

RETHINKING MODERN GERMAN HISTORY:
CRITICAL SOCIAL HISTORY AS A TRANSATLANTIC ENTERPRISE, 1945-1989

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ABSTRACT

PHILIPP STELZEL: Rethinking Modern German History: Critical Social History as a
Transatlantic Enterprise, 1945-1989
(under the direction of Konrad H. Jarausch)

My dissertation “Rethinking Modern German History: Critical Social History as a Transatlantic Enterprise, 1945-1989” analyzes the intellectual exchange between German and American historians from the end of World War II to the 1980s. Several factors fostered the development of this scholarly community: growing American interest in Germany (a result of both National Socialism and the Cold War); a small but increasingly influential cohort of émigré historians researching and teaching in the United States; and the appeal of American academia to West German historians of different generations, but primarily to those born between 1930 and 1940. Within this transatlantic intellectual community, I am particularly concerned with a group of West German social historians known as the “Bielefeld School” who proposed to re-conceptualize history as Historical Social Science (*Historische Sozialwissenschaft*). Adherents of Historical Social Science in the 1960s and early 1970s also strove for a critical analysis of the roots of National Socialism. Their challenge of the West German historical profession was therefore both interpretive and methodological.

My dissertation aims to revise the extant historiography in two main areas: First, in contrast to the prevailing interpretation—which views American historians of modern Germany as a monolithic group of left-liberal scholars—I emphasize their methodological, interpretive, and political breadth. Second, I question some of the predominant assumptions about the so-called “Bielefeld School,” in particular the supposedly high degree to which their interpretations of modern German history conformed with those of their American colleagues. Instead, I argue that the “American connection”, which the Bielefeld School’s protagonists emphasized repeatedly, served a strategic purpose: it pitted their new, “critical,” and “internationalized” historiographical project against a parochial and old-fashioned West German historical profession. Ultimately, my dissertation not only investigates an important

chapter of post-World War II transatlantic intellectual history, but also explores the political dimensions of historiography and aims to provoke historians to greater self-consciousness about the nature of their work.

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INTRODUCTION

Ending the peculiarities of German historiography?

At the first annual meeting of the *Verband der Historiker Deutschlands* (German Historians' Association) after the end of World War II, on September 12, 1949, its chairman Gerhard Ritter outlined the "present situation and future tasks of the German historical profession."¹ Oscillating between assertiveness and defensiveness, Ritter conceded that German historiography previously had focused too much on political history and *Geistesgeschichte* (history of ideas), and that a closer cooperation with the social sciences was the order of the day. Moreover, while "truly great statesmen" such as Frederick the Great and Otto von Bismarck now more than ever had to serve the purpose of fostering German self-confidence, German historians at the same time had to eschew the blatant apologia characterizing much of post-World War I scholarship.

In retrospect, it is obvious that the West German historical profession as a whole did not achieve many of these ambitious aims during the next two decades. Traditional political history still prevailed, and with the political and economic prospects of West Germany steadily improving, the West German historians' willingness to reexamine their interpretive and methodological assumptions declined almost as steadily.² Gerhard Ritter himself never

¹ His address was later published as "Gegenwärtige Lage und Zukunftsaufgaben der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft," *Historische Zeitschrift* 170 (1950), 1-22.

² See the standard work of Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (München, 1989).

delivered the results he had demanded, and while other historians, such as Friedrich Meinecke, initially were more willing than Ritter to reevaluate modern German history for the roots of National Socialism, their ambitions soon gave way to a more defensive stance. Meinecke's essay *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, written in 1945 and published in 1946, went comparatively far in its critique of various aspects of Prussian and German history, but his later writings clearly fell behind these promising beginnings.¹

To be sure, the West German historical profession of the 1950s received a few new impulses, arguably most importantly from the establishment of *Zeitgeschichte* as a discipline with its focus on National Socialism.² Despite his role at the Universität Königsberg in the 1930s and his ideological proximity to many aspects of National Socialism prior to his emigration to the United States, Hans Rothfels became a crucial figure in the development of *Zeitgeschichte* in West Germany after his return.³ Initially, the very conservative political outlook of leading figures like Rothfels defined the limits of the scholarly *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) at places such as the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* as well as at most West German universities. Thus, while Rothfels, for example, insisted on the legitimacy of resistance to National Socialism in his publications of the late 1940s—which many contemporary Germans still viewed as treason—his

¹ Compare Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe. Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen* (Wiesbaden, 1946), and his essay "Irrwege in unserer Geschichte," *Der Monat* 2 (1949), 3-6.

² Regarding West German *Zeitgeschichte*, this dissertation follows neither the hagiographic account of Horst Möller nor the at times ahistorical critique of Nicolas Berg. Compare Möller, "Das Institut für Zeitgeschichte und die Entwicklung der Zeitgeschichtsschreibung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," in Möller/Udo Wengst (eds.), *50 Jahre Institut für Zeitgeschichte* (München, 1999): 1-68; and Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker: Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2003).

³ See his programmatic article "Zeitgeschichte als Aufgabe", which appeared in the first issue of the Institute's journal *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1953), 1-8.

interpretation of the resistance movement clearly did not do justice to its varying political background and motivations.⁴

In addition, Catholic historians tried to promote a counter-narrative to the predominant Protestant master narrative of modern German history.⁵ This master narrative had entailed, among other aspects, a strong focus on the German Empire with Prussia at its center, and generally neglected the Southern and Southwestern states. French and German efforts to strengthen the pro-European and pro-Catholic position within West German historiography led to the foundation of the *Institut für Europäische Geschichte* in Mainz in 1950. While these developments somewhat broadened the topical scope of West German historiography and modified some interpretations, such as the formerly prevailing Bismarck-hagiography, they did not contribute much to a methodological renewal of the profession. Finally, Ludwig Dehio, the first postwar editor of the profession's leading organ *Historische Zeitschrift*, also embarked on a cautiously reformist course. Yet the resistance he encountered emphasizes the limited degree to which the West German historical profession was willing and able to rethink its interpretive and methodological foundations.⁶ Ernst Schulin's assessment of a "politically and morally tamed historicism" that dominated West German historiography during the first two postwar decades still seems accurate.⁷

⁴ Hans Rothfels, *The German Resistance to Hitler: An Appraisal* (Hinsdale, Ill., 1948).

⁵ Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft*, 207-227; Sebastian Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation: Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan, 1945 – 1960* (Göttingen, 1999), 71-87.

⁶ Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft*, 87-109.

⁷ Ernst Schulin, "Zur Restauration und langsamen Weiterentwicklung der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945," in Id., *Traditionskritik und Rekonstruktionsversuch. Studien zur Entwicklung von Geschichtswissenschaft und historischem Denken* (Göttingen, 1979), 139.

With only few exceptions, historians with impeccable conservative credentials—to say the least—were the ones who helped modernize the West German historical profession. Jerry Muller’s dictum regarding the postwar “deradicalization” of West German conservatism captures the situation among historians very well.⁸ “Deradicalized” conservatives such as Theodor Schieder, Karl Dietrich Erdmann, and Werner Conze became the West German historical profession’s leading figures beginning in the late 1950s. All of them had made at least some concessions to the Nazi regime, and all of them managed to cover the brown spots in their biographies throughout their long and successful careers in the Federal Republic.⁹ After 1945, these historians became long-term editors of the profession’s main journals—Schieder of *Historische Zeitschrift* (1959-1984), Erdmann of *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* (1950-1989)—or coordinated large-scale research, as did Werner Conze at the University of Heidelberg. Erdmann, Schieder, and Conze successively served as chairmen of the *Verband der Historiker Deutschlands* (VHD, Association of German Historians) between 1962 and 1976. Conze and especially Schieder trained a large number of historians who later came to advocate interpretive and methodological positions very different from their teachers. Conze also proved to be at least a cautious methodological modernizer; he began to develop his project of *Strukturgeschichte* during the 1950s. However one might evaluate its “brown roots”, which undoubtedly existed, one should still

⁸ Jerry Muller, *The Other God That Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism* (Princeton, 1987).

⁹ Martin Kröger/Roland Thimme, *Die Geschichtsbilder des Karl Dietrich Erdmann. Vom Dritten Reich zur Bundesrepublik* (München, 1996); Winfried Schulze/Otto Gerhard Oexle (eds.), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999).

recognize that *Strukturgeschichte* signaled a methodological departure from much of previous German historiography.¹⁰

This brief outline suggests that West German historiography of the 1950s overall defies a simplistic categorization. In many ways, the developments during this decade resemble those within the West German society at large. Most historians of the Federal Republic now argue that in many areas of society, liberalization processes began hesitantly during the later 1950s rather than in the 1960s, or more specifically, in 1968. But they also acknowledge that during the 1960s these processes accelerated and took on a new quality.¹¹ Similarly, while one has to recognize the historiographical changes of the late 1940s and 1950s, it was not until the 1960s or even the 1970s that the West German historical profession significantly advanced towards the far-reaching goals Ritter had already proposed in 1949.

The assessment of West German historians' *interpretive* reorientation—from “apologia” toward a “revisionist” stance—obviously remains a matter of the observer's own position. Yet it is evident that the *methodological* changes Ritter had demanded soon after the war did not take place until the 1960s. It was yet another generation of historians, born between the late 1920s and early 1940s that carried out this task. Many if not most of these historians developed and maintained close relationships with American historians of modern Germany. Thus, as historians agree about the role of the United States in the democratization

¹⁰ See Thomas Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte: Werner Conze und die Neuorientierung der westdeutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (München, 2001); Lutz Raphael, “Trotzige Ablehnung, produktive Mißverständnisse und verborgene Affinitäten. Westdeutsche Antworten auf die Herausforderungen der ‘Annales’-Historiographie (1945-1960)”, in Heinz Duchhardt und Gerhard May (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft um 1950* (Mainz, 2002), 65-80.

¹¹ See Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland. Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1945-1980* (Göttingen, 2002).

process of the West German society,¹² American scholars of German history usually receive credit for their contributions to the historiographical *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Expressing a commonly held view, Hans-Ulrich Wehler has remarked that

“The transatlantic dialogue between American and German historians since the late 1940s is based on the fundamental experiences of the political generation that lived through the Nazi dictatorship, World War II, the postwar years and the founding of the Federal Republic. These common experiences led to close contacts; I am someone who has benefited immensely from them. The generations of Carl Schorske, Leonard Krieger, Hajo Holborn, Arno Mayer, Jim Sheehan, Henry Turner, Gerald Feldman, Charles Maier, and others, have influenced in a lasting way the political generations in Germany to which I belong.”¹³

Indeed, Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s career exemplifies the development and the intensity of the transatlantic dialogue very well: Wehler first came to the United States as a Fulbright Student in 1952, when he spent a year at Ohio University, Athens. After completing his PhD in the Federal Republic, he returned in 1962, funded by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), to conduct research for a study of American imperialism at Stanford University and at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. At Stanford he met Carl Schorske and, more importantly, Hans Rosenberg, who would become the most important American scholar for Wehler and many other social historians of his generation.¹⁴ Wehler, at that time *Assistant* of Theodor Schieder, even received a job offer at the University of California at Berkeley in 1963, mediated through Hans Rosenberg, which he eventually

¹² See, for example, Hermann-Josef Rupieper, *Die Wurzeln der westdeutschen Nachkriegsdemokratie: der amerikanische Beitrag, 1945-1952* (Opladen, 1993).

¹³ Andreas Daum, “German Historiography in a Transatlantic perspective: interview with Hans-Ulrich Wehler,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.* 26 (2001), 121.

¹⁴ I use “German” and “American” in this study to indicate where historians pursued their careers rather than to refer to their personal backgrounds. Otherwise Hans Rosenberg, born in Cologne and a student of Friedrich Meinecke’s, would not qualify as American.

turned down.¹⁵ He did, however, repeatedly return to the United States, as a visiting professor at Harvard (1972 and 1989), Princeton (1976), and Stanford (1983/84). Several American contributions to Wehler's 1996 Festschrift also testify to his close contacts with the American historical profession.¹⁶ Finally, in 2000, the American Historical Association awarded Wehler its honorary foreign membership.

As Hans-Ulrich Wehler's remark indicates, after an almost complete standstill during the 1930s and early 1940s, scholarly contacts and cooperation between the two countries increased steadily, and for many German historians of Wehler's generation the United States soon became an attractive place. Participating in student exchange programs and, later in their careers, holding visiting professorships became increasingly desirable. It is not an exaggeration to state that in the field of modern German history, West German historians developed closer ties with their American colleagues than with historians of any other country. More generally, the intellectual dialogue between American and West German historians after 1945 was fundamentally shaped by the events and processes Hans-Ulrich Wehler mentioned. The different generations involved in this dialogue contributed to and experienced it in a multitude of ways.

Shortly after the end of World War II, many American scholars had wondered if and how their German colleagues would overcome the nationalism and intellectual isolation that had characterized the vast majority of the German historical profession since 1933 if not since 1918. Already in 1941, Oscar J. Hammen had concluded his analysis of German

¹⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Eine lebhafte Kampfsituation: ein Interview mit Manfred Hettling und Cornelius Torp* (München, 2006), 42.

¹⁶ Manfred Hettling/Paul Nolte (eds.), *Nation und Gesellschaft in Deutschland: Historische Essays* (München, 1996), which includes contributions by James J. Sheehan, Henry A. Turner, and Gerald D. Feldman.

historiography in the 1920s and 1930s with the claim that “the obvious rejection of ‘western’ ideas and institutions, the ‘revision’ of the liberal historiography of the nineteenth century by German historians since 1933, are but the intensification of tendencies which already were pronounced before the advent of the Nazi regime.”¹⁷ Not surprisingly, then, American historians paid close attention to the first attempts of their German contemporaries to explain the rise of National Socialism.

In the Americans’ view, some German historians did better than others: Friedrich Meinecke’s 1946 essay *Die deutsche Katastrophe* garnered a generally favorable reception, and its author was awarded the American Historical Association’s honorary foreign membership in the following year.¹⁸ But Meinecke was, despite or rather because of his iconic status, not perceived as the typical representative of the German historical profession. That role was to remain with Gerhard Ritter, the first postwar chairman of the West German Historians’ Association and a very active public intellectual.¹⁹ Ritter had by no means been ardently opposed to all aspects of National Socialism, but had been imprisoned after Stauffenberg’s failed plot against Hitler in July 1944, due to a loose association with the Goerdeler resistance circle. After the end of the war Ritter was determined to prove that National Socialism had been a decisive break with all German traditions, and not an integral part – or even the logical culmination – of modern German history. His rather crude

¹⁷ Oscar J. Hammen, “German Historians and the Advent of the National Socialist State,” *Journal of Modern History* 13 (1941), 188.

¹⁸ Already in 1933, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences had made Meinecke a Foreign Honorary Member; in 1935 he had become an Honorary Member of the Massachusetts Historical Society and in 1936, Harvard University awarded Meinecke an honorary doctorate.

¹⁹ For Ritter’s role in the postwar West German historical profession, see the comprehensive biography by Christoph Corneliussen, *Gerhard Ritter: Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf, 2001).

apologia, referring to National Socialism as “not an authentic Prussian plant, but an Austrian-Bavarian import,”²⁰ met with considerable resistance among American historians. Felix Gilbert thus criticized the “rather nationalistic bias in Ritter’s tendency to excuse dangerous and deplorable German developments and even to consider them justified if somewhat similar developments have occurred in other countries.”²¹

Fifteen years later, American scholars of modern Germany assumed a significant role in a debate that not only upset the West German historical profession but also generated a public debate in which countless newspaper readers wrote letters to the editor and which prompted even the German *Bundestag* to address the controversial issue. In 1961, the German historian Fritz Fischer had published his groundbreaking study on the German Empire’s war aims during the First World War, *Griff nach der Weltmacht*. In this study, Fischer pointed to continuities between Germany’s war aims in both World Wars and argued, moreover, that the German Empire bore an important part of the responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War.²² Seen by many as almost a traitor, Fischer faced strong headwind from his German colleagues, who initially contented themselves with attacking him in scholarly journals. Eventually, however, they resorted to sabotaging Fischer’s lecture tour to several American universities that had been planned for the spring of 1964 by convincing the German Foreign Office (which was supposed to fund Fischer’s trip) that it was not in West Germany’s “national interest” for Fischer to present his views abroad.

²⁰ Gerhard Ritter, *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht: ein Beitrag zur historisch-politischen Neubesinnung* (Stuttgart, 1946), 29.

²¹ Felix Gilbert, “Review of Gerhard Ritter, *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht: ein Beitrag zur historisch-politischen Neubesinnung*,” *American Historical Review* 53 (1948), 788.

²² Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914-1918* (Düsseldorf, 1961).

Several American historians responded by publishing an open letter in the German weekly *Die Zeit* condemning the cancellation. They then secured sufficient financial means through the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) to invite Fischer to lecture in the United States. Eventually Fritz Stern backed Fischer at a panel discussion at the German *Historikertag* in 1964, underscoring the need to examine continuities in modern German history instead of de-contextualizing National Socialism from the course of German history.²³

Such episodes appear to emphasize the degree to which the rethinking of modern German history in the postwar decades has been a transatlantic enterprise. More importantly, both American reactions to Gerhard Ritter's apologetic writings in the late 1940s and the American support for Fritz Fischer in the mid-1960s suggest that American historians of modern Germany generally favored interpretations that sought to critically reconsider German history for the origins of National Socialism. Therefore it is not surprising that historians have told the story of post-1945 German-American historiographical relations as a story of West Germans proceeding, with steady American help, on their "long way West." While this popular master narrative certainly covers many aspects of the German-American scholarly community's development, the historiographical story is much more complicated. Even the *Fischer-Kontroverse*, usually the prime example of the transatlantic fight for the good historiographical cause, unfolded in a more complex manner: writing to Hans Herzfeld several weeks after Fischer's United States lecture tour, Hans Rosenberg provided a candid – and devastating – assessment: "Fischer's appearance here [at Berkeley], as I indicated

²³ For American involvement in the notorious *Fischer-Kontroverse*, see my article "Fritz Fischer and the American Historical Profession: tracing the Transatlantic Dimension of the Fischer-Kontroverse," *Storia della Storiografia* 44 (2003), 67-84.

already, turned out to be a great intellectual and scholarly disappointment [*eine große geistig-wissenschaftliche Enttäuschung*]. Had the German Foreign Office not tried to silence him, he would have encountered strong criticism over here. But given the political background we all turned a blind eye on his assumptions and at times sloppy methods, even though we by no means endorse them.”²⁴ This example suggests that American support for German iconoclasts was not necessarily unconditional. A comprehensive and plausible account of the transatlantic community of scholars therefore needs to move beyond a simplistic interpretation that suggests American and progressive German historians working steadily toward the same goal. In the pages that follow, I will trace this story from the early postwar years up into the 1980s.

Through the transatlantic scholarly community of German history, several generations of German historians have developed, or in some cases, resumed close ties with their American colleagues. To name but a few, Gerhard Ritter (born 1888) repeatedly spent long periods of time in the United States, as did Fritz Fischer (born 1908). In the spring term of 1960, Walther Hubatsch (born 1915) taught at the University of Kansas. However, as Hans-Ulrich Wehler (born 1931) suggested in the interview quoted above, the American scholarly community of modern German history has been and remains a particularly important source of inspiration for historians of his generation. These scholars, born between ca. 1930 and 1940, encountered the United States relatively early in their careers, either as students or as post-doctoral fellows. Historians of this generation, whom Paul Nolte recently labeled the “Historians of the Federal Republic,” have shaped the West German historical

²⁴ Hans Rosenberg to Hans Herzfeld, 24 May 1964, BAK, NL Herzfeld, Box 12.

profession from the late 1960s and early 1970 up to the present day.²⁵ Moreover, most of these historians saw themselves not only as scholars but also as public intellectuals and therefore repeatedly left the ivory tower to contribute to controversial political debates, from the signing of the *Ostverträge* in the early 1970s to the possible membership of Turkey in the European Union since 2005.

From a historiographical perspective, however, the actual accomplishment of this generation was to suggest an alternative to the “German conception of history,” to invoke the title of Georg Iggers seminal work on German historicism.²⁶ While German historians of Wehler’s generation followed different paths in their pursuit of “history beyond historicism” (Wolfgang J. Mommsen),²⁷ the project most closely associated with American academia was the “Bielefeld School” of Historical Social Science (*Historische Sozialwissenschaft*). This historical school arguably went furthest in its repudiation of both the interpretive and methodological traditions of German historiography, and its protagonists claimed to develop their alternative in a close dialogue with their American colleagues.²⁸

It has already become apparent that this study views the German-American scholarly community as one consisting of American and *West* German scholars. This focus is less a result of anti-Marxism or the author’s *West* German obliviousness of East Germany’s existence, but rather due to the fact that with very few exceptions, East German historians did

²⁵ Paul Nolte, “Die Historiker der Bundesrepublik: Rückblick auf eine ‘lange Generation,’” *Merkur* 53 (1999), 413-431.

²⁶ Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, 1968).

²⁷ This was the title of Mommsen’s inaugural lecture at the Universität Düsseldorf. See Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1971)

²⁸ See, for example, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation: ein Gespräch mit Manfred Hettling und Cornelius Torp* (München, 2006).

not travel to the United States until the 1980s, and that personal intellectual exchange through letters was likewise extremely limited.²⁹ East German scholars and their works are, however, a part of this dissertation insofar as American and West German scholars received, discussed, rejected, or sometimes even relied on them. For the West Germans, rejection was the predominant attitude, while some Americans, especially Andreas Dorpalen and Georg Iggers, strove for a more differentiated response.

Ultimately, my dissertation offers an account of the transatlantic scholarly community of modern German history in the first four decades after the Second World War and simultaneously contributes to the historicizing of the Bielefeld School as an important scholarly group within West German historiography. Both the transatlantic connections of West German historians and the Bielefeld School of Historical Social Science are key issues in postwar historiography, and both have thus far largely escaped historians' attention. By analyzing the Bielefeld School and the transatlantic scholarly community in connection, I want to add a transnational dimension to the flourishing field of the history of the West German historical profession.

Historiography

Accounts of the field of German history in the United States, usually essays and articles rather than monographs, are still very scarce. In addition, some of these few historiographical surveys examine European history in general rather than German history in

²⁹ See Georg Iggers, *Two Lives in Uncertain Times: Facing the Challenges of the 20th Century as Scholars & Citizens* (New York, 2006), 143-168; Fritz Klein, *Drinnen und Draußen: ein Historiker in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000), 274-290.

particular.³⁰ Several articles have traced various aspects of the field of German history or outlined its development as a whole, but they have for obvious reasons relied on monographs and articles exclusively, and have not considered archival sources. Generally, a consensus exists that American scholarly interest in modern European and especially modern German history increased considerably because “the collapse of democracy and the abandonment of liberalism certainly was the major historical theme for American historians during the decades after 1945.”³¹ This growing attention manifested itself institutionally: as Kenneth Barkin has stated, “the three decades following World War II witnessed the solid establishment of German history as a critical part of the curriculum of every major American university.”³²

While the increasing interest in Germany’s past and future led to a quantitative extension of the field German history, a number of émigré historians helped strengthen its quality. Prior to the Second World War, historians such as Bernadotte Schmitt, Sidney Fay, and William Langer had already proven the level of distinction of American scholars of German history. In addition, the debate about the outbreak and the course of World War I revealed that American historiography on modern Germany was far from uniform and

³⁰ Exceptions include Fritz Stern, “German History in America, 1884 – 1984,” *Central European History* 19 (1986), 131-163; Charles E. McClelland, “German Intellectual History,” *Central European History* 19 (1986), 164-173; Gerald D. Feldman, “German Economic History,” *Central European History* 19 (1986), 174-185; Konrad H. Jarausch, “German Social History – American Style,” *Journal of Social History* 19 (1985), 349-359. For German history as part of the European field see Leonard Krieger, “European History in America,” in John Higham (ed.), *History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1965), 233-313; Volker R. Berghahn/Charles S. Maier, “Modern Europe in American Historical Writing,” in Anthony Molho/Gordon Wood (eds.), *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past* (Princeton, 1998), 393-414.

³¹ Berghahn/Maier, “Modern Europe in American Historical Writing,” 402.

³² Kenneth D. Barkin, “German Émigré Historians in America: the Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies”, in Hartmut Lehmann/James J. Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933* (Cambridge, UK, 1991), 153.

comprised a variety of positions.³³ But émigré historians who arrived in the United States mostly during the 1930s added a new perspective.

On the one hand, a number of first generation émigrés, who had received their academic training in Germany, left their mark on the American historical profession.³⁴ These scholars, many of whom had been students of Friedrich Meinecke at the University of Berlin in the 1910s and 1920s, include Hans Rothfels, Gerhard Masur, Dietrich Gerhard, Hajo Holborn, Felix Gilbert, and Hans Rosenberg.³⁵ Especially Holborn, Gilbert, and Rosenberg turned out to be influential both as scholars and as teachers, as numerous recollections reveal.³⁶ Therefore literature on these historians often resorts to a “great men make historiography” approach.³⁷ In addition, with the exception of Rothfels this first generation of émigrés generally appears politically liberal and thus in favor of an in-depth revision of historiography on modern Germany. Such an evaluation, however, does not do full justice to the individuals belonging to this generation who had different ideas regarding the ideal extent and character of historiographical revision.

³³ Compare Bernadotte Schmitt, *The Coming of War*, 2 vol. (New York, 1930), and Sidney B. Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, 2 volumes, (New York, 1929).

³⁴ See the essays in Lehmann/Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past*.

³⁵ See the collection of letters recently published by Gerhard A. Ritter, *Friedrich Meinecke: Akademischer Lehrer und emigrierte Schüler: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen 1910 – 1977* (München, 2006). See also Felix Gilbert’s account “The Historical Seminar of the University of Berlin in the Twenties,” in Lehmann/Sheehan, *An Interrupted Past*, 67-70.

³⁶ Hartmut Lehmann (ed.), *Felix Gilbert as Scholar and Teacher* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute 1992); Eugene Genovese, “Hans Rosenberg at Brooklyn College: A Communist Student’s Recollection of the Classroom as a War Zone,” *Central European History* 24 (1991), 51-57; Shulamit Volkov, “Hans Rosenberg as a Teacher: A Few Personal Notes,” *Central European History* 24 (1991), 58-64; as well as the numerous articles in the issue “In Memory of Hajo Holborn, 1902-1969” *Central European History* 3 (1970).

³⁷ See especially Ritter’s introduction to *Friedrich Meinecke: Akademischer Lehrer und emigrierte Schüler*, 105-111.

On the other hand, already in the early 1950s the second generation of émigré historians began their careers. Scholars such as George Mosse, Klaus Epstein, Peter Gay, Fritz Stern, Gerhard Weinberg, and Georg Iggers had been born in Germany (or in Austria, such as Raul Hilberg, and Poland, such as Theodore Hamerow) but received their academic training in the United States. While some of them have published memoirs covering at least parts of their careers, only George Mosse's has received scholarly scrutiny thus far.³⁸ Recently, Steven Aschheim has examined Mosse, Stern, Gay, and Walter Laqueur as a group with distinctive autobiographical characteristics, which he argues explain the brand of intellectual and cultural history they later developed.³⁹ While my dissertation follows Aschheim's interpretation of these historians' intellectual development, it will offer a more comprehensive assessment of the generation of émigrés, which comprised scholars of very different methodological orientations. Ultimately, this dissertation will place greater emphasis on the question of the second generation of émigrés' significance in both the field of modern German history in the United States and the transatlantic scholarly community.

