in other countries, such as the US, this had

32 Other foreign historians could serve in the same role. This constitutes one of two main reasons why Eley’s, Blackbourn’s, and Evans’s critique of the *Sonderweg* paradigm warmed the hearts of German conservatives. British historians could hardly be accused of an apologetic stance toward Imperial Germany. The critics’ neo-Marxist orientation provided even more reason for satisfaction, since the Bielefelder were attacked by fellow “progressives.” See David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung: Die gescheiterte bürgerliche Revolution von 1848* (Frankfurt, 1980). An expanded English edition was published as *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984). See also Richard J. Evans, ed., *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London, 1978).

33 For a critique of Hillgruber’s and Hildebrand’s methodological and political conservatism, see Wehler, “German Historiography 1949–1979,” first in Jürgen Habermas, *Stichworte zur geistigen Situation der Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), later in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung: Studien zu Aufgaben und Traditionen deutscher Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 26 and 36–37; Wehler, “Moderne Politikgeschichte oder ‘Grosse Politik der Kabinette’,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975); Wehler, “Kritik und kritische Antikritik,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 225 (1977); Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*. More generally, non-German scholarship often served as a yardstick against which Wehler measured the supposedly old-fashioned German diplomatic and political histories – and found them wanting. See, for example, Wehler, “Vorwort zur zweiten Auflage,” in *Krisenherde des Kaiserreichs 1871–1918: Studien zur deutschen Sozial- und Verfassungsgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 12: here he emphasizes the “denkbar schmale Angebot an wahrhaft modernen politikhistorischen Arbeiten [...]. Löhnen sie, stammen sie oft aus den Vereinigten Staaten oder neuerdings aus England. Hierzulande müssen die Vertreter der ‚modernen Politikgeschichte‘ noch einen erheblichen Nachholbedarf befriedigen.”

been done for quite a while, implying that only a few old-fashioned Germans refused to accept a development that had become common wisdom abroad.³⁴

The Postwar Decades: Two Distinct Phases

Observing the post–World War II German-American community of historians during the postwar decades, we can distinguish two phases. During the first phase, between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s, West German historians realized and accepted that American views on German history could no longer be ignored. Yet they still often resorted to the argument that Americans tended to lack proper understanding for and empathy with the specific conditions of German history. *Verstehen* and *Einfühlen* became key terms in this context. During the second phase, beginning in the mid-1960s, such an argument became unacceptable.

As the examples provided above reveal, German historians of all methodological and political persuasions sought transatlantic contacts, because American views on German history had begun to matter. Even more, it increasingly mattered what American historians of Germany thought not only about the German past but also about the German historiographical present. Thus, when at the height of the Fischer-Kontroverse Gerhard Ritter inquired why *Historische Zeitschrift* had repeatedly granted Fritz Fischer the opportunity to advance his views on the German Empire's policies during World War I, he received a telling response. Editor Theodor Schieder admitted that his decision had been motivated by the fact that “most American historians have a completely distorted view of our profession. Above all, they believe that there is still an ongoing controversy between ‘reactionary’ and ‘progressive’ historians.” Therefore it was important “to demonstrate very clearly that the German historical profession is overwhelmingly critical of Mr. Fischer but does not exclude him from the debate.”³⁵ That leading figures within the West German historical profession had done just that when they were secretly trying to torpedo Fischer's lecture tour to the United States belied Schieder's statement allegedly favoring a free scholarly discourse.³⁶

Having recognized the importance of American views, Germans increasingly sought contacts with like-minded American historians and sometimes even “enlisted” those with similar views. While German historians increasingly understood

34 See Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*; Wehler, “Moderne Politikgeschichte oder ‘Grosse Politik der Kabinette’ and ‘Kritik und kritische Antikritik,’” both reprinted in Wehler, *Krisenherde des Kaiserreichs 1871–1918*.

35 Theodor Schieder to Gerhard Ritter, November 9, 1964, BAK, NL Schieder, Box 243.

36 Stelzel, “Fritz Fischer and the American Historical Profession,” 67–84.

that intellectual isolation was not a viable option, some still liked to insist that foreign colleagues more likely than not lacked the necessary empathy (*Einfühlungsvermögen*) into the peculiarities of German history.