Linked to the trajectory of the field of German history in the United States is the development of scholarly relations between American historians and their German colleagues after the Second World War. Reflecting upon a century of German history in the United States in 1984, Fritz Stern described the scholarly relations between American and German

³⁸ The memoirs include Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: the Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago, 1996); Peter Gay, *My German Question: Growing Up in Nazi Berlin* (New Haven, 1998); George L. Mosse, *Confronting History: A Memoir* (Madison, 2000); Wilma and Georg Iggers, *Two Lives in Uncertain Times: Facing the Challenges of the 20th Century as Scholars & Citizens* (New York, 2006); Fritz Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known* (New York, 2006). An evaluation of Mosse's work provides the collection by Stanley Payne et al (eds.), *What History Tells: George L. Mosse and the Culture of Modern Europe* (Madison, 2004).

³⁹ Steven Aschheim, "The Tensions of Historical Wissenschaft: The Émigré Historians and the Making of German Cultural History," in Id., *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton, 2007), 45-80.

historians during this period as moving “from dependency through a kind of academic emancipation and political antagonism to equality and collaboration.”⁴⁰ By and large, one can hardly dispute Stern’s view of the development after 1945. For the 1930s and early 1940s, however, John L. Harvey has recently suggested a much greater affinity between many American historians of Europe (not only Germany) and their German colleagues favoring the Nationalist or even National Socialist Right.⁴¹ But even Harvey concedes that the 1950s marked a watershed, when a new generation of scholars of German history assumed their positions. Building upon these older and more recent views, my dissertation will assess the degree to which the writing of modern German history indeed became a common transatlantic project.

This very emphasis on the writing, or rather the re-writing of modern German history as a common transatlantic enterprise, especially beginning in the 1960s, has in recent years almost become a cliché. As Ernst Schulin put it succinctly, “Anglo-American critical interest in German history influenced and assisted in the modernization of West German historical writing.”⁴² Virtually every single account of postwar German-American historiography echoes this point of view.⁴³ However, a comprehensive analysis of this subject will reveal a

⁴⁰ Stern, “German History in America, 1884 – 1984,” 132.

⁴¹ John L. Harvey, “Our Nazi Past: American Professors of European History in Collaboration with the Nazi State,” paper delivered at the Annual Conference of the German Studies Association, San Diego, Oct 5, 2007. See also Harvey’s *The Common Adventure of Mankind: Academic Historians and an Atlantic Identity in the Twentieth Century* (PhD Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2003).

⁴² Ernst Schulin, “German and American Historiography in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in Lehmann/Sheehan, *An Interrupted Past*, 31.

⁴³ See Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *The Return to the Western Tradition: German Historiography since 1945* (Washington, D.C., 1991); Georg Iggers, “Introduction”, in *Ibid.*, *The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historical Writing Since 1945* (Leamington Spa, 1985), 1-45; Andreas Daum, “German Historiography in Transatlantic perspective: interview with Hans-Ulrich Wehler”, *Bulletin of the*

more complex picture. 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.⁴⁴ All of them seem to constitute the field of post-1945 German-American historiography as well.

In recent years, historians have published extensively on the first decade and a half of post-1945 West German historiography.⁴⁵ Several influential historians have found their biographers, while other studies have taken a broader view and focused on historical schools or particular trends within the entire profession.⁴⁶ Even though these studies differ significantly in their focus on methodological, interpretive, and political aspects as well as in their evaluations, they have in sum provided a fairly nuanced picture of the immediate postwar West German historical profession. Winfried Schulze’s account of West German historiography during the first postwar decade and a half, published in 1989, set the interpretive tone: after some initial attempts to reconsider previously held methodological and interpretive assumptions, the overwhelming majority of West German historians during

German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., 26 (2001), 121f.; Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte: Begriff – Entwicklung – Probleme* (Göttingen, 1977), 40.

⁴⁴ Daniel T. Rodgers, “An Age of Social Politics,” in Thomas Bender (ed.), *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002), 260.

⁴⁵ The starting point is still Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*.

⁴⁶ See the biographies by Christoph Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter: Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf, 2001); Jan Eckel, *Hans Rothfels: Eine intellektuelle Biographie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2005); Eduard Mühle, *Für Volk und deutschen Osten: der Historiker Hermann Aubin und die Ostforschung* (Düsseldorf, 2005). A broader view is taken by Thomas Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte: Werner Conze und die Neuorientierung der westdeutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (München, 2001); and by Sebastian Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation: Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan, 1945 – 1960* (Göttingen, 1999); Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker: Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2003); and Norbert Frei (ed.), *Martin Broszat, der “Staat Hitlers,” und die Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2007).

the 1950s returned to traditional political history, and the very few dissenters met with considerable resistance.⁴⁷

By contrast, the 1960s and 1970s have thus far not received appropriate attention, and therefore this dissertation's emphasis will lie on these decades. Given the tremendous quantitative changes taking place within the historical profession during that time, this lack of attention is highly surprising: between 1960 and 1975, the number of professorships quadrupled, and the number of *Assistenten* grew by six times.⁴⁸ In addition, since the 1960s generally figure as the decade during which the West German historians overcame – or at least began to overcome – the parochialism of the immediate postwar years, it is high time to historicize this period. After all, political, economic, and cultural historians have already shifted their attention to the Federal Republic during the 1970s.⁴⁹

Most of the historiographical texts on the 1960s are either contributions by historians who were involved in the fierce debates of the 1970s, or later attempts at (self-)historicizing by the same scholars.⁵⁰ Interpretively, the controversies have centered on the evaluation of the German Empire and its historical links with Nazi Germany – the notorious “continuities

⁴⁷ Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 302-303.

⁴⁸ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Zur Lage der Geschichtswissenschaft in der Bundesrepublik 1949-1979,” in Id., *Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung: Studien zu Aufgaben und Traditionen deutscher Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen, 1980), 31. An Assistant is roughly equivalent to the rank of assistant professor. However, an *Assistent* generally also performs research as well as administrative tasks for an *Ordinarius*/full professor, on whom he or she is dependent.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), *Das Ende der Zuversicht. Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte* (Göttingen, 2008); Andselm Doering-Manteuffel/Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom. Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970* (Göttingen, 2008).

⁵⁰ The most prolific observer, as well as one of the main protagonists, of these developments is Hans-Ulrich Wehler. His writings include *Geschichte als Historische Sozialwissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1973); “Moderne Politikgeschichte oder ‘Grosse Politik der Kabinette’?” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975), 344-369; “Kritik und kritische Antikritik,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 225 (1977), 347 – 384; *Historisches Denken am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 2000).

in German history.”⁵¹ Methodologically, historians have argued about the advantages and disadvantages of history’s connection with the social sciences, as well as the question of whether diplomatic history should be constituted as a subfield of an all-encompassing “history of society” (*Gesellschaftsgeschichte*). While Hans-Ulrich Wehler has been the most vocal proponent of the latter, he has of course not been the only one. Jürgen Kocka’s programmatic volume *Sozialgeschichte* belongs in the same category, just like a number of articles of articles by scholars who belong to the same age cohort without being partisan to the Bielefeld School in the narrow sense.⁵² Finally, the debate’s political dimension revolved around the validity of “critical historiography,” which the Bielefeld School’s protagonists emphasized and which their opponents rejected at least as adamantly.⁵³ Building upon not only the protagonists’ works but also institutional and personal papers, this dissertation will thus provide the first in-depth analysis of this story’s various dimensions.

⁵¹ See Fritz Fischer, *Bündnis der Eliten. Zur Kontinuität der Machtstrukturen in Deutschland 1871 – 1945*, (Düsseldorf, 1979). A key critique provides Thomas Nipperdey, “1933 und die Kontinuität in der deutschen Geschichte,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 222 (1978), 86-111.

⁵² Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte: Begriff—Entwicklung—Probleme* (Göttingen, 1977); Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus* (Düsseldorf, 1971); Dieter Groh, *Kritische Geschichtswissenschaft in emanzipatorischer Absicht. Überlegungen zur Geschichte als Sozialwissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1973); Imanuel Geiss, *Studien über Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1972); Arnold Sywottek, *Geschichtswissenschaft in der Legitimationskrise: ein Überblick über die Diskussion um Theorie und Didaktik der Geschichte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1969-1973* (Bonn, 1974).

⁵³ Andreas Hillgruber, “Politische Geschichte in moderner Sicht“, *Historische Zeitschrift* 216 (1973), 529 – 552; Klaus Hildebrand, “Geschichte oder ‘Gesellschaftsgeschichte’? Die Notwendigkeit einer politischen Geschichtsschreibung von den internationalen Beziehungen“, *Historische Zeitschrift* 223 (1976), 328 – 357; Thomas Nipperdey, “Wehlers ‘Kaiserreich’. Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung“, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975), 539 – 560; Karl-Georg Faber, „Geschichtswissenschaft als retrospektive Politik? Bemerkungen zu einem Aufsatz von Hans-Ulrich Wehler“, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 6 (1980), 574-585.

Between the “primacy of methodology” and “radical constructivism”

As Christoph and Sebastian Conrad have pointed out, a “primacy of methodology” has long dominated historiographical studies.⁵⁴ Their authors have generally attempted to legitimize or de-legitimize a particular methodological approach. In this dissertation, I view the methodological dimension differently: I am more interested in the particular role debates about methodology played within the transatlantic scholarly community than in assessing the heuristic value of particular methods and theories. While the latter is unquestionably significant, it all-too-often assumes a self-serving character. Instead, one should ask, for example, whether and why historians used foreign methodological trends to bolster their own position within the domestic debate.

As the history of historiography has become a widening and flourishing field, it has also become subject to an intensive theoretical and methodological debate.⁵⁵ At the forefront of methodological reflection, Thomas Etzemüller has suggested “radical constructivism” as heuristically most promising for historiographical studies. Etzemüller asks: “what constitutes historiography – a past reality which is (re-)constructed by historians, and which guides this reconstruction? Or is it the practices of historians in the present, independent from what they label as ‘past’ and what they assume to be ‘reality’?”⁵⁶ Etzemüller believes the latter to be the case, and has subsequently developed a “radical constructivist” heuristic model based on Ludwik Fleck’s *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache*, Michel

⁵⁴ See Christoph Conrad/Sebastian Conrad, “Wie vergleicht man Historiographien?”, in Id. *Die Nation schreiben: Geschichtswissenschaft im internationale Vergleich* (Göttingen, 2002), 25.

⁵⁵ The most recent publication is Jan Eckel/Christoph Etzemüller (eds.), *Neue Zugänge zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen, 2007).

⁵⁶ Etzemüller, “‘Ich sehe was was Du nicht siehst’: wie entsteht historische Erkenntnis?”, in Eckel/Etzemüller (eds.), *Neue Zugänge zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft*, 27.

Foucault's discourse analysis, and Pierre Bourdieu's habitus concept.⁵⁷ Etzemüller's study on Werner Conze's social history has profoundly influenced my thinking about historiography, and Fleck, Foucault, and Bourdieu have sharpened historians' awareness of the various conditions in the present that guide the historians' approaches to the past. Yet the claim that one cannot find *any* access to a past reality (Etzemüller does not deny that such a reality *exists*) does not seem convincing to me. While older historiographical studies have not given the constructivist element of historiography its appropriate weight, recent works have overemphasized this very factor.

Of the three theoreticians mentioned above, this dissertation is particularly indebted to Ludwik Fleck. His classic *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache* (genesis and development of a scientific fact) offers two heuristically valuable models, the "thought style" (*Denkstil*) and the "thought collective" (*Denkkollektiv*). Fleck defines a "thought collective" as "community of people who are in a constant process of exchanging thoughts" and who therefore share certain perceptions and assumptions.⁵⁸ This common way of perceiving the world is what Fleck terms "thought style." This style usually finds its expression in a distinct vocabulary which scholars of a single thought collective share. Fleck's understanding of a thought collective seems somewhat rigid, as he argues that perception/cognition (*Erkenntnis*) and the subsequent genesis of a new thought are *only* possible within a thought collective, and not individually. While this position appears too

⁵⁷ Ludwik Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache: Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993); Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*: (Cambridge, UK, 1977).

⁵⁸ Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache*, 54/55.

radical, Fleck's emphasis on the social and historical dimensions of scholarly communities is important and informs this study.

Theoretically, an entire scholarly community may form such a thought collective, agreeing on basic assumptions and methods. Yet considering the epistemological and methodological differences between the historians under review in this study, it seems preferable to analyze a single historical school, such as the *Bielefelder Schule*, as one distinct thought collective. Then one can ask more precisely: how did this particular group of historians make sense of their world, i.e. both modern German history and the Federal Republic, as opposed to historians with very different methodological and political positions? What language did they develop and employ to describe the phenomena they were analyzing?

Fleck's thought style model has drawn the historians' attention to the social dimension of knowledge production, and his insights link with Pierre Bourdieu's field concept: it aims at uncovering the social conditions that help generate historical knowledge.⁵⁹ Rather than viewing an academic field as a "scientific community" (with an emphasis on *community*) in which scholars are primarily cooperating with one another, the field concept stresses its antagonistic quality and describes the scientific process as a struggle for social recognition. Therefore the field concept looks at social milieus, institutions, and networks, in which scholars of a certain field operate. It does not neglect the intellectual dimension of historiography, but rather combines an intellectual and a social focus. The field concept is equally interested in the *producers* of historical knowledge and their *products*. But rather

⁵⁹ For the following, see Olaf Blaschke/Lutz Raphael, "Im Kampf um Positionen: Änderungen im Feld der französischen und deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945," in Eckel/Etzmüller (eds.), *Neue Zugänge zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft*, 69-109.

than simply to assume that the “best” or most convincing historical work will receive the appropriate recognition, it seeks to uncover the power relationships within the academic fields that help promote certain views and tend to suppress others.

These reflections also have consequences for this dissertation itself, which is a product of the very field it analyzes. Rather than claiming an “objective” position that preceding observers have not been able to attain, the study follows Peter Novick’s position on this issue of objectivity. In his seminal *That Noble Dream*, Novick contends that the ideal of historical objectivity is neither true nor false, neither right nor wrong: “I find it not just essentially contested, but essentially confused.”⁶⁰ As he has subsequently shown, “the evolution of historians’ attitudes on the objectivity question has always been closely tied to changing social, political, cultural, and professional contexts.”⁶¹ Therefore all a historical work, including this one, can aim at is plausibility, and accordingly the goal of this dissertation is to provide a plausible analysis of the German-American community of historians after World War II.

Social, economic, cultural, and intellectual contacts between the United States and Europe in the 20th century, and in particular after 1945, have come under scholarly scrutiny during the last two decades, resulting in the Westernization/Americanization debate. Hence a study on a German-American community of historians between the 1940s and the 1970s has to be placed within this context. Historians have understood Westernization as a process of intercultural transfer between Europe and the United States that began in the late 18th and

⁶⁰ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, UK, 1988), 6.

⁶¹ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 628.

early 19th centuries. Westernization has at times meant phases of European influence on the United States, and at other times phases of American influence on Europe. Anselm Doering-Manteuffel has defined Westernization as the “development of common values in societies on both sides of the North Atlantic.”⁶² By contrast, Americanization usually refers to a process in which non-American countries and societies are at the receiving end, without in turn influencing the United States. This is true despite the fact that the process is often seen as taking place as selective appropriation.⁶³ In the most general sense, the West German historical profession thus certainly underwent a Westernization process rather than an Americanization process. German émigrés had a considerable impact on the American field of German history, and German historians became increasingly receptive to developments within the American historical profession. Yet the Americanization concept can still be useful for this study, precisely because of its elusiveness, following Rob Kroes, who defines the term as “a shorthand reference to what is essentially a black box in the simple diagram of cultural transmission and reception.”⁶⁴ As we will see, West German historians’ ideas of the United States and the American historical profession often differed greatly from one another – at least in part a result of the pluralized character of the American field. And as in the realm of popular culture, selective appropriation also took place within the scholarly community. Finally, one should mention that the term has been used in the context of Americanization

⁶² Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1999), 12.

⁶³ Philipp Gassert, “Amerikanismus, Antiamerikanismus, Amerikanisierung: neue Literatur zur Sozial-, Wirtschafts- und Kulturgeschichte des amerikanischen Einflusses in Deutschland und Europa,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 39 (1999), 532.

⁶⁴ Rob Kroes, “Introduction”, in Id., *If You’ve Seen One, You’ve Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana and Chicago, 1996), xi.

debates mostly to analyze allegedly deplorable developments in Europe and elsewhere. In the extant literature on West German historiography, in contrast, historians have referred to Americanization or American influences as an unquestionably positive feature.

A comprehensive history of the historical profession, or any other academic field, must not separate questions of content from questions of style. In this context, the Norwegian social scientist Johan Galtung has drawn attention to specific national academic styles. Galtung has famously contrasted four distinctive intellectual styles, constructing the ideal types of the “Saxonic”, the “Teutonic”, the “Gallic”, and the “Nipponic” intellectual style.⁶⁵ Among other elements, Galtung distinguished between the rather conversational style of debate in Anglo-American academia and the more contentious style of debate within its German counterpart. Of course, such distinctions should be taken with at least a grain of salt. But it is important to ask now only *what* lay at the heart of a particular scholarly controversy but *how* these debates were carried out – especially in a study that transcends national borders.

Since this dissertation focuses equally on the intellectual and social processes constituting historiography, it also combines a quantitative and a qualitative dimension. On the one hand, any comprehensive analysis of a historiographical field requires some degree of statistical coverage. For example, one can judge the interest in a particular topic or period or the prominence of certain methodological trends by the number of articles that were published in scholarly journals, and by the number of monographs that appeared. Of course, such an analysis also has to consider who edited journals and reviewed books for publication

⁶⁵ Johan Galtung, “Structure, Culture, and Intellectual Style: an Essay Comparing Saxonic, Teutonic, Gallic, and Nipponic Approaches”, in *Social Science Information* 20, 6 (1981), 817-856.

and thus significantly influenced or even controlled what was published. Here, considerations of “quality” (itself a problematic category) were not always decisive.⁶⁶ While a comprehensive evaluation of journals and publisher’s lists form the basis of the dissertation’s quantitative aspect, historians’ personal papers are indispensable for a look “behind the scenes” that reveals professional power structures. While nobody would deny the impact of these structures, influential scholars in particular are often unwilling to acknowledge them, as the admission would contradict the ideal of objectivity.⁶⁷

My analysis of both the post-1945 German-American scholarly community and the controversial developments within the German historical profession in the late 1960s and 1970s considers their interpretive as well as methodological, institutional, and political dimensions. These dimensions of course overlap in various ways and are treated separately only in order to discuss the dissertation’s source basis.

Regarding the institutional dimension, I have examined the papers of the *American Historical Association* and of its German counterpart, the *Verband der Historiker Deutschlands*. Apart from covering matters pertaining to its organization, the AHA papers at the Library of Congress also contain some editorial files of the *American Historical Review*. For the AHR’s German equivalent, *Historische Zeitschrift*, the personal papers of its long-term editor Theodor Schieder (he held that position between 1957 and 1984) have proven

⁶⁶ In 1964, Theodor Schieder, editor of *Historische Zeitschrift*, decided to publish an article by Fritz Fischer only because he was afraid that a failure to do so might appear as censorship of a historian who held views on the German Empire’s policies during World War I which were very unpopular among his German colleagues. Schieder explicitly referred to the “distorted view of the German historical profession” many American colleagues had, as they were distinguishing “between progressive and reactionary historians.” See Schieders letter to Gerhard Ritter, 9 November 1964, Nachlass Theodor Schieder, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter BAK), Box 243.

⁶⁷ For the American historical profession, the key study is Novick, *That Noble Dream*.

enormously insightful. Since Schieder also served as chairman of the *Verband der Historiker Deutschlands*, his papers shed light on the association's development as well.

For both the methodological and the interpretive dimensions, I am relying primarily on the body of scholarly work that the historians belonging to the German-American scholarly community have produced. An analysis of the leading German and American scholarly journals illustrates prevailing trends at a given time. But again, historians' personal papers supply important additional information. The tendency to discuss interpretive and methodological questions in letters overall might have declined after the 1950s, when the phone became the main medium to exchange these views. George Mosse, for example, preferred to call rather than to write to his colleagues and his papers accordingly contain very little of relevance in this respect. And yet, one finds counter-examples even in the mid-1970s, and these have been very illuminating.

The bulk of the personal papers of German historians on which this dissertation draws are located at the *Bundesarchiv* Koblenz. It would have been impossible to analyze the papers of all historians belonging to the German-American scholarly community. Some have not left any personal papers, and the existing *Nachlässe* are extremely scattered. Yet the historians whose papers I have been able to evaluate belonged to different generations and held widely varying methodological and political views. Thus, this dissertation draws on the personal papers of a fairly representative sample of historians, and will be able to provide plausible conclusions about the entire field of modern German history. Of course, the focus remains on the West German historical profession's transatlantic dimension, as the study cannot provide a syncretic history of the field. Yet by analyzing both challenge and response, the project *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* as well as its critics, this dissertation will

add to our understanding of the West German historical profession during the 1960s and 1970s.

A final note on the *erkenntnisleitende Interessen* (the knowledge-guiding, or knowledge-constituting interests) of this dissertation is in order: The writing of historiographical accounts in order to legitimize a new approach is an inherently problematic undertaking, and as we will see, this applied to the protagonists of the *Bielefelder Schule* as much as to their contemporary and later critics.⁶⁸ This dissertation will not provide an ex-post-facto contribution to the debate between protagonists of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* and their opponents among the diplomatic and political historians. Neither does it constitute a belated contribution to the German *Methodenstreit* between social historians and cultural historians.⁶⁹ Finally, even though historians generally distinguish between *affirmative* and *critical* historiography, my dissertation attempts to provide both. On the one hand, I hope to illustrate how much the postwar transatlantic community has contributed to the historiography on modern Germany. On the other hand, this sympathetic view of many members of this scholarly community should be compatible with its critical historicization. After all, as Allan Megill has stated, “the true historian needs to be committed to both objectivity and commitment, because ‘discernment of multiple perspectives is a condition of

⁶⁸ Wolfgang Weber has emphasized the same for the Bielefelder Schule’s relationship to its conservative predecessors. See Weber, *Priester der Klio: Historisch-sozialwissenschaftliche Studien zur Herkunft und Karriere deutscher Historiker und zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft 1890-1970* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987), 14.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Ute Daniel, *Kompendium Kulturgeschichte: Theorien, Praxis, Schlüsselwörter* (Frankfurt a Main, 2001); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Die Herausforderung der Kulturgeschichte* (München, 1998).

understanding human affairs,’ and thus is ‘also a prerequisite of attaining reliable historical knowledge.’”⁷⁰

Organization

This study begins with an outline of the West German historical profession’s development after 1945. While this story is quite well known, I will present it from a transatlantic perspective, incorporating the personal and institutional contacts between American and West German historians into the narrative. During the immediate postwar years, American scholars often objected to apologetic tendencies among their West German colleagues and generally demanded a reevaluation of modern German history. Yet were they open to forming scholarly ties with almost all German historians, or just those with impeccable political credentials, while ignoring Germans whose biographies contained brown spots? Conversely, did German historians of all political and methodological brands – or just the most liberal-minded – attempt to establish, or reestablish, relations with American colleagues? If the Cold War constituted the primary cause for the integration of West Germany into the Western bloc, it might also have affected the country’s historical profession in a similar way. Accordingly, West German historians might have realized that, in contrast to the interwar years, intellectual isolation was no longer a feasible option. This would not mean that one could necessarily speak of the West German historians’ “Westernization”—or even “Americanization”—after 1945.⁷¹ But it is impossible to ignore

⁷⁰ Allan Megill, “Objectivity for Historians,” in Id., *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: a Contemporary Guide to Practice* (Chicago, 2007) 111.

⁷¹ See Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen?*

the fact that the American perception of German historiography now mattered more to the West Germans than it previously had.

The second chapter moves across the Atlantic. It outlines the field of modern German history in the United States, which was changing in two significant ways during the postwar years. On the one hand, it expanded quantitatively. Not only did the overall number of professorships increase, but German history also received more attention than before, since the rise of National Socialism in a highly civilized country demanded explanation. On the other hand, the professoriate underwent a transformation: émigré scholars helped internationalize the field, and American scholars from different ethnic and social backgrounds were able to enter the profession. This chapter will therefore explore how these significant changes affected the way modern German history was written in the United States during these years. It surveys the “leading schools” in the United States, i.e. PhD-granting institutions with specialists in German history. This limitation comes at a price; we will not attain a comprehensive impression of the kind of German history that was taught at American institutions of higher education. Yet this chapter will cover the institutions whose scholars produced widely-read studies on modern Germany, who trained future generations of historians, who wrote reviews in academic journals, and whom German historians viewed as representing the American historical profession

While German history in the United States was rapidly expanding, West German historians of all ages came into contact with the American historical profession. Accordingly, the third chapter explores how exactly these encounters unfolded. Established scholars sometimes reactivated their pre-war contacts with American colleagues, sometimes ventured into unknown territory. Some spent one or two semesters as visiting professors in the United

States, while others went on shorter lecture tours. A number of scholars participated in faculty exchange programs, sponsored by those American organizations that explicitly or implicitly wanted to familiarize German academics with “Western” approaches. This chapter seeks to determine whether and how these older scholars were influenced by their contacts with American academia and the United States more generally. The cases of these individuals differ insofar as they did not always show the openness so characteristic of the younger generation. In some cases, it will also become apparent that the Germans went to the United States in order to promote certain views on German history. Apart from the established scholars, a number of young German historians encountered the American historical profession, as well as related fields, as students throughout the 1950s and 1960s. They have since, without exception, emphasized how formative these early experiences were, and have usually maintained close relationships with American colleagues throughout their careers. Therefore this chapter explores the exact nature of the experiences of these young German historians. Did they develop an interest in the area or period they had studied while in the United States? Did they borrow methodologically from American scholars they had encountered during their visits? Or did certain interpretations prevalent in the United States have an impact on their later scholarship?

The fourth chapter returns to the Federal Republic and examines the historiographical developments of the 1960s and early 1970s, again from a transatlantic perspective. Many German historians perceived this period as one of acute crisis, because the social sciences seemed to threaten Clio’s role as a *Leitwissenschaft* – an academic discipline that also played

a significant role in public debates.⁷² Even worse, history as a subject in high schools came under increasing pressure as educational reformers attempted to integrate it into a more comprehensive social studies course. Thus some scholars felt compelled to reflect upon and defend the very necessity of history.⁷³ However, the sense of crisis was not only triggered by these extra-academic developments but also partly a result of dramatic changes within the field. Some historians strongly objected to the methodological reforms that younger scholars in particular proposed. The most controversial reformist project concerned the attempt of a few historians at the Universität Bielefeld to redefine history as a social science. Focusing on the rise of the so-called *Bielefelder Schule* and its project *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* during these years, this chapter asks to what extent these reforms took place in a transatlantic context: were American historians of modern Germany active participants, sources of inspiration, or attentive observers? My analysis in this chapter will proceed along three dimensions: interpretive, methodological, and political. *Interpretively*, the fierce debates between the historiographical camps revolved around continuities, or the lack thereof, in modern German history, more specifically between 1871 and 1945. At the center was the question of whether Germany had followed a “special path” (*Sonderweg*), marked by economic modernity and political backwardness, in comparison with Great Britain and France. *Methodologically*, proponents of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* argued, against more traditional political and diplomatic historians, for a greater interdisciplinary orientation of the profession, which eventually led to the integration of political history into a synthetical

⁷² Klaus Grosse Kracht, *Die zankende Zukunft: Historische Kontroversen in Deutschland nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2005), chapter 3.

⁷³ Reinhart Koselleck, “Wozu noch Historie?” *Historische Zeitschrift* 212 (1971), 1-14.

social history or history of society (*Gesellschaftsgeschichte*).⁷⁴ The political dimension concerns first the academic politics of that period as they played out at the *Historikertage* (the biannual conventions of the German Historians' Association) and on other occasions. More specifically, I will ask how the protagonists of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* attempted to establish themselves within the profession, and how the German "traditionalist" historians responded to the iconoclasts' challenge. Second, the study takes a broader perspective and examines these historians' ideas about their role in society. This debate revolved around the question of whether scholars should provide their readers with affirmative or rather critical histories.⁷⁵ But it also touches upon the issue of the historian as a public intellectual.

The fifth and final chapter again looks at the West German historical profession from a transatlantic perspective. By the mid- to late 1970s, the Bielefelder Schule had established itself institutionally and interpretively within the field. As these historians were becoming part of the academic establishment themselves, they in turn came under attack from new, oppositional historiographical groups such British neo-Marxists and West German historians of everyday life (*Alltagshistoriker*) and women's historians.⁷⁶ This chapter briefly explores these fierce debates and then takes stock of the long-term impact that the Bielefelder Schule has had on the West German historical profession. Because its protagonists have, as public

⁷⁴ For a contemporary critique of the *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*'s program, see Andreas Hillgruber, "Politische Geschichte in moderner Sicht", *Historische Zeitschrift* 216 (1973), 529-552; Klaus Hildebrand, "Geschichte oder 'Gesellschaftsgeschichte'? Die Notwendigkeit einer politischen Geschichtsschreibung von den internationalen Beziehungen", *Historische Zeitschrift* 223 (1976), 328-357.

⁷⁵ Of course, what constitutes "critical" or "affirmative" in a specific context is rather subjective. Historians from very different political backgrounds have leveled the charge of "political bias" against each other.

⁷⁶ Adelheid von Saldern, "'Schwere Geburten': Neue Forschungsrichtungen in der bundesrepublikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft", *Werkstatt Geschichte* 40 (2005), 5-30.

intellectuals, participated in many debates outside of the ivory tower, their contribution to the intellectual life of the Federal Republic more generally also receives attention. Arguably, now is a very apt moment to do this, since Hans-Ulrich Wehler in 2008 published the fifth and last volume of his monumental *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, which incidentally deals with German history during the very period under consideration in this study.⁷⁷ The project *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* has now been realized, most of the dust has settled, and the historicization can begin.

⁷⁷ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte Volume V: Von der Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten zur Vereinigung 1949-1990* (München, 2008). See also Patrick Bahners/Alexander Cammann (eds.), *Bundesrepublik und DDR. Die Debatte um Hans-Ulrich Wehler's Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (München, 2009), which contains responses to this final volume.

CHAPTER 1

Postwar West German Historiography with a Transatlantic Touch

On 8 October 1951, Martin Göhring, founding director of the recently established *Institut für Europäische Geschichte* (IEG) in Mainz wrote to Guy Stanton Ford, secretary general of the American Historical Association. Göhring stated that he was motivated “by the question of organizing close contacts between American, English, French and German historians for the purpose of intensifying historical research, particularly in the field of modern history.” He emphasized that it was “our intention [...] to achieve a revision of history’s interpretation by means of international cooperation, one of the most urgent tasks of our day.”¹ Apart from fostering an international community of scholars, Göhring also hoped to secure American financial support for the establishment of a library at the institute.

It certainly made sense for Göhring to appeal to the AHA. While the Mainz institute had been founded as the result of a French occupation initiative, it had early on received support by the United States High Commission as well.² Against the background of a German historical profession with a Prussian-Protestant bent, this had been an attempt at a “de-Prussification” (*Entpreussung* was the commonly used term) of modern German history.

¹ Martin Göhring to Guy Stanton Ford, 8 October 1951, Library of Congress (hereafter LoC), American Historical Association (AHA) papers, Box 174, Secretary File.

² For the history of the institute’s foundation, see Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 243 and 274-277; Ernst Schulin, “Universalgeschichte und abendländische Entwürfe,” in Heinz Duchhardt/Gerhard May (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft um 1950* (Mainz, 2002), 50-53.

While few American historians believed in a simple one-way street from Luther—or Frederick the Great or anyone else—to Hitler, most held the view that their German colleagues had to reevaluate many of their cherished assumptions about the course of modern German history. In addition, quite a few argued that a broader, European rather than a strictly national perspective was now the order of the day. By the mid- to late 1950s the IEG had become an institution where American scholars saw these needs fulfilled.¹

American historians of modern Germany played an important role in the reconstitution of the German historical profession during the immediate postwar years, either as active participants or as attentive observers. In some cases, Americans had had come into contact with Germany through their military service, in other instances émigré historians took a lively interest in the postwar development of West Germany as well as of the German historical profession.² Moreover, some German scholars were actively seeking contacts with their American colleagues, either reestablishing older ties, or reorienting themselves under drastically altered circumstances. These postwar tendencies illustrate that German history no longer “belonged” to German historians alone. German scholars realized that they could not ignore American (as well as other foreign) views on their past. By no means did these academics immediately replace their defensive and nationalist attitudes with post-national ones. Accordingly, the claim that a foreign historian because of his or her nationality was unable to properly understand and empathize with the peculiar course of German history

¹ See Chester V. Easum, “Review of Martin Göhring, ed., *Europa. Erbe und Aufgabe*,” *Journal of Modern History* 30 (1958), 47-48.

² Hajo Holborn, *American Military Government: Its Organization and Policies* (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1947); Hoyt Price and Carl Schorske, *The Problem of Germany* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1947); Leonard Krieger, “The Inter-Regnum in Germany: March-August 1945,” *Political Science Quarterly* 64 (1949), 507-532.

could be heard well into the early 1960s. But even the most conservative West Germans realized that their American colleagues were not a *quantité négligeable* anymore, and thus it was preferable to maintain a steady dialogue with them.

This chapter will therefore provide a survey of the West German historical profession's development and of American views on this process between 1945 and the early 1960s. Yet before one can assess the consequences of the postwar changes and the role of the transatlantic network for the West German historical profession, it is necessary to briefly consider the Nazi years and the extent to which the historical profession had complied with the regime. For 1945 did not mark a *Stunde Null* ("zero hour" or tabula rasa) for German society, and the same was true for the historical profession. Only then is it possible to evaluate the reconstitution of the profession immediately after the end of World War II. Likewise, an analysis of the reconstitution and the subsequent development of West German universities during the postwar years will help to explain the broader institutional context in which the West German historians operated.

The Nazi Years

Only belatedly did West German historians begin late to tackle the role of the historical profession in Nazi Germany: the 1960s saw the publication of the first scholarly and journalistic accounts emphasizing the degree to which German historians had either made concessions to or even enthusiastically supported the regime. Karl Ferdinand Werner's essay on German medievalists and Helmut Heiber's monumental study on Walther Frank's *Reichsinstitut für die Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands* shed light on two important aspects

of the larger issue.³ Werner revealed the extent to which German medievalists had projected the origins of the German nation backwards, which coincided with the crude ideas of some among the Nazi leadership.⁴ Heiber provided a thoroughly comprehensive account of Walter Frank's failed attempt to establish a purely National Socialist research institution. Yet Werner's and Heiber's insights coexisted for the next three decades with the immediate postwar argument that the historical profession as a whole had adhered to highest academic standards while keeping strict political distance from the regime.⁵

After a series of publications in the 1990s, this view is no longer tenable.⁶ As Hans Rothfels argued already in 1965, "the fierce opposition of many historians toward the republican-democratic state and the parliamentary system represented a point of affinity with National Socialist propaganda."⁷ Ironically, the émigré Rothfels himself in the 1990s stood at

³ Karl Ferdinand Werner, *Das NS-Geschichtsbild und die Geschichtswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1967); Helmut Heiber, *Walther Frank und sein Reichsinstitut für die Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands* (Stuttgart, 1966).

⁴ For Heinrich Himmler's attempts to reinterpret the Middle Ages, see Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler. Biographie* (Berlin, 2008), 224-225, 281, 306-308.

⁵ Gerhard Ritter put it most succinctly in his article "Der deutsche Professor im 'Dritten Reich'", *Die Gegenwart* 1 (1945), 23-26, which later appeared as "The German Professor and the Third Reich", *The Review of Politics* 8 (1946), 242-254. Ritter's conclusion set the tone for his (and other Conservatives') defensive historiographical position: "No foreigner can fully understand what a heartbreak and what a perversion of patriotic sentiment all this was for us Germans who were opposed to National Socialism and who had to sacrifice our own blood and the blood of our sons for a hated cause." That foreigners, including foreign historians of modern Germany inevitably lacked the proper understanding for the predicaments of German history—Nazi and older—remained a popular argument well into the 1960s.

⁶ Surveys of the debate which resurfaced at the Historikertag 1998 provide Winfried Schulze and Otto Gerhard Oexle (eds.), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999) as well as Rüdiger Hohls/Konrad H. Jarausch (eds.), *Versäumte Fragen: Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart, 2000).

⁷ Hans Rothfels, "Geschichtswissenschaft in den dreissiger Jahren", in Andreas Flitner (ed.), *Deutsches Geistesleben und Nationalsozialismus: eine Vortragsreihe der Universität Tübingen* (Tübingen, 1965).

the center of one of the fiercest debates about historians' involvement with the Nazi regime, and his evaluation applied very well to his own attitude during the early 1930s.⁸

Following the establishment of the Nazi regime, only very few university historians had joined the NSDAP, which after World War II served as proof for the intellectual independence of the historical profession. Without a question, this position merely reflected wishful thinking. One simply cannot measure ideological proximity to Nazi ideology by counting the number of Nazi party members among historians. As was the case in German society at large, many historians shared important values and sentiments expressed by National Socialism without being completely committed to the regime. Gerhard Ritter provides an excellent case in point: at the end of World War II, Ritter had been imprisoned by the Gestapo because of loose contacts with a resistance circle, and he subsequently claimed to speak with particular moral authority. And yet Ritter had in his writings made numerous concessions to the Nazi regime. His biography of Frederick the Great, published in 1936, contained several passages with only thinly veiled approval of Nazi German foreign policies.⁹ Even Friedrich Meinecke's record is somewhat mixed: in 1935, he had been removed from the editorship of *Historische Zeitschrift* because of his moderate politics. Yet he welcomed the *Anschluss* of Austria in 1938, celebrated the German victory over France in 1940 as a punishment for the Versailles Treaty, and he made several other remarks that can be labeled at best ambivalent.¹⁰ While most German historians, like their academic

⁸ See Jan Eckel, *Hans Rothfels. Eine intellektuelle Biographie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005); Johannes Hürter/Hans Woller (eds.), *Hans Rothfels und die deutsche Zeitgeschichte* (München, 2005).

⁹ See Christoph Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter: Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf, 2001), 230-239 and 276-278.

¹⁰ See Wolfgang Wippermann, "Friedrich Meineckes *Die Deutsche Katastrophe*. Ein Versuch zur deutschen Vergangenheitsbewältigung", in Michael Erbe (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke heute* (Berlin, 1981), 101.

colleagues in other fields, abhorred the primitive style of National Socialism, they still agreed with considerable parts of the Nazi party's political platform. This agreement illustrates the overlap of various forms of conservatism and neo-conservatism with National Socialism.¹¹

Considering the state and development of the German historical profession during the Weimar Republic, the historians' reaction to the Nazi rise to power did not come as a surprise. As Wolfgang J. Mommsen concluded, "there was a strong tendency to denounce the Weimar system as alien to the German historical tradition and imposed by the victorious Western powers against the wishes of the majority of Germans."¹² Compared to other academic fields, the "Aryanization" of the historical profession had had only limited personal consequences, due to the small number of Jewish scholars. The Nazi regime had to dismiss only three professors in the areas of modern and medieval history—Ernst Kantorowicz, Hans Rothfels, and Richard Salomon. The numbers of dismissed scholars in ancient and legal history were slightly higher; due to the less politicized nature of these fields Jews were more likely to receive appointments.¹³

The German historical profession had always been staunchly conservative, nationalist, and while generally not openly and militantly anti-Semitic, unwilling to grant Jewish scholars access to professorships. During the Weimar Republic, conditions for Jewish scholars had improved slightly. Yet an *Ordinarius* such as Friedrich Meinecke, who took on

¹¹ On this overlap, see the remarks by Hans Mommsen, "Der faustische Pakt der Ostforschung mit dem NS-Regime. Anmerkungen zur Historikerdebatte," in Schulze/Oexle (eds.), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, 265-273. Mommsen adamantly rejects a position that confines the label "National Socialist" to those scholars who found themselves in *complete* agreement with the regime.

¹² Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "German Historiography during the Weimar Republic and the Émigré Historians," in Hartmut Lehmann/James J. Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933* (Cambridge, UK, 1991), 32.

¹³ See Catherine Epstein, *A Past Renewed: A Catalogue of German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), 2.

and supported a significant number of Jewish students, had still been exceptional.¹⁴ The case of Meinecke's student Gerhard Masur reveals the difficulties which scholars of Jewish origins were still facing: Masur had been born to parents of Jewish background who had converted to Protestantism. After the end of World War I, Masur joined the anti-Republican and anti-democratic *Freikorps*, and in 1920 he participated in the Kapp-Putsch, an attempt to overthrow the parliamentary Weimar democracy. Thus Masur fit well into the interwar historical profession politically, and methodologically he was no revolutionary, either. Yet in 1927, the Universität Frankfurt am Main rejected his *Habilitation* attempt on anti-Semitic grounds.¹⁵ While other universities were less anti-Semitic—Hans Rosenberg became a *Privatdozent* (adjunct lecturer) at the Universität Köln—the overall number of Jewish scholars remained negligible, especially in modern German history. Yet, the purge ensuing after 1933 affected not only historians already holding professorships but also, and mostly, those in the advanced stages of their academic training and those who had finished their second book but were still teaching as *Privatdozenten*. Fritz T. Epstein, a specialist in Russian history, was forced to emigrate just after completing his *Habilitation*, which he could no longer submit after the establishment of the Nazi regime. To name but a few, Hans Baron and Dietrich Gerhard taught as *Privatdozenten*; Felix Gilbert, Edgar Rosen, and George W. F. Hallgarten had received their PhDs but not yet finished their second book.

¹⁴ Felix Gilbert, "The Historical Seminar of the University of Berlin in the Twenties", in Lehmann/Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past*, 67-70.

¹⁵ See Gerhard Masur's letter to Friedrich Meinecke, April 20, 1927, in Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke. Akademischer Lehrer und emigrierte Schüler: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen, 1910-1977* (Munich, 2006), 195-197.

Notable changes after 1933 also concerned editorships of some scholarly journals and positions within research institutions outside the universities. Friedrich Meinecke lost his position as editor of *Historische Zeitschrift* to Karl Alexander von Müller, a committed National Socialist, who proclaimed in his first editorial note that “the historical profession does not come empty-handed to the new German state and its youth.”¹⁶ His role in the *Gleichschaltung* of the profession’s leading journal did not keep Müller from being honored by one of his students in the same journal after 1945.¹⁷ Wilhelm Mommsen lost his position as editor of *Vergangenheit and Gegenwart*, as he was deemed politically unreliable.¹⁸ All in all, it is fair to offer a somewhat ambivalent conclusion: on the one hand the Nazi regime clearly did not succeed in its attempted *Gleichschaltung* of the German historical profession, and this failure was due to differences in style and content alike. Yet on the other hand the overwhelming majority of historians found themselves in at least partial agreement with Nazi policies—thus the failure to bring them in line did not have profoundly negative consequences for the regime.

Since the impact of National Socialism on German historians was somewhat limited, the profession survived denazification relatively unscathed. Twenty-four academics temporarily lost their position, but, as Winfried Schulze has argued, this was less surprising than their swift reintegration of many of them.¹⁹ The return of “tainted” colleagues did often depend more on sheer luck or political and professional connections than the degree of

¹⁶ Karl Alexander von Müller, “Zum Geleit”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 153 (1936), 4.

¹⁷ See Heinz Gollwitzer, “Karl Alexander von Müller: ein Nachruf”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 205 (1967), 295-322.

¹⁸ Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 37.

¹⁹ Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 127

complicity. Wilhelm Mommsen, the father of the historian twins Hans and Wolfgang J. Mommsen, lost his chair at the University of Marburg, while Percy Ernst Schramm and Egmont Zechlin soon resumed their positions. Politically “clean” historians were often more than happy to vouch for their “tainted” colleagues. Fritz Wagner, who like Theodor Schieder had received his PhD under Karl Alexander von Müller, and whose distance from the Nazi regime prevented him from obtaining a chair during World War II, provided a *Persilschein* (an unofficial yet often decisive statement) for Schieder.²⁰ It seems that for most German historians political differences were clearly outweighed by a shared sense of belonging to an academic community. In general, the ambivalent legacy of National Socialism made the rehabilitation of historical scholarship difficult, because it seemed not to require as drastic a restructuring as in other areas.

Institutional developments

Institutionally, the fifteen postwar years can be divided into a period of reconstruction (1945-1950) and a period of expansion (1950-1960). The reopening of the universities took place very swiftly, and while the Allies initially placed severe restrictions on the teaching of history in high schools, the universities were not affected by such measures. Already in 1949 a historian at the University of Bonn thus offered a seminar on “German historiography since 1945”—apparently he thought there was some ground to cover.²¹ During the period of expansion, the number of full professors (*Ordinarien*) rose from ca. 50 (1950) to 80 (1960),

²⁰ Fritz Wagner, Statement, January 6, 1946, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 367. It appears highly unlikely that Wagner really believed in Schieder’s “inner distance” to the Nazi regime, as he wrote in his statement. Even an émigré such as Hans Rothfels took a rather generous approach toward former Nazi colleagues. See Eckel, *Hans Rothfels*, 283-284.

²¹ See Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 24.

before nearly tripling to 210 (1975).²² These numbers encompass all historical periods and geographical areas; for modern German history Wolfgang Weber lists 26 (1950), 33 (1960), and 71 (1970) full professors.²³

The postwar years also saw the establishment of a number of research institutions, some affiliated with universities, others existing independently. The foundation of the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, originally named *Institut für die Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Politik*, proved particularly controversial.²⁴ While politicians engaged in the process tended to emphasize the pedagogic responsibilities of a future institute, informing German citizens about the crimes of National Socialism and thus strengthening German democracy, historians insisted on scholarly autonomy. Referring to the politicization of academia during the Nazi years, they opposed any political intervention in their work. At first glance, this may seem to have been an entirely convincing position of historians concerned with their academic freedom. Yet this interpretation captures only part of the story.

The “political”—as opposed to the “academic”—position was not driven by ulterior motives but rather democratic concerns. Some of the politicians involved in the controversy were well aware of the ambiguous role many historians had played during both the interwar and the Nazi years. The Social Democratic *Ministerpräsident* (governor) of Hesse, for example, referred to the “poor political service” that German scholars had performed in the

²² Werner Conze, “Die Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft seit 1945: Bedingungen und Ergebnisse”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 225 (1977), 18.

²³ Wolfgang Weber, *Priester der Klio: Historisch-sozialwissenschaftliche Studien zur Herkunft und Karriere deutscher Historiker und zur Geschichte der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft 1800-1970* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 53.

²⁴ For the early history of the institute, see Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 229-242; John Gimbel, “The Origins of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte: Scholarship, Politics, and the American Occupation”, *American Historical Review* 70 (1965), 714-731.

past.²⁵ But even politicians from the conservative Christian Democrats clashed with historians, above all Gerhard Ritter, and it seems fair to say that the actual point of contention was not whether the institute should contribute to the education of the German public, but how exactly this education was supposed to take shape. Even if German historians in these debates often hid behind their cherished “scholarly objectivity” in order to counter political demands, they at the same time attempted to establish themselves as public intellectuals and thus reach beyond the ivory tower.²⁶

The landscape of scholarly journals experienced profound changes as well. New, untainted scholars took the positions of disgraced editors who had served during the Nazi regime. Ludwig Dehio, who had spent the war years in inner emigration, replaced Nazi historian Karl Alexander von Müller as editor of *Historische Zeitschrift*. With *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* (GWU) an entirely new journal emerged. Mediating between higher education and secondary education, it addressed in particular high school teachers of history, but also assumed a significant role in scholarly debates. And yet, for scholars working on modern Germany the number of journals remained fairly limited, and the decisions what would be published remained with a small number of influential scholars. Among them were Theodor Schieder, editor of *Historische Zeitschrift* between 1959 and 1984, and Karl Dietrich Erdmann, who held the same position for *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* between 1950 and 1989. A new enterprise of a very different kind was the review journal *Das historisch-politische Buch* (HPB). Established in 1953 by members of the *Ranke Gesellschaft*, the HPB—like the *Gesellschaft* itself—essentially served as a venue for

²⁵ Quoted after Gimbel, “The Origins of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte,” 721.

²⁶ Gerhard Ritter’s ambitions are documented by Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter*, 416-435.

those few historians whose Nazi past hindered or even prevented their postwar careers in West Germany.²⁷ Several German historians objected to the use of Leopold von Ranke's name, as the recourse to "objectivity" à la Ranke hardly succeeded in veiling the nationalist to National Socialist positions held by the *Gesellschaft's* members.²⁸ Openly apologetic views, espoused above all by the former president of the University of Hamburg Gustav Adolf Rein, characterized the *Ranke Gesellschaft's* yearbook even more than the review journal.²⁹ In contrast to these dubious organs, the new journal *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (VfZ), edited by Hans Rothfels, became a very important publication devoted initially to the interwar period and the Nazi years.

While some scholarly journals were affected materially by the dire conditions of the immediate postwar years, the reconstitution of the historians' professional association unfolded amidst political problems.³⁰ The Association of German Historians (*Verband deutscher Historiker*) had been established in 1895, but had lost its function during the 1930s, when Nazi historians had attempted to reorganize the profession according to the needs of the regime. Now, after the end of the war, the question of how—as well as if—an association should be organized contained both a domestic and an international dimension. Internationally, it seemed necessary to represent German historians through a common, official organization, or so the overwhelming majority of historians believed. After all, this promised to accelerate their formal reintegration into the International Committee of

²⁷ See Manfred Asendorf, "Was weiter wirkt: Die 'Ranke-Gesellschaft' – Vereinigung für Geschichte im öffentlichen Leben", 1999. *Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* 4 (1989), 29-61.

²⁸ Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 204.

²⁹ Gustav Adolf Rein, "Zum Geleit," *Das Historisch-Politische Buch* 1 (1953), 1.

³⁰ See Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 159-182.

Historical Sciences (ICHHS).³¹ Yet the organization's establishment on a national level proved to be much more controversial, since a number of different factions or camps competed for influence.

A first, informal meeting of a number of influential historians took place in Göttingen in November 1946. The participants' ideas regarding the institutional and intellectual future of the profession differed remarkably. While Peter Rassow of University of Cologne advocated writing European rather than German history, many of his colleagues insisted on the need to provide the German people with a nation-centered history, which they saw as particularly important at a time when the future of the German state was unclear. Gerhard Ritter, who had just argued along those lines in his recently published essay *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht*, suggested a careful revision of previously held historiographical assumptions without abandoning the focus on the German nation.³² Finally, some participants were concerned more with the past than with the profession's future: Percy Ernst Schramm of the University of Göttingen aroused strong resistance when he defended the necessity of the Ardennes Offensive of December 1944.³³

The controversies surrounding the establishment of a professional organization were also often of confessional nature. Catholic historians had always been a minority within the profession, comprising approximately 30% of all professorships.³⁴ After the end of World War II, calls for a "de-Prussification" of German history did not only demand a less

³¹ For this question, 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, 2005).

³² Gerhard Ritter, *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht: ein Beitrag zur historisch-politischen Neubesinnung* (Stuttgart, 1946).

³³ Schulze *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 160-161.

³⁴ Wolfgang Weber, *Priester der Klio*, 83-91.

nationalist, but also a less Protestant perspective. Accordingly, Catholic historians were opposed to Gerhard Ritter's ambitious attempts to secure a leading position within the postwar German historical profession, since they associated the Protestant nationalist Ritter—correctly—with both orientations. Karl Buchheim of the Technical University of Munich voiced doubts shared by several colleagues when he claimed it to be impossible to achieve a historiographical reorientation if Ritter were to play a leading role in this undertaking.³⁵

Ultimately, it would take two more years until the Association of German Historians (*Verband der Historiker Deutschlands, VHD*) came into existence. In October 1948, members of the two oldest German historical institutions, the Historical Commission of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences (founded in 1858) and the board of editors of *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (an institution devoted to the study of medieval history, founded in 1819) assembled in Munich and decided to reestablish a national professional organization, which was supposed to hold its first convention in September 1949. At the meeting in October 1948, a foundational committee consisting of four historians emerged and suggested electing Gerhard Ritter chairman, despite the fact that resistance against his candidacy had arisen inside as well as outside the historical profession.³⁶ Apart from the aforementioned reservations by Catholic historians, the French occupation authorities (Ritter taught at Freiburg University, located in the French zone) suspected Ritter of “nationalist” and

³⁵ Karl Buchheim, *Eine sächsische Lebensgeschichte: Erinnerungen 1889-1972* (München, 1996), 256-257. The contemporary slogan commonly used by historians was “reorientation of historical consciousness” (Neuorientierung des Geschichtsbewusstseins).

³⁶ See the announcement in *Historische Zeitschrift* 169 (1949), 226-227.

“authoritarian” tendencies.³⁷ In June of 1949, these authorities had even claimed that they regarded the “centralist and authoritarian” foundation of the VHD as illegal.³⁸ Since they regarded Ritter as “political representative of a nationalist reaction” he temporarily contemplated withdrawing his candidacy. Yet broad support of a dozen leading historians at an informal meeting during the convention in Munich convinced him otherwise, and the VHD’s members elected Ritter chairman on September 14, 1949.

Despite these initial difficulties, the convention itself unfolded successfully. While the political division of Germany had already been established, many historians from the Soviet zone attended the convention. To be sure, several historians (among them Friedrich Meinecke and Wilhelm Schüssler) had already left the Soviet zone, and Fritz Hartung of the University of Berlin (now located in the city’s Eastern part and soon to be renamed “Humboldt University”) had requested retirement for political reasons.³⁹ Thus only few “bourgeois” historians still held academic appointments at universities in what soon became the German Democratic Republic. Yet the permanent split into two ideologically opposed camps lay still ahead.

The early 1950s saw a series of contradictory developments: on the one hand, the East German regime and the historians who supported it wholeheartedly attempted to bring all East German scholars in line. As Martin Sabrow has shown in his study on the first two decades of the East German historical profession, the regime did not simply coerce Clio into a politicized and subservient field. Rather, this was a process that unfolded from within at

³⁷ Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 168-170.

³⁸ Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter*, 439

³⁹ Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 186.

least as much as it was forced upon it from outside.⁴⁰ On the other hand, East German historians were unsure whether the best course of action was isolation from their West German colleagues, or rather aggressive competition, in order to demonstrate the superiority of Marxist-Leninist historiography over its “bourgeois” counterpart. Accordingly, East Germans skipped the second historians’ convention in Marburg two years after Munich, only to attend the third meeting in Bremen in 1953 with a large delegation. The East German historical profession’s official organ, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, established in 1953, exacerbated the tensions between East and West by publishing harsh attacks on leading West German historians. For example, the report on the Bremen convention castigated Theodor Schieder’s “imperialist claim for German domination in Eastern Europe” and labeled him a “reactionary opponent of bourgeois democracy.”⁴¹ In turn, these West Germans succumbed to the heated atmosphere of the early Cold War, overlooking the differences between dogmatic Communist party hacks and unorthodox Marxists with whom a scholarly dialogue might have been possible. An additional reason for this almost non-existing dialogue was the scarcity of leftist historians in the Federal Republic.

By 1955, an institutional split between East and West had become more and more likely. The VHD’s executive board passed a resolution not to allow a large number of Marxist historians to join the association, worried that these would eventually form a majority within the VHD and thus determine its future course. East Germans in turn

⁴⁰ For the development of the East German historical profession, see Martin Sabrow, *Das Diktat des Konsenses: Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR 1949-1969* (München, 2001), 36-37.