Verständnis and Einfühlungsvermögen

I would therefore like to mention some examples of such attitudes of conservative West German historians vis-à-vis their American colleagues, including émigré historians now teaching in the United States. As it is well known, of the émigré historians teaching in the United States, only the most conservative, such as Hans Rothfels, permanently returned to West Germany. Some scholars who signaled interest in positions in Germany, such as Fritz T. Epstein, never managed to secure appointments. Others who were asked to return preferred to stay in their new homeland: Hans Rothfels did not succeed in recruiting Gerhard Masur as his successor at Tübingen.³⁷

Overall, it is safe to say that the more conservative an émigré was, the more attractive he was for the postwar West German historical profession. Hans Rothfels fit into the field much better than the liberal Hans Rosenberg could ever have. Therefore it was only a logical consequence that Theodor Schieder, who due to his towering significance within the West German historical profession certainly held greater influence on job distributions than any of his colleagues, pointed to Klaus Epstein – the son of Fritz T. Epstein – when asked for the names of promising younger scholars. For Epstein, according to Schieder, had not only an “extraordinarily sharp mind,” but also, and more importantly, an “impressive ability to empathize with the German conditions, from which he had been removed through his course of life.”³⁸ By hiring Epstein, the German historical profession would have been able to signal its openness toward “foreign” perspectives without running the risk of pushing revisionism too far. Schieder’s remark also suggests that not all émigré historians could be trusted to express the same empathy and understanding. After all, throughout the first two postwar decades, German con-

³⁷ See Hans Rothfels to Gerhard Masur, January 15, 1961, and Masur to Rothfels, February 12, 1961, in Ritter, ed., *Friedrich Meinecke. Akademischer Lehrer und emigrierte Schüler*, 214–217.

³⁸ Theodor Schieder to Dekan H. Moser, February 5, 1964, BAK, NL Schieder, Box 115. As early as 1963, Schieder had recommended Epstein for a position at the University of Frankfurt. See the letter from Theodor Schieder to Dietrich Geyer (History Department, University of Frankfurt), January 30, 1963, BAK, NL Schieder, Box 115.

servatives often hurled the accusation of harboring *émigrantisches Ressentiment* ('émigré resentment') against scholars advancing disagreeable views.³⁹

By contrast, it is hard to imagine Fritz Stern or even George Mosse being considered for an appointment at a German history department in the 1960s. What West Germany's leading historians thought about Stern became apparent during the Fischer-Kontroverse. In October 1964 the publisher of the journal *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* (GWU) suggested including Stern's contribution to the Historikertag, which had supported Fritz Fischer's position, in a forthcoming issue. GWU's editor, Karl Dietrich Erdmann (one of the profession's most influential figures), responded that Stern's paper was merely emotional in nature and contained not a single factual argument ("Appell an Emotionen, kein einziges Argument zur Sache"). Eventually, GWU decided not to print Stern's paper.⁴⁰ Complaining to Erdmann about "Mr. Stern's babble" at the Historikertag, which had deeply annoyed him, Gerhard Ritter voiced a similar sentiment.⁴¹

The perceived ability to empathize with the peculiarities of German history, which apparently distinguished Klaus Epstein from others, was an appealing quality to be found in an American scholar. It was also a yardstick that some German historians still used to assess their foreign colleagues, up until the early 1960s.

Another example provides the reception of Koppel Pinson's synthesis *Modern Germany*, published in 1954. Reviewing the book in *Historische Zeitschrift*, Hans Herzfeld acknowledged that Pinson had provided "one of the most serious foreign attempts to grapple with the difficult problems of nineteenth and twentieth century German history."⁴² The entire review was suffused by a condescending tone – Herzfeld noted approvingly that Pinson showed a "true inner relationship to German intellectual life" and that the reader could find "in detail some streaks of objectivity."⁴³ Thus, while Herzfeld at least acknowledged Pinson's efforts to provide

39 For example, Gerhard Ritter rejected Helmuth Plessner's *Verspätete Nation*, considering it "not real history, but the product of an émigré's imagination" ("nicht echte Historie sondern Konstruktion aus Emigrantenfantasie"). Gerhard Ritter to Theodor Schieder, [undated, ca. 1961], BAK, NL Schieder, Box 506. Helmuth Plessner (1892–1985), was a sociologist whose study *Verspätete Nation* (Belated nation) analyzed what Plessner considered the belated and defective form of modernization of German economy and society (in particular of the *Bürgertum*). See Carola Dietze's biography *Nachgeholtes Leben: Helmuth Plessner, 1892–1985* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006).