⁴¹ Heinz Kamnitzer, “Zum Vortrag von Theodor Schieder, ‘Das Verhältnis von politischer und gesellschaftlicher Verfassung und die Krise des bürgerlichen Liberalismus’”, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 1 (1953), 909-912, quotes on 912.

contemplated the establishment of an association of their own. This led to a problem regarding the historians' representation in the ICHS, which had made it clear in 1956 that if an East German historical association emerged the VHD could no longer claim to represent all German historians and would thus be forced to leave the ICHS.⁴² During the next two years, East German party-line historians radicalized their campaign against the few remaining "bourgeois" colleagues in the GDR, in some cases even threatening to revoke academic degrees. The intensified struggle against "counter-revolutionary" and "revisionist" elements was a result not only of the hardliners' dominance within the East German scholarly community, but also of political directives given by the SED's Central Committee after the reform Communist experiment in Hungary had ended so violently.⁴³ These developments alone most likely would have sufficed to cause a permanent break between historians from the two Germanies. Yet for fairness' sake, one should mention that in the Federal Republic dogmatic anti-Marxists within the VHD won over those colleagues representing a more pragmatic, conciliatory line.

The VHD convention in Trier in 1958 saw the final culmination of this incipient division. Aware of the developments within the GDR, the VHD's executive board passed a declaration refusing to let speak any East German historian who intended to make political statements or supported the new, hard line. Appalled by this form of "censorship", the East German delegation left the convention and soon afterwards established its own association, the German Society of Historians (*Deutsche Historikergesellschaft*).⁴⁴ This institutional split

⁴² Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 191.

⁴³ Sabrow, *Das Diktat des Konsenses*, 267-268.

⁴⁴ Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter*, 451-452.

brought back the question of who was to represent German historians on an international level. Here, the West Germans were clearly in a better position, as the VHD's former chairman Gerhard Ritter (succeeded in 1953 by Hermann Aubin) had become a member of the ICHS's Bureau in 1955. Other West Germans attempted to mobilize international support for their position—for example Hans Rothfels, who tried to convince Boyd Shafer, executive secretary of the American Historical Association (AHA), to reject the East German membership application.⁴⁵ Ultimately, the West Germans were successful: the Bureau of the ICHS, opposed to an East German accession, refused to let the general assembly of the next international congress debate the issue and decided instead to postpone the debate until the following congress. East German historians ultimately gained international recognition only in 1970.⁴⁶

By the late 1950s, the West German historical profession had thus regained at least some of its international standing. As the escalating Cold War accelerated the political and military integration of West Germany into the Western bloc, it had similarly fortunate consequences for the West German historical profession. German historians themselves realized that intellectual isolation was no longer a viable option. Invoking the political situation in the early 1950s, Martin Göhring in his aforementioned letter to the AHA emphasized the “importance of strengthening of “conscience of unity and community of the

⁴⁵ See the letter by the AHA's executive secretary Boyd Shafer to Arthur P. Whitaker (Chairman, Comm. on Intl Act.), April 1 1960, which detailed Rothfels efforts: “Hans Rothfels (President of the German Historical Association) was in the office this week to talk about the split between the West and East German historians and the attempt the Eastern ones are making to get separate representation in ICHS. The question will be presented at Stockholm and hotly debated. We ought to have a determined policy. I'd favor trying to postpone a decision. We need to talk, though. What do you think?”, LoC, AHA papers, Box 668

⁴⁶ Erdmann, *Toward a Global Community of Historians*, 245-247.

European peoples who still enjoy their freedom.”⁴⁷ Under the new political circumstances, American historians may have been more receptive to an intellectual reintegration of their German colleagues. Internally, the profession had not only consolidated itself, but also expanded slightly, as the number of professorships had increased. In addition, a number of autonomous research institutions and projects testified to the significance West Germany attributed to its historians. Yet despite these quantitative changes, it was still a relatively small number of scholars who occupied influential positions. It is to these major figures that we now turn.

The personal dimension

An account of the postwar German historical profession discussing the significance of a few leading scholars might run the risk of appearing old-fashioned. After all, the times when only great men were believed to make history—or historiography in this case—have been passé for a while. Yet if one considers the structure of the profession, especially in the decade and a half after 1945, this approach seems unavoidable: prior to the expansion of the field in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the founding of new universities and the enlargement of the existing ones, a few West German historians wielded tremendous power, whether as officers in professional associations, editors of scholarly journals, or due to their standing as *Ordinarien* (full professors) at venerable universities. And apart from the profession’s major figures, it is worth asking who was part of this scholarly community—and who was not.

⁴⁷ Göhring to Guy Stanton Ford, 8 October 1951, Library of Congress, AHA papers, Box 174, Secretary File. Göhring added: “It is evident that historians ought to bear a main responsibility in this task.”

Approaching the historical profession through a generational lens helps us understand the specific experiences historians shared. The older generation influential after 1945 consisted of historians born in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Their values had been shaped during the late German Empire, which meant that many only reluctantly accepted the democratic state of Weimar. World War I had for most of them epitomized a caesura of far-reaching consequences.⁴⁸ Scholars such as Gerhard Ritter, Siegfried A. Kaehler, Hans Rothfels, and Egmont Zechlin all had fought in the war, some of them as volunteers. Rothfels had lost a leg in the war, Zechlin an arm. When German historians in the 1960s argued about causes, conduct, and consequences of the Great War, many representatives of this generation had not only a scholarly but also a personal stake in the debate. Some of them managed to occupy influential positions well into the 1960s; Ritter (1949-1953) and Rothfels (1958-1962) served as chairmen of the VHD, as did Hermann Aubin (1953-1958), who also for more than four decades (1926-1967) edited the main journal for social and economic history, the *Vierteljahrsschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*.

The next generation that would dominate the West German historical profession from the mid-to-late 1950s to the late 1970s and even beyond comprised scholars born around 1910. Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze, Karl-Dietrich Erdmann were the three leading figures of this generation. All of them chaired the VHD, Erdmann from 1962 to 1967, Schieder between 1967 and 1972, and Conze from 1972 to 1976. Schieder edited the profession's main organ, *Historische Zeitschrift*, from 1957 to 1984, Erdmann edited

⁴⁸ Their response to the German Empire's defeat in World War I in general and to the "War Guilt Clause" of the Versailles Treaty in particular has been documented by Wolfgang Jäger, *Historische Forschung und politische Kultur in Deutschland. Die Debatte 1914-1980 über den Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Göttingen, 1980), 68-88.

Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht even longer, between 1950 and 1989. Conze, soon after moving to the University of Heidelberg in 1957, established a working group for social history, the *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte*, which strove to establish and strengthen a new kind of structural and social history.⁴⁹ Especially Conze and Schieder trained a significant number of historians who subsequently shaped the West German historical profession themselves.⁵⁰ The fact that both Schieder and Conze had been students of Hans Rothfels at the University of Königsberg in the early 1930s testifies to the close-knit character of the German historical profession.⁵¹

If one counts a large number of students as proof of an influential academic career, Fritz Fischer (born 1908) needs to be added to this list. Even though he insisted on portraying himself as an outsider, and despite the fact that he lacked the institutional clout which Conze, Erdmann, and Schieder possessed, Fischer through his 1960s studies on the origins and the course of World War I attracted one hundred PhD students whose dissertations substantiated and reinforced Fischer's own views.⁵² Historians disagree on whether a distinct "Fischer

⁴⁹ Conze's career has been documented in the masterly study by Thomas Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte. Werner Conze und die westdeutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (München, 2001).

⁵⁰ Schieder's best known students include Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Hemut Berding, and Lothar Gall; among Conze's students were Wolfgang Schieder (Theodor Schieder's son), Dieter Groh, and Volker Sellin. Hans Mommsen worked as research associate/*Assistent* for Conze.

⁵¹ Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte*, 24-47, details the personal relations between Rothfels and his students. For an extremely critical view, see Karl Heinz Roth, "Richtung halten": Hans Rothfels und die neokonservative Geschichtsschreibung diesseits und jenseits des Atlantik," *Sozial.Geschichte* 18 (2003), 41-71.

⁵² For a list of Fischer's students and their dissertation topics, see Dirk Stegmann/Bernd-Jürgen Wendt/Peter-Christian Witt (eds.), *Industrielle Gesellschaft und politisches System. Beiträge zur politischen Sozialgeschichte* (Bonn, 1978), 453-461. As of 1978, Fischer had advised 102 dissertations.

School” existed;⁵³ yet from the early 1970s onwards, Fischer’s students taught at most universities in Northern Germany.⁵⁴

Apart from generational differences, confessional differences continued to split the profession. As historians came to realize the need to reconsider the German past, Catholic historians emphasized the Protestant bias characterizing the overwhelming majority of scholars in Germany. And the percentage of Catholic historians—who demanded a new perspective on German history—had increased, since the territorial changes after World War II had made West Germany a less Protestant, more Catholic country than the German Empire and Weimar Germany. German universities were state universities, and the respective states’ ministries for culture and education were often involved in appointments of university professors. Political orientation as well as religious affiliation therefore played a role in many cases.⁵⁵ The most striking example of religious influence on academic appointments were the so-called *Konkordatslehrstühle* (“concordat chairs”), in which the appointee had to be Catholic. Such chairs existed at the Universities Bonn, Freiburg, Munich, Münster, Tübingen, and Würzburg.⁵⁶

⁵³ Volker R. Berghahn, “Ostimperium und Weltpolitik - Gedanken zur Langzeitwirkung der ‘Hamburger Schule,’” *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 13.04.2006, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/2006-04-001>.

⁵⁴ Fischer’s students who later attained professorships include Imanuel Geiss (Bremen), Helmut Böhme (Darmstadt), Walter Grab (Hamburg), Peter-Christian Witt (Kassel), Peter Borowsky (Hamburg), Dirk Stegmann (Lüneburg), Joachim Radkau (Bielefeld), Arnold Sywottek (Hamburg), Barbara Vogel (Hamburg), Jens Flemming (Kassel), and Karl Heinrich Pohl (Kiel).

⁵⁵ In 1930, 72% of all full professors of history were Protestant, 24% Catholic. By 1950, the relation was 64% to 36%. See Weber, *Priester der Klio*, 84-85.

⁵⁶ Konrad Tilmann, *Die sogenannten Konkordatsprofessuren. Geschichtliche Entwicklung und heutige Rechtsproblematik* (Diss. iur., Freiburg 1971).

The leading voice among the Catholic historians was Franz Schnabel, author of a celebrated multi-volume history of Germany in the 19th century.⁵⁷ A former high school teacher, Schnabel throughout the Weimar Republic had been an outsider within the profession, teaching engineers at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology. His republican sympathies—Schnabel had vehemently protested against Chancellor von Papen’s coup d’état in Prussia in 1932—prompted the Nazi regime to ban him from publishing his works in 1936. Schnabel was appointed professor at the University of Munich in 1947 where he taught until his retirement in 1962. From 1951 to 1959, Schnabel chaired the prestigious Historical Commission of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences. It is important to emphasize, however, that Schnabel never propagated a narrow Catholic view on German history; as a Catholic liberal he was mostly concerned with providing a counterpoint to the prevailing Prussia-centered historiography which interpreted the foundation of the *kleindeutsch* German Empire in 1871 as a historical necessity and tended to glorify Otto von Bismarck.

Missing from this picture of professional leadership were those scholars who had been forced to emigrate by the Nazi regime. With very few exceptions, these historians did not return after 1945. In recent years historians have argued how much effort German universities undertook in order to undo some of the intellectual damage National Socialism has caused by forcing many talented scholars out of the country. Two factors taken together may account for the low number of émigré historians returning to Germany. The first one was a general lack of interest among German historians to reintegrate them—it seems to have been the clear priority to provide for those scholars who had taught at universities that no

⁵⁷ On Schnabel, see Karl-Egon Lönne, “Franz Schnabel”, in Hans Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Deutsche Historiker. Band 9* (Göttingen, 1982), 81-101; Thomas Hertfelder, *Franz Schnabel und die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft. Geschichtsschreibung zwischen Historismus und Kulturkritik* (Göttingen, 1998).

longer lay on German territory. Historians from the Universities of Strasbourg and Königsberg, for example, swiftly transferred to universities in the future West Germany.⁵⁸

A certain wariness regarding a possible return among those few émigrés who had been offered a position constituted the second factor. After all, most of them had had enormous difficulties to establish themselves in their new home countries—Hajo Holborn’s fast and impressive career at Yale was the exception to the rule. Thus they found it difficult to give up what they had secured for themselves, even more so since in exchange, material insecurity and potential political instability in the emerging West German state would have awaited them. Hans Rosenberg’s example is illuminating: Late in 1947, Rosenberg received an offer from the University of Cologne. Even though his position at Brooklyn College was far from ideal, carrying a heavy teaching load of fifteen hours per week, he declined to return to Germany, apparently for “family reasons.”⁵⁹ Soon afterwards, however, Rosenberg regretted his decision, as he made clear in a letter to his *Doktorvater* Friedrich Meinecke.⁶⁰ Thirty years later, Hans-Ulrich Wehler emphasized the loss the West German historical profession had suffered by not attracting Rosenberg.⁶¹ Wehler argued that a permanent return of Rosenberg to West Germany would have accelerated the establishment of social history within the German historical profession. Only after his retirement from Berkeley (where he

⁵⁸ For the situation at the University of Göttingen which had accepted the sponsorship for the University of Königsberg, see Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte*, 40-44.

⁵⁹ Hans Rosenberg to Friedrich Meinecke, December 4, 1947, in Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke*, 366-367.

⁶⁰ Hans Rosenberg to Friedrich Meinecke, October 6, 1948, in Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke*, 372-373. He added: “I do not think I would decline again if another possibility came up at a good German university.”

⁶¹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Hans Rosenberg,” in Wehler, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung* (Göttingen, 1980), 267-276.

had been appointed Shepard Professor of History in 1959) Rosenberg moved back to the Federal Republic and settled in Freiburg. Rosenberg did, however, spend several semesters in Germany as a visiting professor, at the Free University Berlin in 1950/51, and at the University of Marburg in 1955. In Berlin, Rosenberg quickly assembled a circle of promising younger historians including Gerhard A. Ritter, Gerhard Schulz, Wolfgang Sauer, Karl Dietrich Bracher, Gilbert Ziebura, Otto Büsch, and Franz Ansprenger.⁶²

Yet even after the Federal Republic had arisen out of the ruins of the war, its appeal to émigré historians remained limited. In 1961, the Meinecke student Gerhard Masur declined an offer to succeed Hans Rothfels at University of Tübingen, despite the fact that this position was arguably more prestigious than his professorship at Sweet Briar College in Virginia. In a letter to Rothfels, Masur emphasized that he above all was not ready to give up his American citizenship, which he would have had to do had he returned permanently to Tübingen.⁶³ As the only scholar who found a permanent compromise to this dilemma, Dietrich Gerhard divided his time between St. Louis (where he taught European history at Washington University) and Cologne (where he taught American history).

While most historians, as we have seen, stayed in their new homeland for a number of reasons, it was still not a coincidence that those who did return were the most conservative ones. Within the field of modern German history, only two scholars assumed permanent academic positions in West Germany. After returning from Sweden, Hans-Joachim Schoeps

⁶² Hans Ulrich Wehler, "Vorwort," in Id. (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte heute: Festschrift für Hans Rosenberg zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen, 1974). Gerhard A. Ritter, "Hans Rosenberg," in Id. (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke. Akademischer Lehrer und emigrierte Schüler*, 79-80.

⁶³ See the letters Rothfels to Masur, January 25, 1961, and Masur to Rothfels, February 12, 1961, in Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke*, 214-217. Masur added that his College also would not allow him to "commute" between Germany and the United States, an arrangement which both Rothfels (between Tübingen and Chicago) and Dietrich Gerhard (St. Louis and Cologne) enjoyed.

held a professorship for intellectual and religious history at the University of Erlangen. An ardent monarchist and Prussian loyalist, Schoeps remained at the margins of the historical profession.⁶⁴

The opposite was true for Hans Rothfels, whose influence on at least two succeeding generations of historians can hardly be overestimated.⁶⁵ Long-time editor of the journal *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, heavily involved in the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, professor at the University of Tübingen, and recipient of numerous awards and honors, Rothfels was a towering figure within the German historical profession. Having established himself at the University of Chicago after somewhat more difficult beginnings at Brown University, Rothfels, by returning to Germany faced a relatively high professional price in comparison to most of his fellow émigrés. Yet Rothfels also knew that he was precisely the person the German historical profession needed after the end of the war. His émigré experience lent him moral legitimacy, while his staunch conservatism—Rothfels’ pre-war volkish neo-Conservatism had been considerably ameliorated as a result of his time in the United States—made him fit well into an overwhelmingly conservative field. Yet most important was the historical profession’s reputation Rothfels helped restore, and his colleagues were only too aware of this fact.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ On Schoeps, see Frank-Lothar Kroll, “Geistesgeschichte in interdisziplinärer Sicht. Der Historiker Hans-Joachim Schoeps,” in Id., *Das geistige Preußen. Zur Ideengeschichte eines Staates* (Paderborn, 2001), 209–240.

⁶⁵ The controversy about Hans Rothfels has mostly centered on his political views during the Weimar and early Nazi years, when he taught at the University of Königsberg.

⁶⁶ Walther Peter Fuchs, professor at the University of Erlangen, expressed a view shared by many of his colleagues when he wrote in a birthday letter to Rothfels: “lassen Sie mich bei dieser Gelegenheit noch einen anderen Gedanken aussprechen. Die deutschen Histor[i]ker haben sich durch ihr Verhalten im 3. Reich weithin um den Kredit in der Welt gebracht. Umso mehr schulden wir Ihnen Dank, dass Sie es vor Jahren auf sich genommen haben, in unsere Mitte zurückzukehren. Sie haben uns alle damit einen unschätzbaren Dienst erwiesen. Nehmen Sie mir, einem ganz kleinen Historiker, es bitte nicht übel, wenn er diesen Gedanken einmal

Rothfels' keynote speech at the first postwar *Historikertag*, which sought to reconstitute the historical profession institutionally, epitomizes these issues. The appearance of a scholar who had been forced to leave Germany only a decade earlier, and had subsequently become a highly respected member of the American historical profession, was awkward, since not all of his former colleagues had survived the Nazi years with their academic integrity intact. Moreover, and at least as importantly, Rothfels had given the closing speech at the last *Historikertag* prior to the Nazi seizure of power, held in Göttingen in 1932. His speech at the Munich convention in 1949 thus was supposed to be understood as providing the link to the good traditions of a “better Germany.”⁶⁷ Rothfels had initially hesitated to attend or even speak at the convention, since he did not want to be perceived by his colleagues as a “re-educator.”⁶⁸ Yet Gerhard Ritter and Hermann Aubin managed to change his mind, arguing that it was not only his proven expertise on the Iron Chancellor but also the “new perspective” that he had acquired abroad that made Rothfels the ideal choice.

The topic of his speech, “Bismarck and the nineteenth century”, reveals that the evaluation of the “Iron Chancellor” as the founder of the German national state preoccupied many historians immediately after the war. Rothfels argued that his émigré experience provided him with an intellectual advantage, for he had been able to develop a “universal-historical” instead of a merely “national” perspective on Germany history.⁶⁹ Therefore he

Ihnen gegenüber ausspricht“, Walther Peter Fuchs to Hans Rothfels, 14 May 1956, BAK, Nachlass Hans Rothfels, Box 1.

⁶⁷ Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation*, 76.

⁶⁸ Eckel, *Hans Rothfels*, 229.

⁶⁹ Hans Rothfels, “Bismarck und das 19. Jahrhundert,” in Walther Hubatsch (ed.), *Schicksalwege deutscher Vergangenheit. Beiträge zur geschichtlichen Deutung der letzten hundertfünfzig Jahre* (Düsseldorf, 1950), 233-248. This volume constituted the Festschrift for Siegfried A. Kaehler und was a testament to the extent to which

interpreted Bismarck not only as a German, but also as a European statesman, whose policies were not directed towards German hegemony. The ending of Rothfels' speech was particularly paradigmatic for a distinctly conservative approach to German history. Rothfels invoked Leopold von Ranke, in whose footsteps many scholars attempted to follow, and then quoted from a letter of Ranke's to Bismarck: "The historian can learn from you."⁷⁰

Rethinking Modern German History

"History is written by the victors" is one of the most overused historical truisms. Triumphalist American accounts of the Cold War, written after the collapse of Communism, reveal that such history is often not too illuminating.⁷¹ Already after Germany's victory over France in 1871 Jacob Burckhardt had famously quipped that the "history of the world since Adam" would now be reinterpreted in German terms.⁷² Yet as Reinhart Koselleck has emphasized, the losers also need to write—or rather re-write—history, and their defeat forces them to look more critically at the past and eventually enables them to arrive at new historical insights.⁷³ To what extent, we might then ask, did West German historians take up this challenge?

many German historians struggled to adopt to the new political situation. In the table of contents, several contributors were listed with both their recent and previous (i.e. prior to 1945) affiliation: Reinhard Wittram (Riga/Göttingen), Werner Conze (Posen/Göttingen), Theodor Schieder (Königsberg/Köln), Hans Rothfels (Königsberg/Chicago).

⁷⁰ Rothfels, "Bismarck und das 19. Jahrhundert," 248.

⁷¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York, 2005), is a good example for this genre. For a convincing critique, see Tony Judt, "A Story Still to be Told," *New York Review of Books*, March 23, 2006.

⁷² Jacob Burckhardt, *Briefe. Vollständige und kritische Ausgabe. Mit Benützung des handschriftlichen Nachlasses bearbeitet von Max Burckhardt*, Vol. 5, (Basel, 1963), 184.

⁷³ Reinhart Koselleck, "Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel. Eine historisch-anthropologische Skizze," in Christian Meier/Jörn Rüsen (eds.), *Historische Methode* (München, 1988), 52.

Of course, rethinking German history also required sources, and here the West German historians were again reminded of the increasing erosion of German “control” over the interpretation of their own past. After World War II, German historians were not in possession of all of their nation’s archival files, as the Allies had captured a considerable part of them and shipped them overseas in order to make sure that Nazi crimes would be punished. For obvious reasons, this was of pivotal importance for the German historical profession. Historians have often used the control as well as the selective release of documents to influence the historiographical discourse on delicate and politically charged subject matters: After World War I, the multi-volume edition *Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette*, consisting of diplomatic correspondence between the German Empire and other European states, was published to underscore German innocence regarding the outbreak of the war. This was one important contribution to the rejection of the notorious “war guilt paragraph” of the Versailles Treaty.⁷⁴ While German historians after 1945 did not attempt to contest Nazi Germany’s responsibility for World War II, they still considered the lack of access to archival documents unacceptable. Therefore they fought vigorously for the immediate return of their files, while the Americans were not convinced that this was the preferable option. This “struggle for the files” lasted well into the 1950s.⁷⁵

Observers of postwar West German historiography disagree sharply on the extent to which the historians succeeded or failed to reconsider some of their main tenets. In

⁷⁴ For the post-World War I situation, see Ulrich Heinemann, *Die verdrängte Niederlage. Politische Öffentlichkeit und Kriegsschuldfrage in der Weimarer Republik*, (Göttingen, 1983), and Wolfgang Jäger, *Historische Forschung und politische Kultur in Deutschland. Die Debatte 1914 – 1980 über den Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs*, (Göttingen, 1984) .

⁷⁵ For the post-World War II situation, see Gerhard L. Weinberg, “German Documents in the United States”, *Central European History* 41 (2008), 555-567; and Astrid M. Eckert, *Battle for the Files: The Western Allies and the Return of Captured German Archives after World War II*: (Cambridge, UK, forthcoming).

evaluating these diverging positions, one must keep in mind for which purposes they were developed: many of the very critical assessments of postwar historiography appeared in the later 1960s and 1970s, when the West German historical profession underwent methodological and interpretive changes. Historians representing or at least welcoming this development sought to contrast the new historiographical enterprises with those older traditions they strove to overcome. These iconoclasts did not simply represent one particular “school” and thus advocated a common program. Rather, it was the generation born between ca. 1930 and 1940, which attempted to set themselves apart from their predecessors.⁷⁶ While Charles Maier in the 1990s deplored the lack of “intellectual parricide” in German historiographical debates, the 1970s certainly did not suffer from the same tendencies.⁷⁷ Similarly, historians who stress the accomplishments of the immediate postwar years and attempt to construct a more linear development of historiographical change tend to reject the methodological and interpretive positions of the iconoclasts.⁷⁸ In short, most of these historiographical overviews are as much programmatic statements as they are analyses of past developments. In contrasting the opposing positions, one can draw a parallel between the West German society’s alleged failure to come to terms with the past, and the historical

⁷⁶ Of course, among the most outspoken advocates were the Bielefelder Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Jürgen Kocka. Yet the “movement” was significantly broader and encompassed scholars such as Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus* (Düsseldorf, 1971); Immanuel Geiss, *Studien über Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1972); Immanuel Geiss/Robert Tamchina (eds.), *Ansichten einer zukünftigen Geschichtswissenschaft* (München, 1974); Arnold Sywottek, *Geschichtswissenschaft in der Legitimationskrise. Ein Überblick über die Diskussion um Theorie und Didaktik der Geschichte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1969-1973* (Bonn, 1974); Hans Mommsen, “Historical Scholarship in Transition: The Situation in the Federal Republic of Germany”, *Daedalus* 100 (1971), 485-508.

⁷⁷ Charles S. Maier, “Comment”, in Hartmut Lehmann/James van Horn Melton (eds.), *Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s* (Cambridge, UK, 1994), 395.

⁷⁸ Conze, “Die Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft seit 1945”, Horst Möller, “Die Formierung der Zeitgeschichtsschreibung in Deutschland nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg”, in Heinz Duchhardt/Gerhard May (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft um 1950*, 81-100.

profession's alleged failure to satisfactorily answer the most pressing question: how was Adolf Hitler possible?

As a representative of the critical position, Hans Mommsen stated that "German historians were essentially concerned with reformulating the historical questions of the 1920s."⁷⁹ Accordingly, the political legacy of the early 19th century Prussian reformer Baron vom Stein became a popular subject. While historians stressed vom Stein's idea of local government (*Selbstverwaltung*), in line with the occupational powers, they neglected its anti-parliamentarian tendency.⁸⁰ In addition, the German revolution of 1848 received increased attention, because of its centenary as well as because the revolution had now become part of a positive part of German history, however short-lived it had turned out to be. Generally, the emphasis lay on constitutional and democratic achievements of the revolution rather than on the national and social conflicts that accompanied it. Finally, as Hans Rothfels' keynote speech at the first postwar *Historikertag* had suggested, historians focused again on Otto von Bismarck. While most of them did not downplay the negative consequences of the Iron Chancellor's domestic policies, hindering or even preventing a successful inner nation-building, his role as founder of the German Empire was of particular interest given the uncertain prospects of the postwar (West) German state. Moreover, Bismarck's supposedly modest and skillful conduct of foreign affairs, enlarging and then consolidating the German

⁷⁹ Hans Mommsen, "Historical Scholarship in Transition: The Situation in the Federal Republic of Germany", 485-486.

⁸⁰ The most comprehensive treatment of the Stein reception in both West and East Germany offers Heinz Duchhardt, *Mythos Stein: vom Nachleben, von der Stilisierung und von der Instrumentalisierung eines preußischen Reformers* (Göttingen, 2008), 133-156.

Empire, appeared even more appealing after Hitler's destructive as well as self-destructive policies.⁸¹

A few scholars took a broader view and attempted to interpret the history of Germany since the French Revolution, offering an explanation of the rise of National Socialism as well as recommendations for the new German state. Among these historians were Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter. Both Ritter's and Meinecke's reflections on the roots of National Socialism were at least in part responses to alternative interpretations from mostly British and American historians and journalists during World War II, who claimed that German history had taken a calamitous course with Frederick the Great, Martin Luther, or even earlier.⁸² Not surprisingly, Gerhard Ritter emphatically rejected these notions, which he termed "Vansittartism," after the British Undersecretary of the Foreign Office, Robert Vansittart, whose 1941 broadcast addresses containing similar arguments were published as "Black Record."⁸³

Meinecke in his *Die deutsche Katastrophe* as well as Ritter in his *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht* and the more comprehensive *Europa und die deutsche Frage* described themselves as representatives of the "other," i.e. the better Germany.⁸⁴ Meinecke stated that "it is the intellectually and politically oppositional camp to Hitler that raises its voice in this

⁸¹ See, for example, Gerhard Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage. Betrachtungen über die geschichtliche Eigenart des deutschen Staatsdenkens* (München, 1948), 77-100.

⁸² See Rohan D'Olier Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism 1783 – 1933* (New York, 1942); A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History. A Survey of the Development of German History Since 1815* (London, 1946); William Montgomery McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler. The History of Nazi-Fascist Philosophy* (Boston and New York, 1941).

⁸³ See Klaus Hildebrand, *Das Dritte Reich* (München, 4th edition, 2003), 166.

⁸⁴ See Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe. Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen* (Wiesbaden, 1946); Gerhard Ritter, *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht. Ein Beitrag zur historisch-politischen Neubestimmung* (Stuttgart, 1946); and Id., *Europa und die deutsche Frage*.

book,⁸⁵ while Ritter portrayed himself as standing between a “moralizing and tendentious historiography” on the one hand and a “court historiography” on the other.⁸⁶ The first term Ritter attributed to overly critical non-German evaluations of German history, the second term referred to what he considered as apologetic German historiography. Both Meinecke and Ritter emphasized that one could not explain National Socialism simply by relating it to German developments, but that a European perspective was necessary, and both took generally a “history of ideas” approach. Meinecke focused primarily on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries while Ritter briefly discussed the legacy of Lutheranism and Prussianism (*Luthertum* and *Preussentum*)⁸⁷ and then concentrated on the development of German nationalism in the nineteenth century and the consequences of the First World War for Germany. Ritter, who shortly after the end of World War II became a historical-political advisor for the leadership of the EKD (the *Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands*, the German Protestant Church), strongly rejected any connections that had been suggested between Lutheranism and National Socialism, since he saw the rise of the latter closely related to the forces of “modern secularism.”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, 7.

⁸⁶ Ritter, *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht*, 10..

⁸⁷ The German word *Preussentum* is hard to translate; it essentially means qualities and traditions associated with the Prussian state and Prussian history.

⁸⁸ See Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage*, 19. In this case, a critical remark might be of interest: while the relationship between the Protestant Church and the Nazi regime as well as between Lutheranism and Nazi ideology was certainly more complicated than suggested by Ritter, his claim that the National Socialist mass appeal had been much stronger in the Catholic South and West of Germany than in the Protestant North and East was simply wrong. To give one example, in Bavaria the NSDAP scored their first electoral victories in Franconia whose population was overwhelmingly Protestant. The same was true for Schleswig-Holstein. See Jürgen Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (München, 1991), as well as Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter: the Social Foundation of Fascism in Germany, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill, 1983)

Meinecke and Ritter differed significantly in their evaluation of Prussianism. Meinecke saw basically two forces within the Prussian state, a positive, “cultured” force, and another force that was negative and “adverse to culture.” With the end of the Prussian reforms in 1819 the latter had emerged triumphant. Closely linked to the assessment was Meinecke’s view of the Prussian military tradition, which he saw as having adopted a “dangerous one-sidedness” in the early nineteenth century, emphasizing merely professionalism, efficiency, and technical competence.⁸⁹ Ritter, in contrast, although conceding that the Prussian military spirit’s emphasis on obedience might have facilitated the rise of National Socialism or made the Germans more receptive to it, argued that eventually National Socialism “did not grow on Prussian-Protestant soil, but on the soil of radical, revolutionary democracy.”⁹⁰ The Israeli historian Jacob Talmon would shortly afterwards develop a similar argument regarding the genealogy of totalitarianism.⁹¹ And while Ritter argued that historians had to rethink the “problem of Prussian-German militarism,” he at the same time believed that “National Socialism [was] not a Prussian plant, but an Austrian-Bavarian import.”⁹²

In addition to this claim that National Socialist ideology, was actually imported from Austria, Ritter also emphasized the importance of the French Revolution in order to understand the emergence of totalitarianism and thus National Socialism: “No event in German history, but the great French Revolution has shaken the firm ground of European

⁸⁹ See Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, 67.

⁹⁰ Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage*, 32.

⁹¹ Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London, 1952).

⁹² Ritter, *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht*, 29.

political traditions.”⁹³ The Revolution produced egalitarian mass democracy, and “historical experience shows that the democratic principle as such offers no protection against dictatorship; on the contrary: egalitarian democracy is the most important political precondition for it.”⁹⁴ The French Revolution, according to Ritter, had in another respect laid the ground for the developments of the twentieth century: “When the old authoritarian state was transformed into the democratic nation-state and the churches were dislodged from their central position, the way was open, in principle, to the development of the modern total state.”⁹⁵ Ritter used this argument to indirectly relativize the specific German developments and instead to emphasize common European developments. Yet Meinecke tended to scrutinize nineteenth and twentieth century German rather than European history, for he believed it was more important to “sweep in front of one’s own door” than to ask for “being granted extenuating circumstances.”⁹⁶ A disturbing feature in Meinecke’s account, however, was a repeated reference to a negative influence of German Jews on the course of German history, even though he also strongly condemned anti-Semitism.⁹⁷

What, then, was the turning point in German history? For Ritter, it was clearly the aftermath of World War I, even though he stated that already the war itself had caused an “exaggerated national consciousness” as a mass phenomenon in Germany.⁹⁸ But only in the

⁹³ Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage*, 50.

⁹⁴ Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage*, 51.

⁹⁵ Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage*, 43.

⁹⁶ Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, 6.

⁹⁷ See Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, 29-30 (role of Jews in the „devaluation of liberal ideas“ and their “corrupting influence”), 53 (reference to Jewish greed after World War I), and 91-92 (Meinecke’s rejection of anti-Semitism).

⁹⁸ See Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage*, 168.

1920s, when the masses (*Massenmenschentum*, a key term in Ritter's vocabulary) rose, as they did throughout Europe at that time, could a demagogue like Adolf Hitler achieve power. And while this answer to the question of why National Socialism was eventually successful in Germany seems unsatisfying, it can be explained by the fact that Ritter wrote in response to the British and American studies cited above and was thus more interested in refuting their claims about a German disposition to National Socialist ideas than in providing an original answer himself. Meinecke, in contrast, was more willing to reevaluate previously cherished events in German history such as Bismarck's unification of Germany in 1871⁹⁹ and to concede that the Pan-German League in the late Empire and the *Vaterlandspartei* during World War I could be seen as a prelude for the rise of the National Socialists.¹⁰⁰ And while Meinecke emphasized coincidence as an important factor for the eventual success of the Nazis he did not hesitate to assign blame to particular political actors, namely to Reichspräsident Paul von Hindenburg and to the chairman of the German National People's Party (DNVP), Alfred Hugenberg.¹⁰¹ A final difference between Ritter and Meinecke concerned the tone of their writings: the latter wrote a more contemplative prose, while Ritter's style can be termed more combative – maybe just a result of their tempers, but probably also a reflection of their respective attitudes. In fairness to Ritter, one should also mention his later *magnum opus* *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk*, which constituted a serious attempt to grapple with the intricacies of militarism in German history.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ See Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, 85.

¹⁰⁰ See Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, 50.

¹⁰¹ See Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, 94-95.

¹⁰² Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk. Das Problem des Militarismus in Deutschland. Four volumes* (München, 1954-1968).

Even broader in its scope was Ludwig Dehio's *Gleichgewicht oder Hegemonie* (Balance or Hegemony) which attempted to make sense of five hundred years of European history. Dehio, according to Nazi definition a "quarter Jew," had spent the war years at a Berlin archive, not allowed to publish anything. Having become the director of the State Archive Marburg in 1946, he also edited *Historische Zeitschrift* between 1949 and 1956. In *Gleichgewicht oder Hegemonie* Dehio argued that since the fifteenth century, the European state system had come under assault six times: Charles V, Philip II, Louis XIV, Napoleon I, and finally William II and Hitler had pursued hegemony in Europe, until the defeat of Nazi Germany and the emergence of the Cold War had ended this era of European power politics.¹⁰³ While Dehio's study remained within the confines of "power politics" without a discussion of economic and social factors, *Gleichgewicht oder Hegemonie* appeared comparatively revisionist in interpretive respects. After all, his argument that the development of German militarism had led to two successive bids for European hegemony was very much at odds with the position of historians such as Ritter. This became apparent again when Ritter published the first volumes of his magnum opus on German militarism, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk*, which Dehio reviewed very critically.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Ludwig Dehio, *Gleichgewicht oder Hegemonie. Betrachtungen über ein Grundproblem der neueren Staatengeschichte* (Krefeld, 1948). For a biographical sketch including a discussion of his writings, see Volker R. Berghahn, "Ludwig Dehio", in Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Deutsche Historiker: Volume IV* (Göttingen, 1971), 97-116.

¹⁰⁴ Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk. Das Problem des Militarismus in Deutschland* (München, 1954); Dehio reviewed the first two volumes in *Historische Zeitschrift* 180 (1955), 43-64, and in *Historische Zeitschrift* 194 (1962), 130-138. In a letter to Andreas Dorpalen Ritter complained about Dehio's "doctrinaire prejudices" and rejected his alleged equation of Prussianism (*Preussentum*) and militarism. See Gerhard Ritter's letter to Dorpalen, 3 July 1962, in Klaus Schwabe and Rolf Reichardt (eds.), *Gerhard Ritter. Ein politischer Historiker in seinen Briefen* (Boppard, 1984), 571-572.

In contrast, works on the German resistance served a slightly different purpose. Of course, both Ritter and Hans Rothfels who tackled this topic, wanted to convince the world – or at least their foreign colleagues – that there had indeed existed an “other” and better Germany. Especially Rothfels wrote his study for an American audience (where it was published first). But at the same time they also addressed a German public, for the men behind the 20th July 1944 plot, let alone more leftist resistance fighters, were still considered by many Germans to be traitors. The two main studies appearing at the time were quite different in scope: Hans Rothfels’s *The German Opposition to Hitler*, emerging out of a lecture he had delivered at the University of Chicago in 1947, was published in 1948 and was a shorter essay, less based on archival and other unpublished sources than Gerhard Ritter’s more comprehensive *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung*, published in 1954.¹⁰⁵ Rothfels began his study “for the sake of historical justice,” since in his opinion “the German opposition to Hitler was not only much broader than has been conceded so far, but also more extensive than could have been expected under conditions of terror.”¹⁰⁶ Ritter, on the other hand, had certainly a similar agenda, since he had known Goerdeler and had been asked by his family and relatives of other participants in the 20th July 1944 plot to write its history.¹⁰⁷ And yet he claimed that he wanted to focus more on the ideas and values behind the resistance since he believed in their usefulness for a future Germany as well as a future Europe: “The spirit of these men, the moral and political opinions which drove them into

¹⁰⁵ Hans Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler: An Appraisal* (Hinsdale, 1948); Gerhard Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung* (Stuttgart, 1954).

¹⁰⁶ Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler*, 158 and 159.

¹⁰⁷ See Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung*, 7.

opposition, must be kept alive among us, too, if our own work of reconstruction is to prosper.”¹⁰⁸

Given the unequal length of the two books, it might be surprising to note that Rothfels’s was the more comprehensive one. For even though he placed the resistance groups involved in the 20th July 1944 plot at the center of his study, he also emphasized that student groups such as *Weisse Rose* and socialist/communist-leaning groups such as Arvid Harnack’s *Rote Kapelle* had been important. Considering Rothfels’s political convictions and the fact that *Rote Kapelle* had been in contact with the Soviet Union during World War II, his recognition of their “awareness of a European mission” and their “basis of an ideally conceived communism” is remarkable.¹⁰⁹ But it might also have been his desire to depict a German resistance that had pervaded all parts of the German society, since he even argued that intellectuals and artists who chose the option of so-called “inner emigration” (that is, they kept a low profile and disengaged themselves from the regime) should be counted as a part of the resistance. Eventually, his study attempted to counter those accounts that were in Germany often perceived as accusations of *Kollektivschuld* (collective guilt).¹¹⁰ Rothfels thus rejected notions of a particular German submissiveness and furthermore denied that anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany “met with more or less general approval or connivance.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung*, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler*, 12.

¹¹⁰ See the works by Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism 1783 – 1933*; Taylor, *The Course of German History*; McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler*.

¹¹¹ Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler*, 31.

Ritter largely agreed with Rothfels's evaluation of the Resistance; he praised the latter's study in a *Historische Zeitschrift* review.¹¹² But he was much less able than Rothfels to overcome – or at least put into perspective – his own political positions. It is certainly not surprising that Goerdeler became the hero of the study, but when Ritter evaluated the Goerdeler Circle's plans for postwar Germany, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between his own and Goerdeler's positions, since Ritter identified so strongly with the latter's ideas.¹¹³ Much less empathetic, in contrast, was his analysis of the socialist and communist resistance. Ritter's assessment of the *Rote Kapelle* reads as follows: "With the German resistance they had nothing at all to do. They were simply in the service of the enemy." Thus, after the Gestapo discovered the conspiracy, he concluded, "the resultant trial could have no other end than a mass execution."¹¹⁴ But apart from such statements, which probably reveal more about the author's conservative nationalism than about his subject, a remarkable feature of *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung* was the fact that Ritter did not only portray the conservative resistance as the only legitimate one, but that he also recommended Goerdeler's plans for a post-Hitler Germany as appropriate and even necessary for the Federal Republic.¹¹⁵

A cursory glance at these works reveals the difficulty of their easy categorization. Labels such as "liberal" or "conservative" seem appropriate yet vague. What can be said,

¹¹² See Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter*, 553.

¹¹³ I follow the analysis provided by Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter*, 555-557.

¹¹⁴ Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung*, 103.

¹¹⁵ See Ritter, *Carl Goerdeler und die deutsche Widerstandsbewegung*, 266-290. Present-day scholars of the German resistance evaluate the constitutional and economic ideas of the *Goerdeler-Kreis* and other conservative groups more reservedly. See Hans Mommsen, *Alternative zu Hitler. Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Widerstands* (München, 2000).

though, is that Meinecke, Ritter, and Rothfels all argued against a linear continuity in German history culminating into the Nazi dictatorship. At the same time, these historians rejected the notion of a *Kollektivschuld* (collective guilt) of the German people. But who had made such a claim? Apart from a few books published as war propaganda and A.J.P. Taylor's diatribe on the *Course of German History*, one would be hard pressed to identify such voices among professional historians. Norbert Frei has therefore argued that the alleged accusation of collective guilt often served as a straw man, allowing for rebuttals that were not necessarily more nuanced than the position they attempted to reject.¹¹⁶

Among the unquestionable innovations of the immediate postwar period was the establishment of contemporary history (*Zeitgeschichte*) as a particular field of historical inquiry. Defined by Hans Rothfels as the "period of contemporaries" (*Epoche der Mitlebenden*), *Zeitgeschichte* encompassed at the time essentially the period 1917-1945. Due to the resistance of the historical profession, it was initially pursued more outside than within the universities' history departments, above all at the Munich-based *Institut für Zeitgeschichte*. In his comparative study on the West German and the Japanese historical professions between 1945 and 1960, Sebastian Conrad has suggested potentially problematic consequences. While the universities taught general German history and the history of the twentieth century without a particular focus on the Nazi years, National Socialism became "quarantined" at new research institutions. Accordingly, one could view it as a phenomenon *sui generis* rather than within the context and as a result of German history. If history (the situation in political science was slightly different) lecture courses or seminars tackled

¹¹⁶ Norbert Frei, "Von deutscher Erfindungskraft oder: die Kollektivschuldthese in der Nachkriegszeit," *Rechtshistorisches Journal* 16 (1997), 621-634

National Socialism, or if professors directed dissertations on that period, the focus remained generally limited to either the Resistance or World War II.¹¹⁷

The focus on the *Fischer-Kontroverse* as the beginning of “revisionist historiography” has at times led to a neglect of the 1950s. While this decade saw fewer historiographical innovations than the 1960s or the 1970s, not all German historians continued the Rankean path. The debate about the role of Chancellor Brüning in the demise of the Weimar Republic constitutes a case in point.¹¹⁸ While Werner Conze insisted that the failure of Brüning’s policies were primarily a result of unfortunate circumstances, Karl Dietrich Bracher maintained that the Center Party politician had helped weaken the already frail Republic and ultimately bore part of the responsibility for the increasing political radicalization during his tenure as Chancellor. Yet Bracher, who began his academic career as an ancient historian before switching to contemporary history, did not only pose an interpretive challenge to the “establishment.”¹¹⁹ His was also methodological, since he combined historical with political science approaches to analyze the demise of the Weimar Republic. After receiving his PhD in 1948, Bracher had spent two years as a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University. The Harvard years not only deepened Bracher’s interest in and knowledge of the social sciences, but they also introduced him to an academic community

¹¹⁷ Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation*, 222 and 231.

¹¹⁸ Compare Bracher’s seminal *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik. Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie* (Villingen, 1955) and Conze’s articles “Die Krise des Parteienstaates in Deutschland 1929/30,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 178 (1954), 47-83; and “Brünings Politik unter dem Druck der großen Krise,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 199 (1964), 529-550

¹¹⁹ For his academic career, see Karl Dietrich Bracher, “Von der alten Geschichte zur Politikwissenschaft. Karl Dietrich Bracher im Gespräch mit Werner Link”, *Neue Politische Literatur* 42 (1997), 257-274.

that was considerably more internationally oriented than his *alma mater* Tübingen.¹²⁰ At first glance, Bracher's interdisciplinary approach might have appealed to Conze, who appeared generally open to the social sciences and at the time had begun to develop his own conception of social history or *Strukturgeschichte*.¹²¹ And indeed, Conze in a review of Bracher's study emphasized the merits of the methodological borrowings from the social sciences. Yet he simultaneously rejected Bracher's use of allegedly "ahistorical categories" which he thought did not do justice to the reality of the 1920s.¹²² Conze in particular took issue with Bracher's position on the state of German democracy and accused him of measuring the German development against a universalist democratic ideal. Bracher also, and more importantly, blamed many of the problems weakening the Weimar Republic on the legacy of the German Empire, in particular the authoritarian constitutional tradition. This negative view on the German Empire led Conze to deplore Bracher's "distortions" which supposedly prevented him from taking an "unbiased approach" to German history.¹²³ While it is impossible to reconstruct the details of this heated debate, one of Conze's arguments against Bracher's position deserves particular attention. By applying the standards of "Western democracies" to the situation of 1929/30, Conze claimed, Bracher failed to understand the peculiar circumstances of the Weimar Republic during its final phase. Their disagreement thus stemmed from diverging political positions as well as generational

¹²⁰ Bracher, "Von der alten Geschichte zur Politikwissenschaft," 261.

¹²¹ See Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte*, 90-127.

¹²² Werner Conze, "Review of Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik. Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie*," *Historische Zeitschrift* 184 (1957), 378-382.

¹²³ Conze, "Review of Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik. Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie*," 381.

backgrounds. Bracher posited the establishment and the preservation of a functioning democracy as necessity; Conze rejected this position as “ahistorical.”¹²⁴

In the West German historical profession of the 1950s, most established scholars tended to side with Conze, while the younger generation embraced Bracher. *Historische Zeitschrift* did not allow Bracher to respond to Conze’s scathing review. Even though *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik* in the years following its publication underwent several reprints and to this day remains essential for anyone interested in Weimar’s demise, Bracher throughout his career was never offered a chair in history.¹²⁵ He continued instead to publish his highly regarded studies on the Nazi establishment of power and a synthetical work on the Nazi dictatorship as a professor of political science at Bonn University. While one thus might see this episode as further proof the historical profession’s conservatism, one should at least concede that the first challenges to the orthodoxy were launched well before the *Fischer-Kontroverse*. It is also noteworthy that they came from historically interested political scientists, who were trying to gain a foothold in the academy.

Another way of reflecting on the historical discourse of the postwar years is to ask what German historians chose not to write about, even though it might have been reasonable to assume that they would. Above all, this concerns the place of the Holocaust in German historiography. As we have seen, in recent years, interest in collaboration between German historians and the Nazi regime has led to a number of illuminating studies. The historian-

¹²⁴ The political character of the debate is also emphasized in Sebastian Ullrich, *Der Weimar-Komplex. Das Scheitern der ersten deutschen Demokratie und die politische Kultur der frühen Bundesrepublik 1945-1959* (Göttingen, 2009), 583-613.

¹²⁵ Bracher, “Von der alten Geschichte zur Politikwissenschaft”, 261. By contrast, Harvard’s history department unsuccessfully attempted to hire Bracher in 1966.

journalist Götz Aly has even suggested that a few historians played a role in the Holocaust, due to their service to the regime as planning experts.¹²⁶ Subsequently, scholars began to investigate whether and how German historians during the immediate postwar years tackled the Holocaust in their work. Nicolas Berg has offered an extremely critical assessment, focusing on West German Holocaust historiography—or the lack thereof—between the late 1940s and the 1980s.¹²⁷ Berg interprets this neglect as a result of two main developments. On the one hand, West German historians focused on the Nazis' rise to power rather than the persecution and subsequent extermination of the European Jews. Often, as we have seen, they arrived at rather general explanations regarding the inherent dangers of mass democracy and the European heritage of fascism and National Socialism. At the same time, they successfully managed to exclude Jewish voices—usually without any institutional support or even affiliation—from the academic discourse, claiming that as victims they lacked the necessary “objectivity” and “distance” indispensable for a reliable historical analysis.¹²⁸

Berg's scathing critique has undeniable merits, and it is impossible to ignore the fact that West German historians only slowly began to analyze National Socialist extermination policies. Strains of anti-Semitism were clearly visible among some scholars, and the general

¹²⁶ Götz Aly, “Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze oder Die Vorstufen der physischen Vernichtung,” in Schulze/Oexle (eds.) *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, 177-178. Aly concludes: “Both [Schieder and Conze] contributed, each in their own ways and professionally, to the Holocaust ... He [Schieder] and Conze qualified the Jews as disruptive factor, parasites, and dangerous internal enemies ... both suggested mass deportations of Jews.”

¹²⁷ Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2003). Many responses to Berg's study have been equally critical. See, for example, Ian Kershaw, “Beware the Moran High Ground,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 October 2003; Gerhard Weinberg, “Nicolas Berg, Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Comments” in Astrid M. Eckert/Vera Ziegeldorf (eds.), *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Eine Debatte* (Berlin, 2004), 41-46, available under http://edoc.hu.berlin.de/e_histfor/2.

¹²⁸ Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Erforschung und Erinnerung*, 218-219, and 369.

suspicion against émigré historians (of which only Hans Rothfels was exempt) only reinforced the dichotomy between “German” and “other” perspectives on the German past. But Berg’s intervention presupposes the achievements of the generation he criticizes, and is therefore ahistorical in spirit. Finally, it is worth remembering that during the 1950s and even 1960s a scholarly pioneer such as Raul Hilberg remained an outsider within the American historical profession.¹²⁹ Warned by his dissertation adviser Franz Neumann not to write about the Holocaust, Hilberg after the successful completion of his dissertation faced enormous obstacles in his attempt to publish his manuscript. Without a doubt, West Germans—like their East German counterparts—were not yet ready to face the moral challenges of Holocaust historiography.¹³⁰ But during late 1940s and 1950s a reluctance to deal with this topic prevailed that transcended German borders.

A Transatlantic Network?

It is one of the main arguments of this dissertation that American scholars of German history assumed a significant role in the reconstitution of the postwar historical profession in West Germany. Yet in contrast to previous accounts, the study suggests that it was not just the representatives of a critical, “revisionist” perspective on German historians who benefitted from contacts with their American colleagues. In order to understand the transatlantic scholarly community emerging after the end of the war, we need to take a broader view.

¹²⁹ See Raul Hilberg’s memoirs *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago, 1996).

¹³⁰ An early exception was the study by the sociologist and political scientist Eugen Kogon, *Der SS-Staat. Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager* (München, 1946).

To be sure, shortly after the end of World War II, many American scholars were indeed wondering how their German colleagues might overcome the nationalism and intellectual isolation characteristic of the vast majority of the German historical profession since 1933, if not since 1914. As early as 1941, Oscar J. Hammen had concluded his analysis of German historiography in the interwar years with the observation that “the obvious rejection of ‘western’ ideas and institutions, the ‘revision’ of the liberal historiography of the nineteenth century by German historians since 1933, are but the intensification of tendencies which already were pronounced before the advent of the Nazi regime.”¹³¹ Thus, it was hardly surprising that American historians paid close attention to the first attempts of their German contemporaries to explain the rise of National Socialism.

In the Americans’ view, some German historians did better than others: Friedrich Meinecke’s 1946 essay *Die deutsche Katastrophe* enjoyed a generally favorable reception, and the following year, its author was awarded the American Historical Association’s (AHA’s) honorary foreign membership.¹³² Despite the fact that Meinecke soon took a much more defensive stance regarding the reevaluation of modern German history, Americans clearly considered him a “good German.”¹³³ On the other hand, Gerhard Ritter’s crude apologia, referring to National Socialism as “not an authentic Prussian plant, but an Austrian-

¹³¹ Oscar J. Hammen, “German Historians and the Advent of the National Socialist State,” *Journal of Modern History* 13 (1941), 188.

¹³² Already in 1933, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences had made Meinecke a foreign honorary member; in 1935 he had become an honorary member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, and in 1936, Harvard University awarded Meinecke an honorary doctorate.

¹³³ See Friedrich Meinecke, “Irrwege in unserer Geschichte,” *Der Monat* 2 (1949), 3-6; and Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (Munich, 1989), 58. The contacts between Meinecke and those of his students teaching in the United States are covered by Gerhard Ritter, ed., *Friedrich Meinecke. Akademischer Lehrer und emigrierte Schüler: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen, 1910-1977* (Munich, 2006).

Bavarian import,”¹³⁴ met with considerable resistance among American historians. Felix Gilbert thus criticized the “rather nationalistic bias in Ritter’s tendency to excuse dangerous and deplorable German developments and even to consider them justified if somewhat similar developments have occurred in other countries.”¹³⁵

The collection of essays *German History: Some New German Views*, edited by Hans Kohn of Brooklyn College in 1954, and its reception provide some insights into American views of German history and historiography during that decade. In his introduction, Kohn emphasized the historically significant role German academics and particularly historians had played in shaping anti-democratic and anti-Western attitudes. Therefore, he argued, the question of whether they would now contribute to the integration of West Germany into the democratic Western community was an important one.¹³⁶ The volume, while undoubtedly offering “new views,” was hardly representative of the German historical profession in the 1950s. Not only were most of the profession’s big players absent from the collection, but Franz Schnabel’s take on the “Bismarck Problem” and Johann Albrecht von Rantzaus devastating critique of the “glorification of the state in German historical writing” also expressed positions that the overwhelming majority of West German *Ordinarien* would have rejected out of hand.¹³⁷ Kohn had rightly anticipated his volume would “make some stir in

¹³⁴ Gerhard Ritter, *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht*, 29.

¹³⁵ Felix Gilbert, “Review of Gerhard Ritter, *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht. Ein Beitrag zur historisch-politischen Neubestimmung*,” *American Historical Review* 53 (1948), 788.

¹³⁶ Hans Kohn, *German History: Some New German Views* (Boston, 1954).

¹³⁷ Contributors included Karl Buchheim, Alfred von Martin, Hans Herzfeld, Ludwig Dehio, Ellinor von Puttkamer, Walther Hofer, Hajo Holborn, and Friedrich Meinecke.