40 See the letters from Friedrich Dieckmann to Karl Dietrich Erdmann, October 21, 1964, and Karl Dietrich Erdmann to Friedrich Dieckmann, November 1, 1964, BAK, NL Erdmann, Box 21.

41 Gerhard Ritter to Karl Dietrich Erdmann, October 14, 1964, BAK, NL Ritter, Box 270.

42 Hans Herzfeld, "Review: Modern Germany: Its History and Civilization by Koppel S. Pinson," *Historische Zeitschrift* 182 (1956), 402–405, quote at 402.

43 Herzfeld, "Review," 402, 404.

an “objective” analysis of recent German history, he also stressed that the author “inevitably” – as he put it – fell short in some respects as well.⁴⁴

Even German-born and -trained historians teaching overseas were suspected to have lost their *Einfühlungsvermögen*, so that, when the first volume of Yale historian Hajo Holborn’s *German History* was published in 1960, Gerhard Ritter found it necessary to tell Holborn, “I have to compliment you on having maintained a true understanding of the history of your German fatherland, which you have been able to preserve despite your *Amerikanismus*, and despite the distance from Germany in which you have been kept since the 1930s.”⁴⁵

These “compliments” reveal a persistent belief among German scholars that the different personal backgrounds and experiences of both American-born and émigré historians might pose some obstacles to an appropriate *Einfühlen* into the conditions of German history. Even some émigré historians, such as Klaus Epstein himself, would not shy away from such a claim: in a review essay on three American studies of German socialism in the early twentieth century Epstein argued that American scholars sympathizing with the left wing of the SPD had, because of their nationality, difficulties understanding the no-win situation in which the moderate Social Democrats had found themselves. In Epstein’s words, “American historians are handicapped when dealing with German developments by the deep-rooted American faith that all problems can be solved by intelligence and good will [...] American historians have underestimated the impersonal forces and conditions which have made German socialists act the way they did, and they have engaged in the futile search for villains.”⁴⁶ Ironically, one of the historians charged with having such a handicap was Epstein’s fellow émigré Peter Gay.

Conclusion

My essay has dealt to a large extent with the exploitation of German-American scholarly contacts for German historiographical gain. This focus has served to correct the predominant view about the postwar transatlantic community of historians. Still, the German-American historiographical balance sheet looks very good overall: the decades under review witnessed the establishment and consolidation of a large and diverse German-American scholarly community. The creation of a continuous transatlantic conversation, in which the national background of the

⁴⁴ Herzfeld, “Review,” 402.

⁴⁵ Gerhard Ritter to Hajo Holborn, October 13, 1960, BAK, NL Ritter, Box 350.

⁴⁶ Klaus Epstein, “Three Studies of German Socialism,” *World Politics* 11 (1959): 650–651.

participants became less and less important, unquestionably constitutes an impressive achievement. To dismiss American historians as lacking the proper understanding of the peculiarities of German history today would be perceived as unacceptable. While national historiographical and of course societal traditions continue to influence the work of historians studying countries other than their own, the earlier critique, which mostly conservative Germans leveled against disagreeable foreign perspectives, has lost its effectiveness.

As German historians realized that intellectual isolation and the dismissal of American – and other foreign – perspectives on German history was no longer a viable option, they increasingly co-opted American colleagues who happened to share their views. Again, these remarks are not meant to reduce international scholarly cooperation to its function within academic politics. But American colleagues often became supposedly impartial scholarly arbiters, whose opinion conveniently served to bolster the respective German position – of conservatives and of progressives.

Therefore we should view American historians of modern Germany as attentive observers rather than active participants during the West German historiographical revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s. When younger German historians during those years attempted to modernize the West German historical profession, they tended to be less in tune with their American colleagues than they claimed. Many Americans were impressed by the creative energy, which in particular Kocka and Wehler unleashed upon their discipline. But they generally did not subscribe to *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* and by and large refused to follow the West German iconoclasts on their *Sonderweg*.

Ultimately, the German-American scholarly community of modern Germany resembles other loose, that is, unorganized transatlantic collectives. In his study on the intellectual exchange between American and European social reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Daniel T. Rodgers has identified “perception, misperception, translation, transformation, co-optation, preemption, and contestation” as its defining features.⁴⁷ All of these qualities characterized German-American scholarly relations as well.

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⁴⁷ Daniel T. Rodgers, “An Age of Social Politics,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 260.

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