German university circles,”¹³⁸ and these circles responded accordingly, as Ludwig Dehio, the editor of *Historische Zeitschrift* (HZ), had warned Kohn.¹³⁹ Instead of engaging with the volume’s essays, the HZ reviewer merely targeted Kohn’s introduction and argued that the exaggerated revisionist tendencies of the first postwar years now had to give way to a more sober analysis (“*einer sachlicheren Ergründung der Zusammenhänge*”)—something Kohn in his opinion had failed to provide.¹⁴⁰ American historians, by contrast, welcomed these German attempts to rewrite modern German history.¹⁴¹ One reviewer, however, noted that the concept of “the West,” against which the German development was measured and found wanting, remained curiously vague and required a much more precise definition if the comparison was to yield meaningful results.¹⁴² This has since been a recurring argument against all kinds of studies examining Germany’s deviation from the “Western development,” as will become apparent below.

At the same time, German historians had also become acutely aware of the importance of American judgments about their scholarship—even if they might disagree with their tendency. German scholars of all political and methodological brands—and not just the most liberal-minded—therefore attempted to establish, or reestablish, relations with American colleagues. Gerhard Ritter, self-appointed spokesperson of the postwar West German historical profession, immediately after 1945 resumed contacts with American

¹³⁸ Hans Kohn to Shepard Stone, June 26, 1952, Leo Baeck Institute, New York (hereafter LBI), Kohn papers, Box 3/11.

¹³⁹ Ludwig Dehio to Hans Kohn, June 6, 1955, LBI, Kohn papers, Box 1/39.

¹⁴⁰ Heinz Gollwitzer, “Review of *German History: Some New Views*,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 180 (1955), 332.

¹⁴¹ See the reviews of *German History: Some New German Views*, ed. Hans Kohn, by E. Malcolm Carroll in *American Historical Review* 60 (1954), 100-101, and by Klemens von Klemperer in *Journal of Modern History* 27 (1955), 199-201.

¹⁴² Klemperer, *Journal of Modern History* 27 (1955), 201.

historians. In so doing, he proved to be a fairly effective proponent of nationalist-conservative causes.¹⁴³ Ritter's self-confidence in these matters continues to amaze: attempting to secure an English translation of his *Europa und die Deutsche Frage* in 1948, he told Fritz T. Epstein that he would be "very grateful if you could get Stanford [University] Press to accept it for publication. After all, my views represent the *communis opinio* of all German academic historians."¹⁴⁴ In reality, Ritter did not even attain the consensus of 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*.¹⁴⁵ 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."¹⁴⁶ West German historians themselves by the early 1960s

¹⁴³ For Ritter's postwar activities and attitudes in general, see Christoph Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter. Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf, 2001), 396ff.; for Ritter's contacts with American scholars and publishers, see John L. Harvey, "Reformationsgeschichte Reformed? The Rebirth of *Archiv of Reformationsgeschichte* from Five Decades Past," paper delivered at the Annual Conference of the Society of Reformation Research, Minneapolis, October 24-28, 2007.

¹⁴⁴ Letter Gerhard Ritter to Fritz T. Epstein, October 8, 1948, 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' study on the German resistance had turned out to be an economic disappointment. See letter Ritter to Epstein, December 23, 1949, BAK, NL Epstein, Box 82.

¹⁴⁵ See Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter*, 534-545; Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 229-234.

¹⁴⁶ Andreas Dorpalen, "Historiography as History: The Work of Gerhard Ritter," *Journal of Modern History* 34 (1962), 18.

would rather have identified Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze, or Karl Dietrich Erdmann as fulfilling the role Dorpalen attributed to Ritter.

Dorpalen's overly generous assessment illustrates that Ritter's eventual 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.¹⁴⁷ When Ritter's name came up again in 1958 (along with those of the medievalists Walter Goetz and Percy Ernst Schramm), the selection committee's chairman, Felix Gilbert, astutely summarized the pros and cons:

"I think there is no doubt that Ritter is regarded to be the leading German historian at the present time and I don't think we can nominate, if we nominate someone from Germany, anyone else but him. Ritter has certainly done most important work. I would say that his *History of the University of Heidelberg* and his recent work on German militarism belong to the small group of really outstanding historical works of the twentieth century. What can be said against Ritter is that probably his literary style is not so distinguished that his works can be regarded as classics of historical literature. Moreover his political views have aroused quite a lot of opposition. 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. I don't know whether we ought to take these political considerations into account at all. He has certainly done a lot to strengthen the cooperation of the German historians with the international world in the period since the Second World War."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ 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 both of these worthy of discussion; Dr. Sontag supports Schnabel but not Ritter." LoC, AHA papers, Box 173, Secretary File.

¹⁴⁸ Letter Felix Gilbert to Boyd Shafer, November 14, 1958, LoC, AHA papers, Box 489, Secretary File.

Eventually, the committee did not let these political considerations affect their decision in choosing Ritter.¹⁴⁹ 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.¹⁵⁰

There are several possible explanations for this surprising fact. Maybe only few Americans—such as the émigrés—were aware of the academic as well as political positions their German colleagues had taken during the Nazi years. Alternatively, most of them knew but were willing to forget about past mistakes for the sake of future professional cooperation. When Felix Gilbert reviewed Gerhard Ritter's *Europa und die deutsche Frage*, he rejected the Ritter's "polemic against what the author considers the Anglo-Saxon view of history", but then added in a somewhat conciliatory manner: "But to hold the author's eagerness to state the German case too much against him and to criticize the book too sharply because one would prefer a better rounded and documented presentation, shows a lack of appreciation of the importance of initiating immediately serious scholarly discussions in Germany and of the difficulties against which scholarly production has to struggle there today."¹⁵¹ In other words,

¹⁴⁹ 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.

¹⁵⁰ Cornelissen, *Gerhard Ritter*, 457.

¹⁵¹ Felix Gilbert, "Review of Gerhard Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage*", *American Historical Review* 54 (1949), 594 and 595.

for the sake of international scholarly dialogue some historians seemed to be willing to accept or at least engage views they sharply disagreed with.

John L. Harvey has offered yet another interpretation, much less flattering for American historians of Germany, speaking of an “entangled conservatism” connecting scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. Germans and—some, by no means all, one has to emphasize—Americans “shared common dispositions about politics, social prejudices, or reactions to the emergence of contemporary popular culture.”¹⁵² Throughout the 1930s, even the most anti-democratic German views did not lead these American historians to distance themselves from their German colleagues. Harvey argues that “the trust that German historians placed in their American counterparts could even include the disclosure of personal allegiances to National Socialism, with an understanding that such admissions would cause no harm for future scholastic intercourse.”¹⁵³ Accordingly, 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 at 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.¹⁵⁴ Yet this blatant propaganda did not keep the Princeton

¹⁵² John L. Harvey, *The Common Adventure of Mankind*, 499.

¹⁵³ Harvey, *The Common Adventure of Mankind*, 533.

¹⁵⁴ Cited after Harvey, *The Common Adventure of Mankind*, 497.

medievalist Gray C. Boyce from paying Schramm a complimentary research visit to Göttingen University the following year.

After the war, Harvey argues, Americans expressed remarkably little interest in the problematic backgrounds of many of their German contemporaries. What made American indifference all the more surprising is the fact that during the mid- and late 1930s and early 1940s several articles in American journals had detailed the degree to which German historians had either collaborated or at least made concessions during the Nazi regime.¹⁵⁵ Harvey concludes that we should view the postwar decade as a transition period: while the interwar conservatism characterizing much of the American writing of German history still existed, the more liberal critique which dominated the 1960s was only slowly emerging.¹⁵⁶ This inevitably raises the question of what the German historians arriving in the United States as exchange students in the early to late 1950s encountered. Did their experience match with later assessments of postwar American academia in general and historiography on modern Germany in particular? These are the questions at the center of the next chapter.

¹⁵⁵ See Hammen, "German Historians and the Advent of the National Socialist State."

¹⁵⁶ Harvey, *The Common Adventure of Mankind*, 551.

CHAPTER 2

Postwar German Historiography in the United States

During the final years of World War II, American politicians, bureaucrats, and intellectuals began to contemplate the crucial question of what to do with a defeated Germany. Contrary to public memory about this issue, “during World War II the United States never achieved a politically coherent consensus on whether the enemy was the Nazi regime or the German nation as a whole.”¹ As a result of these varying American attitudes toward the Germans, conflicting interpretations shaped American warfare and postwar planning. For the future course of action it mattered immensely whether National Socialism was the logical result of eternal Prussian-German militarism, had developed out German culture, or was simply the unfortunate consequence of the takeover of the German nation by a “band of thugs.” Ultimately, the wartime discourse on Germany resulted in a multifaceted and somewhat ambiguous approach, combining material and political reconstruction, intellectual and educational reforms, and confrontation with the crimes of National Socialism.²

The postwar relationship between West German and American historians unfolded under different circumstances, since the latter did not attain the position of an intellectual

¹ Michaela Hoenicke Moore, *Know Your Enemy: The American Debate on Nazism, 1933-1945* (Cambridge, UK, 2009), 341.

² Hoenicke Moore, *Know Your Enemy*, 177-340 and 344-345. For the educational realm, see Brian M. Puaca, *Learning Democracy: Education Reform in West Germany 1945-1965* (New York, 2009).

occupation authority. Still, Americans were concerned with similar questions regarding the Germans' reintegration into the international scholarly community. When Felix Gilbert, at the time an associate professor at Bryn Mawr College, published his bibliographical survey on German historiography during World War II in 1947, he proclaimed that it would not be "easy for German historiography to regain a place in the world of international scholarship." Discerning "a number of factors that place[d] the revival of German historiographical activity under a severe handicap," Gilbert concluded: "It would appear that German historiography will have to make an entirely new beginning, the results of which will hardly become apparent in the near future."¹ Of course, Gilbert only referred to works produced by German historians—his article discussed the extent to which they had compromised academic standards during the Nazi years. Moreover, he placed recent German historiography in its broader historical context, identifying the neglect of social and economic development as a deficiency characteristic of German historians for several decades.² Yet in doing so Gilbert implicitly raised the question of what the task of American historians of Germany should be in the postwar years: should they assume the role of attentive observers of German historiographical production or act as active participants in a reemerging transatlantic community of scholars? Should they maybe even provide intellectual "developmental aid" to their German colleagues, helping establish a more critical historiography? These are the questions at the center of this chapter.

¹ Felix Gilbert, "German Historiography during the Second World War: a bibliographical survey", *American Historical Review* 53 (1947) , 50-58, quotes on 57 and 58.

² Of course, his devastating critique owed some of its force to the time when it was written. Several decades later, Gilbert almost fondly recalled his student days in 1920s Berlin. See his "The Historical Seminar of the University of Berlin in the 1920s", in Lehmann/Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past*, 67-70.

Again, as in the previous chapter, the survey of the field of modern German history in the United States examines its institutional, personal, and interpretive dimension. The chapter thus begins with a discussion of the *Conference Group for Central European History* and the journals that published articles and book reviews on modern Germany. It then focuses on those history departments where German history played an important role and where future historians of Germany were trained. Within this institutional context, the impact of first and second-generation émigré historians will be discussed.³ Moreover, the chapter evaluates the interpretive contours of postwar historiography on Germany, ultimately illustrating the changes in the way scholars wrote about modern Germany since the 1940s. All of these transformations unfolded at a time when the impact of National Socialism and the early Cold War drastically increased public as well as scholarly interest in Germany.

For contemporary observers, this development was not a forgone conclusion: In his presidential address at the American Historical Association's annual convention in 1945, Carlton J. Hayes had demanded increased American attention to European history. Hayes pointed out the small number of dissertations written in European—in comparison to American—history and thought it to be “astonishing and paradoxical” that at a time when the United States had abandoned its economic and military isolationism it should “keep alive and actually intensify an intellectual isolationism.”⁴

³ First generation émigrés, born around the turn of the century, received their PhDs in Weimar Germany. Historians of the second generation, born between the 1910s and 1920s, studied history after arriving in the United States (or in England and the United States, in the case of George Mosse).

⁴ Carlton J. Hayes, “The American Frontier—Frontier of What?” *American Historical Review* 51 (1945), 199-216, quote on 203.

Given the international focus adopted and maintained by American history departments in the next decades, it is obvious that Hayes' fears proved unfounded. As Kenneth Barkin has stated, "the three decades following World War II witnessed the solid establishment of German history as a critical part of the curriculum of every major university."⁵ Consequently, many history departments hired historians specializing in modern German history. At the same time, the influx of émigré historians diversified the field; and while some of these historians started their careers in the United States at smaller colleges and with enormous teaching loads, they eventually managed to move on to universities where they advised graduate students and thus exerted greater influence on the profession's development.

The institutional dimension

The previous comment regarding the various kinds of academic institutions in the United States points to a significant structural difference between the German and the American fields. Undoubtedly, the academic prestige of German universities varies; a PhD received at the Universities of Tübingen or Heidelberg may still be considered higher than the same degree from the Universities of Siegen or Passau.⁶ In addition, appointments at *Technische Hochschulen* or *Technische Universitäten* (Institutes of Technology) are less

⁵ Kenneth D. Barkin, "German Émigré Historians in America: the Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies", in Hartmut Lehmann/James J. Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past: German-Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933* (Cambridge, UK, 1991), 153. An even broader overview provides Fritz Stern, who like Barkin emphasizes the increasing interest in German history during and after World War II, in his "German History in America, 1884 – 1984," *Central European History* 19 (1986), 131-163.

⁶ For a younger historian seeking a professorship, the name (and influence) of the academic adviser, the *Doktorvater*, has historically played a very important role as well.

coveted than at “regular” universities.⁷ Yet the German university system has never known the distinction between colleges and graduate schools, and it has been possible to complete a PhD in history at almost every academic institution. By contrast, the American university system is characterized by a significantly greater variety of institutions with very different academic foci. This chapter therefore surveys the “leading schools” in the United States, PhD-granting institutions with specialists in German history. This limitation comes at a price; we will not attain a comprehensive impression of the kind of German history that was taught at American institutions of higher education. Yet this chapter will cover the schools whose academics produced widely-read studies on modern Germany, who trained future generations of historians, who reviewed in academic journals, and whom German historians viewed as representing the American historical profession.

During the first part of the twentieth century the American historical profession was dominated by scholars who were male, white, and Protestant.⁸ To be sure, several many Catholic colleges and universities existed, as well as so-called “historically black” institutions. But the profession’s most influential figures did not yet reflect the country’s ethnic or religious diversity. Rather, they often mirrored cultural and ethnic prejudices rampant in early twentieth century American society. As John L. Harvey has revealed, prejudices against Eastern Europeans, Jews, African Americans, as well as the French were far more common than historians today would like to admit.⁹ Until the end of World War II,

⁷ The case of Franz Schnabel illustrates this point. He taught for several years at the TH Karlsruhe before moving on to the University of Munich – his alternative interpretation of Bismarck is said to have kept him from receiving a position at a more prestigious university earlier in his career.

⁸ Stephen Steinberg, *The Academic Melting Pot* (New York, 1974), chapter 1. For egregious examples of anti-Semitism in the interwar American historical profession, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 172-174.

⁹ John L. Harvey, *The Common Adventure of Mankind*, 506-516.

these sentiments affected the career prospects of who today would be called “minority scholars.” Émigrés who ultimately had successful careers in the United States initially encountered these obstacles. When Hans Rosenberg turned to William Langer for assistance in establishing himself professionally in the United States, Langer replied: “Painful though it may be to you, I ought also to say that there is not a little anti-Semitic feeling here. It goes back a long way and is not the result of recent developments. But we have always had great difficulty in placing young Jews in academic positions.”¹⁰ American Jewish students ran into similar difficulties. In the late 1930s, when the Columbia University undergraduate Carl Schorske expressed his desire to embark upon an academic career, the literary scholar Lionel Trilling who himself had had been confronted with anti-Semitism, nearly exploded at him.¹¹ John Hope Franklin’s experience at Harvard echoes this sentiment—he recalled being surprised by anti-Semitic comments among graduate students in the early 1940s.¹²

The enormous expansion of higher education in the United States after World War II helped diversify academia—comparable to the development in Germany in the 1960s.¹³ Between 1940 and 1970, the overall number of professorships increased fivefold, while AHA membership increased by 60% during the 1940s, again during the 1950s, and by over 90% in the 1960s. In the 1930s, about 150 history PhDs were awarded annually, however, by the mid-1950s the number had grown to 350 and then to 600 a decade later. According to Peter

¹⁰ William L. Langer to Hans Rosenberg, August 27 1935, Harvard University Archives, William L. Langer Papers, Personal Correspondence, Box 1. Langer added “If you feel nevertheless that you wish to come, it goes without saying that I shall exert myself to the utmost to assist you.”

¹¹ Carl Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton, 1998), 21.

¹² John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America: the Autobiography of John Hope Franklin* (New York, 2005), 64-65.

¹³ All numbers from Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 362.

Novick, “academic hiring became more meritocratic and more universalistic.”¹⁴ Discrimination against Catholic and especially Jewish historians declined, and in 1952, Louis Gottschalk served as the first Jewish president of the AHA. The class background of history graduate students and subsequently professors became more diverse as well. On the other hand, the percentage of women in the profession fell remarkably: whereas women had received 20% of history doctorates between the 1920 and 1940s, by the 1950s this number had dropped to 10%.

As already indicated, the focus of American historians of Europe shifted after the end of World War II: whereas traditionally Great Britain and France had been at the center of most scholars’ attention, with much of Europe laying in ruins “American historians set busily to work to find out what had gone wrong.”¹⁵ In this context, German history unsurprisingly seemed relevant, and this recognition had institutional consequences, with more and more history departments employing at least one specialist of modern Germany.¹⁶ By the mid-1960s, the demise of the colonial empires shifted the historiographical focus again, this time away from Europe. But the two postwar decades European history in general and German history in particular experienced its prime.

Further institutional evidence of the growing number of historians with a focus on Germany was the establishment of the *Conference Group for Central European History*. The *Conference Group* developed out of the *American Committee for the Study of War*

¹⁴ Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 364.

¹⁵ William H. McNeill, “Modern European History,” in Michael Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca and London, 1980), 107.

¹⁶ Barkin, “German Émigré Historians in America: the Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies”, 153; Fritz Stern, “German History in America, 1884-1984,” *Central European History* 19 (1986), 158.

Documents, which had been organized in 1955 by a number of scholars (including Carl J. Friedrich, Koppel Pinson, Raymond Sontag, Boyd Shafer from the AHA, Fritz T. Epstein, and Walter Dorn) in order to oversee as well as finance the filming of the German documents captured during World War II or seized soon thereafter by the United States.¹⁷ Based on two independent initiatives by Hans Kohn and George W.F. Hallgarten, the Committee in 1957 became part of the *American Historical Association*, which administered the funds for the filming of the documents. After transforming into the *Conference Group* the following year, it became the principal organization for historians of Central Europe in North America.¹⁸

American historians of Germany were able to publish their research in a number of journals. Given the comprehensive scope of the *American Historical Review*, this journal generally contained only a small number of articles on modern German history, but its review section considered several recent works in the area—both in English and in German. The first issue of the year 1951, for example, reviewed seven German studies on early modern and modern German history, considering not only major works such as Ludwig Dehio's *Gleichgewicht und Hegemonie*, but also a volume on the nineteenth century historian Onno Klopp, a relatively unknown figure even in Germany.¹⁹ While at the *American Historical Review*'s German counterpart *Historische Zeitschrift* article manuscripts in the mid-1960s were still accepted or rejected solely by its editor Theodor Schieder, the AHR

¹⁷ The long controversies surrounding these files have been documented by Astrid Eckert, *Kampf um die Akten: die Westalliierten und die Rückgabe von deutschem Archivgut nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart, 2004).

¹⁸ The first elected officers were Hans Kohn (Chairman); William O. Shanahan (Vice-Chairman); Hajo Holborn and Arthur May (Board Members), and Oron J. Hale (Secretary-Treasurer). See the note in *Journal of Central European Affairs* 18 (1958), 69.

¹⁹ Onno Klopp (1822-1903), was a critic of the leading Prussian and *kleindeutsche* historians such as Heinrich von Sybel. Originally in the service of King George V. of Hannover, Klopp later moved to Vienna where he became personal tutor of Archduke Francis Ferdinand.

already relied on outside reviewers. Even if the process was not double-blind (an article's author did not know who the reviewers were, yet the reviewers knew the identity of the author), it was comparatively fair.²⁰

Soon after the war, the second major venue, the *Journal of Modern History*, published a number of articles on recent German history, as if the scholarly reckoning with the Nazi past had begun immediately after the Allied victory. The journal had existed since 1929, when Chester P. Higby remarked that “in spite of the European origin of the great majority of Americans, in the United States comparatively little interest to the history of Europe ha[d] been paid until quite recently.”²¹ Not surprisingly, then, the interest in German history dramatically increased during and immediately after World War II—the question of how the Nazi rise to power had been possible would receive a great deal of attention in this journal. The JMH also generally reviewed a considerable number of studies written in German; in 1941 Oscar Hammen published his comprehensive critique of the relationship between German historians and the Nazi regime.²²

Other important journals included the *Journal of Central European Affairs*, the *Review of Politics*, and *World Politics*, each of which had a different scholarly scope. The *Journal of Central European Affairs* had been founded after the German invasion of France in 1940, when the publication of the *Revue des Etudes Slaves* in Paris and of the *Slavonic*

²⁰ See the editorial correspondence of *Historische Zeitschrift* during the 1950s and 1960s, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Boxes 233-244. By contrast, when Walter LaFeber in 1961 submitted his article “The Background of Cleveland's Venezuelan Policy: a Re-interpretation”, three historians (Samuel Flagg Bemis, Julius W. Pratt, and Nelson W. Blake) reviewed the manuscript. See Library of Congress, AHA Papers, Box 513, AHR editorial correspondence.

²¹ Chester P. Higby, “The Present Status of Modern European History in the United States,” *Journal of Modern History* 1 (1929), 3.

²² Oscar Hammen, “German Historians and the Advent of the National Socialist State,” *Journal of Modern History* 13 (1941), 161-188.

Review in London had stopped.²³ As the journal's editor, S. Harrison Thomson explained upon its suspension in 1964, the intent had been "to set up a forum where a study of the history and problems of the whole area of Central Europe, then silenced under Nazi tyranny, could be presented."²⁴ During the twenty-three years of its existence, the journal published a significant number of articles on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century German history. Moreover, its review section was remarkably comprehensive and included a large number of studies written in German. The "notes and documents" section also covered annual conferences of a number of German historical and area studies associations. Two years after the *Journal of Central European Affairs* ceased publication, the Conference Group for Central European History decided to sponsor a new journal, *Central European History*, which together with the *Austrian History Yearbook* (established in 1965 by R. John Rath) and the *East European Quarterly* (founded in 1966) was supposed to cover Central Europe.²⁵ Hajo Holborn and Theodore Hamerow were instrumental in getting *Central European History* off the ground. Similar to the procedure followed by the *American Historical Review* in the 1960s, *CEH* established the anonymous review process from its inception.²⁶

By contrast, the *Review of Politics*, published by the University of Notre Dame since 1939, claimed that, "without neglecting the analysis of institutions and techniques, [was] primarily interested in the philosophical and historical approach to political realities"²⁷ The

²³ Edvard Benes, former President of Czechoslovakia and now head of the Provisional Czechoslovak Government based in London, contributed the very first article, "The New Central Europe," *Journal of Central European Affairs* 1 (1941), 1-4.

²⁴ See the concluding remarks by S. Harrison Thomson in *Journal of Central European Affairs* 23 (1964), 411.

²⁵ "From the editors", *Central European History* 1 (1968), 3.

²⁶ Douglas E. Unfug, personal note to the author, August 29, 2009. Unfug served as editor from 1968 to 1990.

²⁷ Editorial statement, *The Review of Politics* 1 (1939), 1.

political scientist and émigré Waldemar Gurian was the founder and subsequently the driving force behind this journal which was strictly speaking a political-science rather than a historical publication.²⁸ The majority of issues during the immediate postwar years contained articles on either the roots of National Socialism or its aftermath. Moreover, it generally featured reviews of recent American as well as German literature on modern Germany. Compared to the AHR or the *Journal of Modern History*, which had no particular ideological bent, the *Review of Politics* can be characterized as a more conservative journal, both regarding its authors and the topics chosen. Immediately after the war, Gerhard Ritter published an English translation of his rather euphemistic account of German academics in Nazi Germany, which denied the ideological proximity of most scholars to the regime.²⁹ Published by a Catholic university, it also paid increased attention to literature on Catholicism.³⁰

Another journal, which distinguished itself as an interdisciplinary publication (many authors were political scientists or sociologists) but which served as a venue for many historical articles was *World Politics*.³¹ Established in 1948 and published by the *Yale Institute of International Studies*, the journal contained extraordinarily comprehensive review essays analyzing what could be considered the big books on modern Germany during the

²⁸ On Gurian, see Heinz Hürten, *Waldemar Gurian: Ein Zeuge der Krise unserer Welt in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz, 1972). See also the account by Margaret Fitzsimmons, "Profile of Crisis: the Review of Politics, 1939-1963," in *Review of Politics* 25 (1963), 419-430.

²⁹ Gerhard Ritter, "The German Professor in the Third Reich," *Review of Politics* 8 (1946), 242-254.

³⁰ See, for example, early reviews in *Review of Politics* 8 (1946), 551-552 (a study on Nazi policies against the Catholic Church as well as Catholic resistance), and 10 (1948), 244-246 (two studies on Catholic resistance in Nazi Germany).

³¹ The very first issue, for example, contained articles by the pioneer of Comparative Politics Gabriel Almond, the founder of the Realist school in Political Science Hans Morgenthau, economist Jacob Viner, and military historian Alfred Vagts.

time.³² Moreover, it often published articles on contemporary affairs in West Germany, covering, for example, the development of the West German party system and the trade unions.

Centers of German History

While the American landscape of colleges and universities is vast, the training of future historians took place at a comparatively small number of graduate institutions. Aware of the danger of creating the impression of a “great men make historiography” interpretation, what follows is a survey of the “big players” within the American historical profession. In this context, it is worth remembering that graduate training in the United States unfolded in a more open manner than in Germany in the sense that there was less political, ideological, or methodological proximity between the advisers and their students.³³ Without implying a ranking of history departments by presenting them in a particular order, this section proceeds from region to region. It first focuses on the Ivies, then examines departments located in the Mid-West, before moving South and ultimately to the West Coast.

At Harvard, William Langer and Sidney B. Fay wrote on and taught German history, and while labels such as “pro-German” are problematic due to their relative vagueness, both historians held views diametrically opposed to the “from Luther to Hitler” interpretation,

³² Two issues in 1959, for example, featured comprehensive reviews of Leonard Krieger’s *The German Idea of Freedom*, Peter Gay’s *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism*, and Carl Schorske’s *German Social Democracy 1905-1917*.

³³ The following section draws in parts on John L. Harvey’s *The Common Adventure of Mankind*, 548-564. For a comparative sketch of the social dimension of German and American (as well as British and French) historical professions during the first half of the twentieth century, see Wolfgang Weber, “Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte des historiographischen Wandels,” in Wolfgang Küttler/Jörn Rüsen/Ernst Schulin (eds.), *Geschichtsdiskurs. Band 4: Krisenbewusstsein, Katastrophenerfahrungen und Innovationen 1880-1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 90-107.

which saw the Nazi years as the culmination of a long deviation from the “Western” development.³⁴ During the interwar years, Fay had provided the “revisionist” counterpoint to Bernadotte E. Schmitt’s view on the origins of World War I.³⁵ Fay, taking a firm stand against the Versailles Treaty—including the war guilt clause—had provided an in-depth discussion of the underlying and the immediate causes of the war. In the first respect Fay had blamed, above all, the system of secret alliances, and in the latter he stated Austria-Hungary’s responsibility while underlining that “Germany did not plot a European War, did not want one, and made genuine, though too belated efforts, to avert one.”³⁶ This magnum opus got Fay the position at Harvard in 1929, where he taught until his retirement in 1946. Yet Fay also reached beyond the ivory tower: in 1940, he had written an article for the *New York Times*’ Sunday edition entitled “The German Character”, which argued that it would be “a mistake to identify the Nazis with the whole German people” and that “one must distinguish between the Nazi party members, their active supporters, and their terrorized opponents.” Ultimately, the Sunday Times editor Lester Markel and Fay agreed that the time was not right to publish the article.³⁷ Fay also wrote a brief, sympathetic history of

³⁴ This does not imply that other American historians adhered to this view. William Montgomery McGovern who in 1941 published *From Luther to Hitler* was a political scientist and anthropologist at Northwestern University, and his book received mixed reviews in historical journals. The other two studies generally mentioned in a similar vein were written by the British historians A.J.P. Taylor and Rohan d’Olier Butler (both at Oxford University)

³⁵ Compare See Bernadotte Schmitt, *The Coming of War*, 2 volumes, (New York, 1966, first edition 1930); and Sidney B. Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, 2 volumes, (New York, 1929). For the broader context of the “war guilt” debate of the interwar years, see Wolfgang Jäger, *Historische Forschung und politische Kultur in Deutschland. Die Debatte 1914 – 1980 über den Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs*, (Göttingen, 1984), 58-59.

³⁶ Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, Vol. II, 553. Interestingly, the German Foreign Ministry bought a part of the edition of Fay’s book to distribute them abroad. See Ulrich Heinemann, *Die verdrängte Niederlage. Politische Öffentlichkeit und Kriegsschuldfrage in der Weimarer Republik*, (Göttingen, 1983), 113.

³⁷ Sidney B. Fay to Lester Markel, May 30, 1940; Lester Markel to Sidney B. Fay, June 6, 1940; and Sidney B. Fay to Lester Markel, June 13, 1940; Harvard University Archives, Sidney B. Fay Papers, HUG 4385.20, Box 2.

Brandenburg-Prussia, and he translated Friedrich Meinecke's essay *Die deutsche Katastrophe* into English.³⁸ In the translator's preface to the paperback edition published in 1963, Fay emphasized Meinecke's achievement of providing a brief yet penetrating account of Germany's road to National Socialism: "It seeks neither to justify nor to condemn, but to understand. And, like a good historian, Meinecke sees things not purely white or black, but as the merging of lighter and darker shades in the grey web of history."³⁹

William L. Langer, Fay's longtime colleague at Harvard—he taught there from 1927 to 1964—specialized in international rather than German history but always had a keen interest in modern Germany, and he advised several graduate students working within this area.⁴⁰ During World War II, Langer headed the Research & Analysis Branch of the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor of the CIA.⁴¹ This unit produced a number of regional studies for the purposes of the planned occupation; later, it helped prepare the Nuremberg Trials.⁴² Langer also edited an extremely successful series of textbooks—*The Rise of Modern*

³⁸ Sidney B. Fay, *The Rise of Brandenburg-Prussia to 1786* (New York, 1937).

³⁹ Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections* (Cambridge, MA, 1950; paperback edition Boston, 1963), vii.

⁴⁰ On Langer, see the long bibliographical and intellectual-biographical introduction by Carl Schorske in Id./Elizabeth Schorske, *Explorations in Crisis: Papers on International History* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), ix-xliv. Langer's students included Carl Schorske, H. Stuart Hughes, Hans W. Gatzke, and Klemens von Klemperer.

⁴¹ The standard account of Langer's branch is Barry Katz, *Foreign Intelligence: Research and Analysis in the Office of Strategic Services* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

⁴² Tim B. Müller, "Die gelehrten Krieger und die Rockefeller-Revolution: Intellektuelle zwischen Geheimdienst, Neuer Linken und dem Entwurf einer neuen Ideengeschichte," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 33 (2007), 198-227. In this capacity, Langer oversaw the work of scholars such as Crane Brinton, Carl Schorske, Stuart Hughes, Leonard Krieger, Franklin Ford, Gordon Craig, Arthur Schlesinger, Walt Rostow, Charles Kindleberger, Barrington Moore, Franz Neumann, Herbert Marcuse, Otto Kirchheimer, Felix Gilbert, and Hajo Holborn.

Europe—that became known colloquially as the “Langer Series.”⁴³ Toward the end of his career, Langer became, against his will, involved in the controversy surrounding David L. Hoggan who had received his PhD at Harvard in 1948. In 1961 Hoggan published *Der erzwungene Krieg* (The Forced War), which placed the responsibility for the outbreak of World War II on the supposedly conspiratorial diplomacy of Great Britain and Poland. Early in his career, Hoggan had received considerable support from Langer.⁴⁴ When the publication of *Der erzwungene Krieg* caused a scandal in both Germany and the United States, Langer quickly repudiated the book, despite the fact that it strongly resembled the actual PhD thesis he had approved fifteen years earlier.⁴⁵

Probably as important as graduate mentor at Harvard as Langer was Franklin Ford, who advised scholars such as Fritz K. Ringer, Charles S. Maier, and Thomas Childers. As a result of his service for the OSS in Germany Ford had acquired access to captured German documents and was therefore able to write what was arguably the first scholarly treatment of the German resistance.⁴⁶ Ford received his PhD at Harvard in 1950, and, after a brief stint at Bennington College, returned to his alma mater in 1953, where he taught until 1985.

⁴³ On this enterprise, see John L. Harvey, “Mission Impossible? Progress, ‘The New History,’ and European Identity in *The Rise of Modern Europe*,” in Stefan Berger/Chris Lorenz (eds.), *The Nation and Its Other: Microstudies in National History* (London/New York, forthcoming).

⁴⁴ Langer had written a glowing recommendation for Hoggan when he applied for a job at Berkeley. See the letter William L. Langer to Raymond Sontag, April 29, 1952, Harvard Archives, William L. Langer papers, Box 13, Personal Correspondence.

⁴⁵ For the American side, see the review by Gerhard Weinberg and the subsequent exchange between Weinberg, Hoggan, and Hoggan’s defender Harry Elmer Barnes in *American Historical Review* 68 (1962), 104-105 and 914-918. A devastating German review was Gotthard Jasper’s “Über die Ursachen des Zweiten Weltkrieges: zu den Büchern von A.J.P. Taylor and David L. Hoggan,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 10 (1962), 311-340.

⁴⁶ Franklin L. Ford, “The Twentieth of July in the History of the German Resistance,” *American Historical Review* 51 (1946), 609-626.

Primarily a scholar of seventeenth and eighteenth century France, he also managed to oversee the completion of several dissertations in modern German history.⁴⁷

At Columbia, Carlton J. Hayes' long era ended in 1950—he had received his PhD at Columbia in 1909, started teaching immediately afterwards, and had never left the university, except to serve as the American ambassador to Spain between 1942 and 1944.⁴⁸ Not a specialist of modern Germany, Hayes was primarily interested in the political and cultural history of modern Western Europe and especially modern nationalism, but nevertheless advised a number of dissertations on German history.⁴⁹ Shepard Clough, his younger colleague (PhD 1930), had done some postgraduate work at the University of Heidelberg. Primarily interested in modern Italy, he still served as dissertation adviser for graduate students working on German history. Indeed, graduate students writing on modern Germany often had advisers who were not themselves historians of this field, or no historians at all: Fritz Stern completed his dissertation under the supervision of cultural historian Jacques Barzun, while Peter Gay and Raul Hilberg received guidance from Franz Neumann in the Political Science department.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ While he did not publish any monographs on modern Germany, Ford authored articles on the German resistance and Leopold von Ranke, and he reviewed widely in the area of modern German history and historiography.

⁴⁸ On Hayes, see Carter Jefferson, "Carlton J.H. Hayes," in Hans A. Schmitt (ed.), *Historians of Modern Europe* (Baton Rouge, La., 1971) 15-35, as well as Charles R. Halstead, "Historians in Politics: Carlton J.H. Hayes as American Ambassador to Spain, 1942-1945," *Journal of Contemporary History* 10 (1975), 383-405.

⁴⁹ His students include Walter C. Langsam (PhD 1930), who taught first at Columbia from 1927 to 1938, then at Union College. Langsam later became a university administrator, serving as president of the University of Cincinnati between 1955 and 1971; Robert Ergang (PhD 1931), who later taught at NYU; and William O. Shanahan (PhD, 1945), who taught at the University of Notre Dame (1941-1960), the University of Oregon (1960-1966) and Hunter College/Graduate Center, City University of New York (1966-1982).

⁵⁰ Raul Hilberg discusses Neumann's role in *The Politics of Memory: the Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago, 1996).

When Gordon Craig arrived at Princeton in 1941, he was among a number of young scholars joining the history department around the same time and who would come to shape it in the following decades. Craig had been trained at Princeton himself (Raymond Sontag had advised his dissertation on Great Britain's policy of non-intervention in the late 1860s), had briefly taught at Yale and, after Sontag's departure for Berkeley, taken his *Doktorvater's* position.⁵¹ During an extended stay in Europe in 1935—he had been awarded a Rhodes Fellowship—Craig also experienced Nazi Germany first hand. As an analyst for the OSS, Craig penned the pamphlet “Know Your Enemy.” These personal and immediate encounters certainly influenced Craig's future intellectual engagement with German history and contemporary West Germany. Yet while he initially tended toward a *Sonderweg* approach of modern German history, his later works were characterized by a more sympathetic interpretation.⁵² Craig left Princeton for Stanford in 1956, but during his tenure advised a number of graduate students.⁵³

German history at Yale from the mid-1930s to the mid-1960s was almost synonymous with the name of Hajo Holborn, since he had by far the largest number of students. Besides Holborn, his student Leonard Krieger (PhD 1949) taught there from 1946 to 1962, when he left for Chicago. Krieger specialized in intellectual history—*The German*

⁵¹ See the obituary by James Sheehan in *Central European History* 40 (2007), 133-137.

⁵² In 1950, Craig had praised Friedrich Meinecke's attempt to reevaluate Prussian-German militarism in *Die Deutsche Katastrophe* but criticized his reluctance “to conclude that Hitlerism was, in fact, a logical outcome of Germany's development in the nineteenth century,” review of Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*,” *American Political Science Review* 44 (1950), 1030. Similarly, Craig's classic study *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640-1945* (London/New York, 1955) was an exercise in outlining continuities in Prussian and German history.

⁵³ While at Princeton, Craig advises historians such as Henry A. Turner; at Stanford, Craig's students included Roger Chickering.

Idea of Freedom became a classic—as well as historiography.⁵⁴ Hans W. Gatzke did not join Yale’s history faculty until 1964 (he had taught at Johns Hopkins since 1947). And even though he eventually became a pioneer in African studies, one should also mention Harry R. Rudin who had authored an important study on German colonialism as well as a study on the armistice 1918 and who remained interested in both subject matters.⁵⁵

At Chicago, Bernadotte E. Schmitt, the doyen of World War I historiography, retired in 1946 and somewhat ironically was replaced by Hans Rothfels, whose views on German history could hardly have been more different from his predecessor’s. Schmitt’s work on World War I tended to cast the German Empire in a rather unflattering light, and during World War II he advocated a hard line toward a defeated Germany.⁵⁶ This was obviously a position worlds-apart from Rothfels’ whose first postwar book on the German resistance served the purpose to reveal to the American public that the resistance to the Nazi regime was a phenomenon encompassing all strata of German society.⁵⁷ Rothfels was until his departure for the University of Tübingen in 1953 mainly responsible for teaching German history at Chicago.⁵⁸ His colleague S. William Halperin, who taught nineteenth and twentieth century European history, was primarily interested in Italy (he had written monographs on relations between the Vatican and the Italian State, and on Italian fascism). Yet he also

⁵⁴ Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom: History of a Political Tradition* (Boston, 1957); Id., *Ranke: the Meaning of History* (Chicago, 1977); John Higham/Felix Gilbert/Leonard Krieger, *History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1965).

⁵⁵ Harry R. Rudin, *Germans in the Cameroons, 1884-1914* (New Haven, 1938); Id., *Armistice 1918* (New Haven, 1944).

⁵⁶ See Schmitt’s pamphlet *What Shall We Do With Germany?* (Chicago, 1943), which elicited a strong response among his readers. See the correspondence in his papers, LoC, Bernadotte E. Schmitt Papers, Box 5.

⁵⁷ Hans Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler: An Appraisal* (Hinsdale, IL, 1948). See also Jan Eckel, *Hans Rothfels. Eine intellektuelle Biographie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2005), 243-260.

⁵⁸ Georg G. Iggers, Note to the author, 7 August 2009.

published a book on Weimar Germany with the programmatic title *Germany Tried Democracy*.⁵⁹ In Chicago's German department, Rothfels' fellow émigré Arnold Bergsträsser pursued an interdisciplinary course: a sociologist and economist by training, he moved between political science and history and held a chair for German literature and history.⁶⁰ Like Rothfels, Bergsträsser was an ardent conservative and eventually returned to Germany where he played a similarly significant role for the development of postwar West German political science.⁶¹

In the Midwest, the University of Minnesota was a center for German history, where Lawrence Steefel and Harold C. Deutsch were both long-term members of the history department. Steefel was a specialist on European diplomacy in the 1860s—his dissertation analyzed the conflicts surrounding Schleswig and Holstein early in this decade, and a later study examined the origins of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71—taught from 1923 to 1959.⁶² Deutsch, whose tenure at Minnesota lasted from 1929 to 1972, was originally a scholar of Napoleonic France but later decided to specialize in even more recent diplomatic history. In 1935/36, he had spent a year in Europe as a Social Science research fellow, and during World War II he had been one of the many historians enlisting in the OSS's Research

⁵⁹ S. William Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy: a Political History of the Weimar Republic 1918-1933* (New York, 1946).

⁶⁰ Wilma and Georg Iggers, *Two Lives in Uncertain Times: Facing the Challenges of the 20th Century as Scholars and Citizens* (New York/Oxford, 2006), 46-47 and 59-60.

⁶¹ See the account by fellow émigré Ernst Fraenkel, "Arnold Bergsträsser und die deutsche Politikwissenschaft," in Dieter Oberndörfer (ed.), *Arnold Bergsträsser: Weltpolitik als Wissenschaft. Geschichtliches Bewußtsein und politische Erziehung* (Köln, 1965), 252-259.

⁶² Lawrence D. Steefel, *The Schleswig Holstein Question* (Cambridge, MA, 1932); Id., *Bismarck, the Hohenzollern Candidacy, and the Origins of the Franco-German War of 1870* (Cambridge, MA, 1962). Among Steefel's students was the Metternich scholar Enno E. Kraehe, who received his PhD from the University of Minnesota in 1948 and taught at University of Kentucky, the University of North Carolina, and finally the University of Virginia.

and Analysis Branch (he served as chief of political research for Europe, Africa and the Near East for the Office). After the war, Deutsch was involved with interviewing German political and military prisoners, many of whom were later tried and executed for war crimes at the Nuremberg trials.⁶³ Like many of his colleagues, Deutsch thus experienced the dramatic events of his time firsthand, but unlike some of them, he did not only turn to German history but focused on precisely the issues he had witnessed. After a study on the July 1944 plot against Hitler, *The Conspiracy against Hitler in the Twilight War* he wrote a study on the beginnings of the military's disenchantment with the Nazi leadership, *Hitler and His Generals: The Hidden Crisis, January-June 1938*.⁶⁴

During his tenure at Ohio State University from 1929 to 1956, Walter L. Dorn was the specialist in modern Germany, particularly Prussia.⁶⁵ In 1940, Dorn published a volume in the series *The Rise of Modern Europe* (also known as the "Langer Series") on Europe between 1740 and 1763, which he adopted, according to the reviewer in the *American Historical Review*, "almost a Teutonic rather than an American point of view."⁶⁶ During World War II, Dorn had served in the OSS, and after the war he became a personal adviser to General Lucius D. Clay, head of the Office of the Military Government for Germany (OMGUS), during the implementation of the denazification program.⁶⁷ In the 1950s Dorn

⁶³ Biographical sketch Harold Charles Deutsch, University of Minnesota Archives.

⁶⁴ Harold C. Deutsch, *The Conspiracy against Hitler in the Twilight War* (Minneapolis, 1968); Id., *Hitler and His Generals: The Hidden Crisis, January-June 1938* (Minneapolis, 1974).

⁶⁵ "Walter Louis Dorn 1894-1961," *Political Science Review* 76 (1961), 481-482.

⁶⁶ Chester P. Higby, "Review of Walter L. Dorn, *Competition for Empire, 1740-1763*," *American Historical Review* 46 (1940), 127-129, quote on 128. Higby added: "He [Dorn] admires Prussia very much and is inclined to set up Prussian institutions as a standard by which to judge those of other states."

⁶⁷ Walter L. Dorn, "The Debate Over American Occupation Policy in Germany in 1944-45," *Political Science Quarterly* 72 (1957), 481-501. Dorn published the text in German as "Die Debatte über die amerikanische

was a member of the *American Committee for the Study of War Documents* and in 1956 he moved to Columbia University, where he taught until his death in 1961. Equally involved in the transatlantic community, even though his was intellectual rather than political or military, was Dorn's colleague Harold J. Grimm.⁶⁸ A historian of the Reformation who taught at Ohio State from 1937 to 1972, Grimm was well-connected to German Reformation scholars—Gerhard Ritter was a close friend—and he became one of the main figures in the reestablishment of *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, co-edited by the German *Verein für Reformationsgeschichte* and its American counterpart, the *Society for Reformation Research*. This was a postwar attempt to create a truly international intellectual enterprise, yet for the Germans it also had the pleasant side effect of rehabilitating scholars such as Heinrich Bornkamm, who had proven their ideological proximity to National Socialism.⁶⁹

By the mid-twentieth century, the University of Madison's reputation rested primarily on a number of outstanding historians in American history, including Merle Curti, Howard K. Beale, William B. Hesseltine, Merrill Jensen, Fred Harvey Harrington, and later William A. Williams.⁷⁰ European and particularly German history had not yet achieved the

Besatzungspolitik," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 6 (1958), 60-77. See also Lutz Niethammer (ed.), *Walter L. Dorn: Inspektionsreisen in der US-Zone: Notizen, Denkschriften und Erinnerungen aus dem Nachlass* (Stuttgart, 1973).

⁶⁸ Phillip N. Bebb, "In Memoriam: Harold J. Grimm," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983), 497-498.

⁶⁹ See the programmatic statement by Heinrich Bornkamm, Gerhard Ritter, Roland H. Bainton, and Harold J. Grimm, "Unser Programm," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 42 (1951), 7-10. A historical account provides John L. Harvey, "Reformationsgeschichte Reformed? The Rebirth of *Archiv of Reformationsgeschichte* from Five Decades Past," paper delivered at the Annual Conference of the Society of Reformation Research, Minneapolis, October 24-28, 2007. For Bornkamm, see Kurt Nowak, "Zeiterfahrung und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung. Heinrich Bornkamm im Dritten Reich," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 103 (1992), 46-80.

⁷⁰ For a personal recollection of the department's development, see the transcript of an oral history of Fred Harvey Harrington, department chair 1952-1955 and president of the university 1962-1970, UW Madison Oral History Project 135, Vol. 2, 1982.

significance it would have by the 1960s, when George L. Mosse, Theodor Hamerow, and Robert Koehl turned Madison into arguably one of the most interesting places to study modern Germany. Yet Chester V. Easum, who taught at the University of Wisconsin from 1930 to 1964, had a truly transatlantic outlook as well, having written his dissertation on the German revolutionary and American statesman Carl Schurz.⁷¹ Later he published a biography of Prince Henry of Prussia and a textbook on the first half of the twentieth century, both of which emphasized political and military history.⁷² Easum was also another scholar whose interest in German history and contemporary Germany went beyond the strictly intellectual realm. From 1954-1956 Easum had political contact with Germany as the Cultural Attaché in the United States High Commission and then the United States Embassy. In this capacity he attempted to establish contacts between the Embassy and German universities, frequently lecturing at institutions of higher learning.

Probably even more influential politically than Chester Easum was Oron P. Hale, who taught at the University Virginia from 1929 to 1972.⁷³ Hale, like so many of his colleagues, became involved in military intelligence during World War II. After the war had ended, he joined George N. Shuster's team in interviewing high-ranking Nazis including Göring, von Ribbentrop, and Dönitz. During the 1950s, Hale was appointed first deputy state commissioner, then state commissioner of Bavaria. In this capacity he operated with the

⁷¹ Chester V. Easum, *The Americanization of Carl Schurz* (Chicago, 1929); it also appeared in German as *Carl Schurz: vom deutschen Einwanderer zum amerikanischen Staatsmann* (Weimar, 1937).

⁷² Chester V. Easum, *Prince Henry of Prussia: Brother of Frederick the Great* (Madison, WI 1942); Id., *A Half-Century of Conflict* (New York, 1952).

⁷³ Larry D. Wilcox, "Oron J. Hale 1902-1991," *Central European History* 23 (1990), 379-382. Obviously, Hale's obituary did not appear prior to his death. Yet at the time, *Central European History* was behind its publication schedule.

United State High Commission for Germany and supervised Marshall Plan operations in Bavaria, as well as refugee and displaced persons affairs, and the relations of U.S. forces in Bavaria with local agencies.⁷⁴ After his return to the United States, he worked within the *American Committee for the Study of War Documents* and subsequently the *Conference Group for Central European History* (where he was chairman in 1964) and its journal *Central European History* (where he served on the board of editors). Throughout his career, Hale was particularly interested in the role of the media in politics – he published two studies on the decades prior to World War I and later an analysis of the press in Nazi Germany (the latter benefitted from Hale’s interviews with Max Amann, founder of the Nazi press empire).⁷⁵

Further South, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, modern Germany did not constitute a strength of the history department until the late 1960s. The history department at the time had not yet hired a historian of modern Germany. An accomplished teacher who developed a year-long Western Civilization course, Carl H. Pegg’s focus remained on Europe rather than Germany.⁷⁶ Enno E. Kraehe who specialized in nineteenth century Central European history and gained recognition through a multi-volume biography of Metternich, arrived at the University of North Carolina in 1964, but left in 1968 for the University of Virginia. John L. Snell, a graduate of UNC as well as a twentieth century

⁷⁴ In 1969, Hale was awarded the Commander’s Cross of the Order of Merit by the Federal Republic.

⁷⁵ Oron J. Hale, *Germany and the Diplomatic Revolution: a Study in Diplomacy and the Press* (New York, 1931); Id., *Publicity and Diplomacy, with Special Reference to Germany and England, 1890-1914* (New York, 1940); Id., *The Captive Press in the Third Reich* (Princeton, 1964).

⁷⁶ He also authored a textbook on European history since 1918, *Contemporary Europe in World Focus* (New York, 1956). See the obituary in *The Journal of Southern History* 62 (1996), 865-866.

diplomatic historian, joined the department 1968, but died prematurely four years later.⁷⁷ Only when Gerhard L. Weinberg moved to North Carolina from the University of Michigan in 1972 did the department begin to develop its reputation as a place where future historians of modern Germany were trained.

Immediately after World War II, Berkeley had not achieved the rank in German history that it would possess by the late 1960s, when Hans Rosenberg, Carl Schorske, and the young Gerald Feldman taught there. Yet Raymond Sontag, who had joined Berkeley's history department in 1941 (after seventeen years at Princeton) and who remained there until 1963, served as advisor to students of German history.⁷⁸ A diplomatic historian of Europe, he had studied in Germany during the Ruhr Crisis of 1923 and later published a study on the German-British antagonism during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷⁹ Between 1946 and 1949, Sontag served as American editor-in-chief of the intergovernmental project dealing with the captured German state documents.⁸⁰

Arrival of the Émigrés

All these scholars shaped the field German history in the United States, which the German or Central European émigré historians entered in the mid- to late 1930s. The émigré historians fall into two distinct groups—those who received their PhDs before emigrating to

⁷⁷ See Fritz T. Epstein's obituary "John L. Snell," *Historische Zeitschrift* 215 (1972), 522.

⁷⁸ Among his students was Vernon Lidtke.

⁷⁹ Raymond J. Sontag, *Germany and England: Background of Conflict, 1848-1894* (New York, 1938). Sontag discusses his personal experience as a student in Europe in the preface of his study on interwar Europe, *A Broken World 1919-1939* (New York, 1971), xvi.

⁸⁰ See Eckert, *Kampf um die Akten*, 112-114. From this work resulted the multivolume series, *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, as well as the separate documentary volume, *Nazi-Soviet Relations, 1939-1941*.

the United States, and those who at least completed, but in most cases only began their academic training after leaving Central Europe.⁸¹ The first group consisted almost exclusively of students of Friedrich Meinecke.⁸² Among them, Hajo Holborn stands out in several respects: almost immediately upon his arrival in the United States in 1934, Holborn received a job at Yale, where he taught for more than three decades.⁸³ A particularly noteworthy honor was his election as president of the American Historical Association in 1967—at the time making him one of only four foreign-born scholars to have held this position.⁸⁴ Most importantly, however, Holborn advised more than fifty dissertations, and his students would play significant roles in the field from the 1950s to the 1980s. They include Henry Cord Meyer, Leonard Krieger, Otto Pflanze, Theodore Hamerow, Arno Mayer, and Charles McClelland.⁸⁵ His three-volume *History of Modern Germany* became required reading for German history graduate students throughout the United States. Maybe more than any of his fellow émigrés of the same generation, Holborn saw himself as a mediator between the United States and West Germany, academically as well as politically. As he

⁸¹ Limiting the analysis to scholars from German territories would exclude important figures such as Hans Kohn and Theodore Hamerow (from Czechoslovakia and Poland respectively).

⁸² See Gerhard A. Ritter's introduction to the volume of letters he recently edited, "Friedrich Meinecke und seine emigrierten Schüler," in Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke*, 13-111.

⁸³ On Holborn, see the various contributions in the memorial issue of *Central European History* 3:1/2 (1970), as well as Otto Pflanze, "The Americanization of Hajo Holborn", in Lehmann and Sheehan, *An Interrupted Past*, 170-179.

⁸⁴ The other three were Goldwyn Smith (1904), Jules Jusserand (1921), and Michael I. Rostovtseff (1935).

⁸⁵ In 1970, Holborn's students taught at many of the most important American history departments: Dartmouth College (Henry L. Roberts), UCLA (Andrew Lossky), Columbia University (Leonard Krieger, who also taught at Yale and Chicago), University of Minnesota (Otto Pflanze), University of Wisconsin (Theodore Hamerow), Catholic University of America (John K. Zeender), University of Massachusetts (Harold J. Gordon, Miriam Usher Chrisman), Duke University (William E. Scott), Princeton University (Arno J. Mayer), University of Pittsburgh (Richard N. Hunt), Emory University (Douglas A. Unfug), Pennsylvania State University (Dan Paul Silverman), Yale University (Nicholas X. Rizopoulos), New York University (Stewart A. Staehlin), University of Chicago (F. Gregory Campbell), Middlebury College (Marjorie Lamberti), University of Pennsylvania (Charles McClelland).

wrote in the introduction of his *History of Modern Germany*, “my transformation into an American has given me a broader perspective on all things German.”⁸⁶

While his career did not develop in such a straightforward manner as Holborn’s, Hans Rosenberg’s⁸⁷ case was remarkable in a different respect: he was one of very few émigré historians who left a deep impact on both sides of the Atlantic.⁸⁸ After initially immigrating to England in 1933, Rosenberg crossed the Atlantic in 1935. Having been unemployed for almost a year, Rosenberg found a job at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois.⁸⁹ In 1938 he moved to New York City where he taught at Brooklyn College for 21 years. His heavy teaching load hampered his ability to research and write, but during those years Rosenberg taught a significant number of undergraduates, many of whom later entered the profession recalling the rigorous training he had provided them with.⁹⁰ When Rosenberg moved to Berkeley in 1959, where he held the Shepard chair, he also began advising graduate

⁸⁶ Hajo Holborn, *History of Modern Germany: The Reformation* (New York, 1964), x. Holborn added: “Even more important was my growing inclination to evaluate historical phenomena on a comparative level.”

⁸⁷ Unfortunately, I have not been able to draw on Rosenberg’s vast correspondence with American and German historians, located at the *Bundesarchiv* Koblenz. His papers only became accessible on January 1, 2010. This gap will be closed when I revise the dissertation for publication.

⁸⁸ On Rosenberg, see Hanna Schissler, “Explaining History: Hans Rosenberg”, in Lehmann and Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past*, 180-188; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Vorwort,” in Id., *Sozialgeschichte Heute: Festschrift für Hans Rosenberg zum 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen, 1974), 9-21; Heinrich August Winkler, “Ein Erneuerer in der Geschichtswissenschaft. Hans Rosenberg 1904-1988,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 248 (1989), 529-555; Gerhard A. Ritter, “Hans Rosenberg 1904-1988,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 15 (1989), 282-302.

⁸⁹ Hans Rosenberg, “Rückblick auf ein Historikerleben zwischen zwei Kulturen,” in Id., *Machteliten und Wirtschaftskonjunktoren: Studien zur neueren deutschen Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1978), 16.

⁹⁰ See the accounts by Eugene Genovese, “Hans Rosenberg at Brooklyn College: a Communist Student’s Recollections of the Classroom as War Zone,” *Central European History* 24 (1991), 51-57; Morton Rothstein, “Drunk on Ideas: Hans Rosenberg as a Teacher at Brooklyn College,” *Central European History* 24 (1991), 64-68; and Kenneth L. Barkin, “Émigré Historians in America: The Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies,” in Lehmann and Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past*, 154-155.

students.⁹¹ Through visiting professorships he also maintained contact with Germany: most notably he spent a year at Free University Berlin in 1949/1950, where he quickly became surrounded by a group of promising students, including Gerhard A. Ritter, Otto Büsch, Gerhard Schulz, Wolfgang Sauer, Gilbert Ziebura, Helga Grebing, and Franz Ansprenger.⁹² Rosenberg became the godfather of the emerging *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* in the 1970s—to what extent this designation reflected Rosenberg’s own point of view, is a different question, which will be addressed in the fourth chapter. Rosenberg enormous popularity among West German social historians culminated in Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s attempt to have Rosenberg deliver the closing lecture at the *Historikertag* of the German Historians’ Association 1974, as belated recognition of Rosenberg’s accomplishments as scholar and teacher, which he had to cancel due to illness.

Another Meinecke student, Dietrich Gerhard, led an even more transatlantic life than Hans Rosenberg.⁹³ After he had immigrated to the United States, Gerhard became an assistant professor at Washington University where he taught until his retirement in 1965. Yet as he had written to Meinecke soon after the war, he was also interested in reconnecting with German academia.⁹⁴ After several visiting professorships in the early 1950s, Gerhard in 1955 became professor for American Studies and head of the *Amerikainstitut* at the University of Cologne. In 1961 took the position of director of the newly established *Max-*

⁹¹ Shulamit Volkov, “Hans Rosenberg as a Teacher: a Few Personal Notes,” *Central European History* 24 (1991), 58-63.

⁹² Rosenberg dedicated his *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit* to this group of students.

⁹³ See his own account “From European to American History: a Comparative View,” *Journal of American Studies* 14 (1980), 27-44, as well as the obituary by Rudolf Vierhaus, “Dietrich Gerhard,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 242 (1986), 758-762.

⁹⁴ Dietrich Gerhard to Friedrich Meinecke, August 30, 1948, in Ritter (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke*, 182-184.

Planck-Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen. Among the émigrés of the first generation, Gerhard arguably had probably the broadest thematic scope, both in his research and in his teaching. While in Cologne, he taught American history (he also helped establish the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien*), and in St. Louis he remained the Europeanist. In 1967, Carl Bridenbaugh, a historian of colonial America at Brown University, suggested Gerhard for honorary foreign membership of the *American Historical Association*.⁹⁵ Bridenbaugh's suggestion was ultimately rejected, but can still be considered a testament to Gerhard's reputation among scholars of North American history.

Maybe the only historian to match Dietrich Gerhard's wide range of interest was Felix Gilbert, a descendant of Moses Mendelssohn and Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.⁹⁶ After starting out as the biographer of the nineteenth century Prussian historian Johann Gustav Droysen, Gilbert later became primarily a specialist on the Italian Renaissance. In addition, he also wrote about twentieth century European diplomacy and German historiography. Last but not least, his *To the Farewell Address* became required reading for any scholar interested in early American foreign policy.⁹⁷ Having worked as Edward Mead Earle's assistant at the Institute for Advanced Studies between 1937 and 1943, Gilbert served for two years in the OSS.⁹⁸ After the end of the war Gilbert taught for sixteen at Bryn Mawr College.⁹⁹ Yet it was

⁹⁵ Bridenbaugh argued that "a) he has not only been a good scholar ... but he has done wonders for the study of American civilization in Germany. b) I see nothing wrong with rewarding a dues-paying member who has done good work." Letter Carl Bridenbaugh to Crane Brinton (Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Honorary Memberships of the AHA in 1967), October 8, 1967, LoC, AHA papers, Box 737, Committee Files.

⁹⁶ For Gilbert's background and early life, see his memoirs *A European Past: Memoirs 1905-1945* (New York, 1988)

⁹⁷ The significance of Gilbert's study emphasizes Charles S. Maier, "Marking Time: the Historiography of International Relations," in Michael Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca and London, 1980), 377.

⁹⁸ On Gilbert's role in the OSS, see Katz, *Foreign Intelligence*, 70-95.

in his capacity as member of the Institute for Advanced Study (1962-1975) that Gilbert assumed a significant role in the German-American scholarly community, by bringing younger German historians to the United States.

Some of the first generation émigrés remained in less prominent and visible positions but nevertheless played significant roles in the transatlantic scholarly community. Fritz T. Epstein serves as a good example for this type of scholar. Epstein, a specialist in Eastern European and Russian history, had been forced to emigrate just before the completion and defense of his *Habilitation* at the University of Frankfurt, and never managed to secure a permanent appointment in West Germany.¹⁰⁰ While he held several visiting appointments in both the Federal Republic and the United States (including Berlin, Bonn, Hamburg, Berkeley), Epstein did not receive a permanent professorship until 1963 when he was offered a chair in European diplomatic history at Indiana University.¹⁰¹ Yet he was arguably among the more important figures in the transatlantic scholarly community during the postwar years, establishing personal contacts for both American and German historians on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁰² Epstein also often attempted to have German studies translated into English by

⁹⁹ Barbara Miller Lane, "Felix Gilbert at Brywn Mawr College," in Hartmut Lehmann (ed.), *Felix Gilbert as Scholar and Teacher* (Washington, D.C., 1992), 11-16.

¹⁰⁰ See the letter by Fritz T. Epstein to Max Braubach (Bonn University), August 6, 1955, and Braubach's reply to Epstein, September 18, 1955, BAK, NL Fritz T. Epstein, Box 80, in which Braubach describes the hesitations of the North-Rhine Westphalian Ministry of Culture and Education (which had to approve of job hires) to appoint a "foreign" historian, due to financial considerations. Theodor Schieder in a letter to Dietrich Gerhard, December 2, 1954, BAK, NL Schieder, Box 177, described the interest of the University of Cologne to hire Epstein, but similarly voiced doubts regarding the Ministry's position.

¹⁰¹ See the biographical sketch in Epstein's Festschrift by Alexander Fischer, Günther Moltmann, and Klaus Schwabe in Id. (eds.), *Russland – Deutschland – Amerika. Russia – Germany – America* (Wiesbaden, 1978), xv-vi.

¹⁰² Gerhard L. Weinberg, "Fritz T. Epstein, 1898-1979," *Central European History* 12 (1979), 399-401.

contacting American publishers.¹⁰³ While he did not supervise a large number of dissertations, he became an unofficial mentor of many aspiring American graduate students.¹⁰⁴ Epstein also did not hesitate to share his vast bibliographical knowledge with other historians, as the voluminous correspondence contained in his personal papers attests.

While this first generation of émigrés continued to play an important role through the 1970s in both the American historical profession and the German-American scholarly community, the second generation—born in Germany yet educated in the United States—began their careers in the early 1950s. Maybe it was this hybrid background which has kept historians thus far from acknowledging these second generation émigrés as a distinct group. Yet a glance at their biographies makes their significance and impact over several decades—from the late 1950s into the 1990s—abundantly clear.

Fritz Stern completed his PhD at Columbia while teaching at Cornell, but he soon returned to New York where he would remain a member of the history department for the next 44 years (he retired in 1997).¹⁰⁵ Despite initial reservations toward the West German society, Stern soon assumed contacts with German academics. During the summer of 1954, he taught as a visiting professor at Free University Berlin, struck by the stark contrast between “the prevailing silences of much public discourse” and his students’ “willingness to confront the complexities of the past and to explore Germany’s troubled relationship with the

¹⁰³ See the letter by Fritz T. Epstein to the publisher Henry Regnery, March 17, 1949, in which Epstein (unsuccessfully) lobbied for a translation of Gerhard Ritter’s *Europa und die deutsche Frage*; and Regnery’s negative reply, May 5, 1949, BAK, NL Fritz T. Epstein, Box 4; as well as the letters Martin Göhring (Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz) to Fritz T. Epstein, January 26 and April 10, 1960, BAK NL Fritz T. Epstein, Box 72, regarding Göhring’s study *Bismarck’s Erben, 1890-1945*. In this case, Epstein established contacts between Göhring and Praeger Publishers, which however did not lead to the translation of the book.

¹⁰⁴ Carl Schorske, note to the author, April 6, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Fritz Stern, *Five Germanies I Have Known* (New York, 2006), 204-206.

West.”¹⁰⁶ With a “permanent visiting professorship” at the University of Konstanz, which Stern received in 1967, his position in the transatlantic community of historians became more institutionalized. While Stern had already represented the American community of historians of Germany at the German Historians’ Convention in 1964, discussing Fritz Fischer’s study *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, by the 1990s he had come to embody for a broader German public what American historians thought about Germany. He famously addressed the German Federal Parliament in 1987, served as senior adviser to U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and remained a familiar voice in German newspapers.¹⁰⁷ Author of two influential monographs on the German Empire—a study of cultural pessimism and a dual biography of Chancellor Bismarck and his Jewish banker Gerson Bleichröder—he nevertheless preferred the genre of the historical essay.¹⁰⁸ Along with Hans Kohn, Leonard Krieger, and George Mosse, Stern represented a type of cultural and intellectual history of modern Germany that did not have an equivalent in the Federal Republic.¹⁰⁹

George Mosse started his career as a scholar of English constitutional history and political thought in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at the University of Iowa, where he taught from 1944 to 1955.¹¹⁰ These years marked the transition of Iowa’s history

¹⁰⁶ Stern, *Five Germanies I Have Known*, 211.

¹⁰⁷ Marion F. Deshmukh/Jerry Z. Muller (eds.), *Fritz Stern at 70* (Washington, D.C., 1997)

¹⁰⁸ Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: a Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, 1961); Id., *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire* (New York, 1977). His widely read collections of essays include *The Failure of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (New York, 1972) and *Dreams and Delusions: the Drama of German History* (New York, 1987).

¹⁰⁹ See Steven Aschheim, “The Tensions of Historical Wissenschaft: The Émigré Historians and the Making of German Cultural History,” in Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton, NJ, 2007), 45-80.

¹¹⁰ George L. Mosse, *Confronting History: A Memoir* (Madison, WI, 2000), 129-149. See also Johann Sommerville, “The Modern Contexts of George Mosse’s Early Modern Scholarship,” in Payne et al. (eds.), *What History Tells*, 25-38.

department—as well as of many others across the United States—from a place where a small number of “gentlemen scholars” wielded decisive influence to an institution which underwent a significant expansion. In addition, the department also began to place more weight on research without neglecting teaching responsibilities. Yet this period ultimately proved formative for Mosse as well. Iowa—the state much more than university—thoroughly “Americanized” him: he immersed himself in public life by serving as a commencement speaker and moderating a Sunday radio program. By 1956, Mosse had transferred to the University of Wisconsin, whose history department at the time sought to rejuvenate and strengthen its European history program. In Madison, Mosse became one of the pioneers of the study of fascism, and later of the history of sexuality.¹¹¹ Yet while he indeed helped turn Wisconsin’s history department into one of the most interesting places to study European history, Mosse also sought close intellectual contact with scholars of the United States. The cultural historian Merle Curti exerted a decisive influence, and with William A. Williams, the main representative of the “Wisconsin School,” Mosse taught a joint seminar on Marxism which led to Williams’ study *The Great Evasion*—the evasion of Marx’ legacy in the United States.¹¹²

¹¹¹ George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: a History of European Racism* (New York, 1978); Id., *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York, 1999); Id., *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York, 1985). For an analysis of Mosse’s impact on the respective fields, see Robert Griffin, “Withstanding the Rush of Time: The Prescience of Mosse’s Anthropological View on Fascism,” in Payne et al., *What History Tells*, 110-133; Saul Friedlander, “Mosse’s Influence on the Historiography of the Holocaust,” in Payne et al., *What History Tells*, 134-147; Robert S. Nye, “Mosse, Masculinity, and the History of Sexuality,” in Payne et al., *What History Tells*, 183-201.

¹¹² Mosse, *Confronting History*, 158. William A. Williams, *The Great Evasion: An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of Karl Marx and on the Wisdom of Admitting the Heretic into the Dialogue about America’s Future* (Chicago, 1964).

Mosse's long-term colleague at Madison was Theodor Hamerow, who in contrast to most émigré historians under review in this study, had Polish rather than German roots.¹¹³ Born in Warsaw in 1920, Hamerow had spent his childhood in Poland and Germany and arrived in the United States in 1930. After having received his PhD under Hajo Holborn's supervision at Yale in 1951, he spent a year in Germany through the University of Maryland overseas program, where he heard Franz Schnabel lecture at the University of Munich.¹¹⁴ Hamerow then taught for several years at the University of Illinois (1952-1958), before moving to the University of Wisconsin where he spent the remainder of his career. He made his mark on the profession as a social and economic historian of nineteenth century Germany yet after his retirement wrote about the German resistance to National Socialism as well as the Holocaust.¹¹⁵ Hamerow also assumed a leading role within the *Conference Group of Central European History* and was instrumental in the establishment of its journal—*Central European History*.¹¹⁶

While not all émigré historians of the second generation early in their careers maintained or established working relationships with colleagues in West Germany, Klaus Epstein immediately immersed himself in the transatlantic intellectual community.¹¹⁷ The

¹¹³ Theodore S. Hamerow, *Remembering a Vanished World: a Jewish Childhood in Interwar Poland* (New York, 2001).

¹¹⁴ Theodore S. Hamerow, Note to the author, December 1, 2006.

¹¹⁵ The earlier two main studies were *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction: Economics and Politics in Germany, 1815-1871* (Princeton, 1958); and *The Social Foundations of German Unification, 1858-1871* (Princeton, 1969). See also his *On the Road to the Wolf's Lair: German Resistance to Hitler* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), and most recently *Why We Watched: Europe, America, and the Holocaust* (New York, 2008).

¹¹⁶ Douglas Unfug, the journal's first editor (1968-1991), recalled submitting a proposal for editorship to Hamerow. Douglas A. Unfug, note to the author, August 29, 2009.

¹¹⁷ See Kenneth L. Barkin, "Klaus Epstein's Contribution to German History Forty Years Later: an Assessment," paper delivered at the Annual German Studies Association Conference, San Diego, October 7, 2007.

son of Fritz T. Epstein graduated with a PhD from Harvard in 1953, and started his career there until he received an appointment at Brown University in 1960. Already in 1955/56, Epstein spent a year at the University of Hamburg on a Fulbright lectureship. Even though Epstein died tragically in a car accident in 1967, he left behind a large number of writings: his dissertation on the controversial Center Party politician Matthias Erzberger analyzed the transition from the German Empire to the Weimar Republic. At the time of his death, Epstein was working on a comprehensive project on Conservatism in German history, of which the first volume dealt with the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹¹⁸ Apart from these monographs, he authored a number of articles, and longer review essays--the latter had become almost his trademark.¹¹⁹

Gerhard Weinberg was always more than “just” a historian of modern Germany; beginning as a specialist of Nazi foreign policy, he later became one of the leading authorities on World War II and developed a truly global scope.¹²⁰ He had been a student of Hans Rothfels at the University of Chicago and spent most of his later career at the University of Michigan (1959-1972) and the University of North Carolina (1972-1997). In the early 1950s Weinberg had been hired by Fritz T. Epstein to participate in the War

¹¹⁸ Klaus Epstein, *Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy* (Princeton, 1959); Id., *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton, 1966).

¹¹⁹ This is also emphasized by Klaus Schwabe’s obituary “Klaus W. Epstein,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 206 (1968), 262-264. A collection of his review essays appeared in German after his death as *Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert: ein Leitfaden* (Berlin, 1972).

¹²⁰ His most important studies include *Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939-1941* (Leiden, 1954); *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany: Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-1936* (Chicago, 1970); *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany: Starting World War II, 1937-1939* (Chicago, 1980); and *A World At Arms: a Global History of World War II* (Cambridge, UK, 1994).

Documentation Project (WDP) dealing with captured German documents.¹²¹ While he never became as frequent a visitor to Germany as some of his fellow émigrés, Weinberg participated in the scholarly dialogue through frequent publications in German journals, often battling apologetic historical interpretations widely popular in West Germany. In the 1950s, he strongly opposed German historians who claimed that *Operation Barbarossa*, Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, had been a "preventive war." Ten years later, Weinberg was similarly outspoken in his condemnation of David L. Hoggan's attempt to portray the outbreak of World War II as a result of the supposedly conspiratorial diplomacy of Great Britain and Poland.¹²²

Another tireless mediator between the American and German academic communities was Georg Iggers, who, like Weinberg, received his PhD at the University of Chicago. Unlike Weinberg, Iggers studied in the "Committee for the History of Culture," where Louis Gottschalk served as his adviser.¹²³ After several teaching positions at smaller black colleges in Arkansas and Louisiana (where Iggers also immersed himself in work on behalf of civil rights issues), he eventually moved to SUNY Buffalo in 1964, where he taught until his retirement in 1997. One of the foremost authorities on German historiography and historical thought, Iggers established his reputation through his enormously influential critique of what

¹²¹ A personal recollection as well as a summary of the project provides Gerhard L. Weinberg, "German Documents in the United States," *Central European History* 41 (2008), 555-568.

¹²² Weinberg published his critique of the so-called *Präventivkriegsthese* whose proponents claimed that the Soviet Union was on the verge of attacking Nazi Germany when Hitler early in 1941 decided to preventively invade the Soviet Union as "Der deutsche Entschluss zum Angriff auf die Sowjetunion," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1953), 303-318. For the controversy surrounding Hoggan, see the review by Gerhard Weinberg and the subsequent exchange between Weinberg, Hoggan, and Hoggan's defender Harry Elmer Barnes in *American Historical Review* 68 (1962), 104-105 and 914-918.

¹²³ Georg Iggers, personal note to the author, August 6, 2009. See also the memoirs of Wilma and Georg Iggers, *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, 44-60.

he considered “the basic theoretical premises of the main current of German historiography”—German historicism.¹²⁴ In the 1970s, through his own writings, Iggers helped popularize the works of a younger generation of German social historians, including—but not limited to—*the Bielefelder Schule*. Moreover, Iggers was among the first Western historians to establish scholarly contacts with Communist colleagues in East Germany as well as in China, maintaining that it was important to distinguish between orthodox party hacks and less dogmatic scholars with whom a fruitful dialogue was both possible and desired.

All second-generation émigré historians covered so far share the experiences of forced emigration due to their Jewish background. Yet Hans W. Gatzke’s case differed: neither Jewish nor politically on the Left, he was awarded a fellowship for a year’s study in the United States by the German Academic Exchange Service upon graduating from high school in 1934. Even though Gatzke continued his studies in Germany, his previous experiences at Williams College were positive enough to make him immigrate to the United States in 1937 when he realized the direction in which the Nazi regime was moving Germany.¹²⁵ World War II interrupted Gatzke’s graduate training at Harvard, where he received his PhD in 1947. After seventeen years of teaching at Johns Hopkins, he was appointed to a professorship at Yale where he joined his fellow émigré Hajo Holborn. A diplomatic historian throughout his career, Gatzke established his scholarly reputation through the publication of his dissertation, which analyzed the German Empire’s economic

¹²⁴ Iggers, *Two Lives in Uncertain Times*, 97. The study appeared as *The German Conception of History: the National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, CT, 1968).

¹²⁵ See Annelise Thimme and Carole Fink, “Hans W. Gatzke, Germany, and the United States,” in Carole Fink et al. (eds.), *German Nationalism and European Response, 1890-1945* (Norman and London, 1985), 267-277.

and political war aims in the West during World War I.¹²⁶ Published in 1950, the study foreshadowed the works produced in the 1960s by Fritz Fischer and his students. Given the significance of Gatzke's book, it remains remarkable yet unsurprising that it was never translated into German. His subsequent works dealt with Gustav Stresemann, Russian-German relations in the interwar period, as well as with German-American relations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

While one can label most of the émigré historians of both generations “liberals” in the broad American sense of the term, they were still a more diverse group than past accounts have indicated. Hans Rothfels was not the only exception to the rule. Gerhard Masur had been a *Freikorps* member and had participated in the Kapp Putsch of 1920, and his post-World War II views were still rather conservative. His ideological proximity to Rothfels also helps explain why Rothfels tried to persuade Masur to succeed him at the University of Tübingen.¹²⁷ And Felix E. Hirsch, who had completed his Ph.D. under Hermann Oncken, distinguished himself not only as a tireless reviewer but also as an eager proponent of Gustav Stresemann. For Hirsch, Stresemann personified the prototypical “good European” as well as the positive aspects of the Weimar Republic. Hirsch generally believed that the first German democracy deserved a kinder treatment than historians had been willing to grant it after 1945. At the same time, Hirsch was attempting to save his *Doktorvater* Oncken from oblivion,

¹²⁶ *Germany's Drive to the West: A Study of Germany's War Aims during the First World War* (Baltimore, 1950)

¹²⁷ See the letters Rothfels to Masur, January 25, 1961, and Masur to Rothfels, February 12, 1961, in Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke*, 214-217. Masur added that his College also would not allow him to “commute” between Germany and the United States, an arrangement with both Rothfels (between Tübingen and Chicago) and Dietrich Gerhard (St. Louis and Cologne) enjoyed.

though without much success.¹²⁸ Yet in his efforts to make American colleagues acquainted with what he considered the positive aspects of both German history and German historiography, Hirsch was very much in tune with his fellow émigrés. Felix Gilbert, for example, edited essays by Otto Hintze and wrote the introduction to the English translation of Meinecke's *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*.¹²⁹ Thus, when at the AHA meeting in 1960, Fritz K. Ringer delivered a stinging indictment of the German historical profession during the German Empire and the Weimar Republic and included Friedrich Meinecke in his critique, Meinecke's students in the audience—all émigré historians teaching in the United States—were not amused. Several elderly gentlemen with thick German accents rose to defend their *Doktorvater* against what they perceived as an entirely unjustified attack.¹³⁰

Another historian who does not fit the prevailing notion of the left-liberal émigré was Joachim Remak. Born in Berlin in 1920, he escaped from Nazi Germany in 1938. Remak pursued undergraduate studies at UC Berkeley before entering graduate school at Stanford, where he received his PhD in 1955. After several years at Stanford, he first taught at Lewis & Clark College in Oregon (1958-1965), before accepting a position at UC Santa Barbara, where he stayed until his retirement. Beginning with his dissertation on the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand in 1914, Remak throughout his career remained primarily an

128 Felix E. Hirsch to Theodor Schieder, September 11, 1960, BAK, NL Schieder, Box 241. See also Felix E. Hirsch, "Gustav Stresemann in Historical Perspective," *The Review of Politics* 15 (1953), 360-377; *Gustav Stresemann: Patriot und Europäer* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1964); "Hermann Oncken and the End of an Era," *Journal of Modern History* 18 (1946), 148-159.

129 See Gerhard A. Ritter, "Einleitung," in Id., (ed.) *Friedrich Meinecke. Akademischer Lehrer und emigrierte Schüler*, 61.

130 Barkin, "German Émigré Historians in America," 153.

expert on World War I.¹³¹ While American historians in the 1960s provided crucial support for the embattled Fritz Fischer, Remak emerged a few years later as his main critic on this side of the Atlantic and proclaimed in 1971 that “Fritz Fischer’s decade has ended.”¹³² Remak clearly believed that Fischer was pushing revisionism too far, and the popular emphasis on continuities in German history between 1871 and 1945 did not convince him, either. A notoriously polemical reviewer, Remak welcomed Geoff Eley’s and David Blackbourn’s attack on the *Sonderweg* paradigm as “an annoying book with a valid thesis.”¹³³

These efforts of émigré historians to ensure that the American historical profession maintained or developed a differentiated view on German history and historiography are noteworthy. They prove that the obsession of some West German historians with the supposed *emigrantisches Ressentiment*, which had begun right after the end of the war, was completely unfounded. This notion of alleged émigré resentments clouding their scholarly work remained, however, until the mid-1960s, a popular way to dismiss disagreeable views of German history, even if the preferred way to express it was in private correspondence rather than in public. Thus Gerhard Ritter rejected Helmuth Plessner’s *Verspätete Nation*, considering it “not real history, but the product of an émigré’s imagination.”¹³⁴ For Ritter,

¹³¹ Joachim Remak, *Sarajevo, the Story of a Political Murder* (New York, 1959); Id., *The Origins of World War I, 1871-1914* (New York, 1967). Id., *The First World War: Causes, Conduct, Consequences* (New York, 1971).

¹³² Joachim Remak, “1914 – the Third Balkan War: Origins Reconsidered,” *Journal of Modern History* 43 (1971), 353-366, quote 353.

¹³³ Joachim Remak, “Review of Geoff Eley/Daid Blackbourn, *The Peculiarities of German History*,” *The History Teacher* 20 (1986), 138-139, quote on 138.

¹³⁴ The original stated “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

Plessner's geographical distance from Germany had led to a lack of empathy without which objective history could not be written. This accusation of lacking empathy could then apply not only to émigrés but also to others, non-German historians writing German history. To what extent did American historians show “empathy” toward Germany and its history after 1945?

Rethinking modern German history

It has already become clear that during the postwar years the project of reinterpreting modern German history occupied many scholars, for the question of how the Nazi rise to power had been possible was hard to avoid. Accordingly, if one considers the books from the late 1940s through the early 1960s that are still widely read today, it is obvious that the vast majority analyze aspects of the roots of National Socialism, at least in a broad sense. As Fritz Stern has put it for the historians (and social scientists) formerly working for the OSS, many of whom subsequently taught at Columbia University, they “shared [a] sense that the study of the German past, and hence of the path to National Socialism, was an imperative of historical investigation and moral understanding.”¹³⁵ Apart from the obvious urgency to analyze and reinterpret the course of German history particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, by the early 1950s there were still very few historical works available in English—“a remarkable opportunity for my generation”, as Fritz Stern has written.¹³⁶

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, 2006).

¹³⁵ Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known*, 192.

¹³⁶ Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known*, 203.

While what follows is primarily concerned with the broad interpretive contours of postwar American historiography on modern Germany, this dimension needs to be understood together with the methodological developments during the same time. Regarding the latter, it seems that—contrary to the prevailing view—American historians were not across the board significantly more “modern” or advanced than their German colleagues.¹³⁷ All too often, historians tend to view methodological, interpretive (and sometimes even political) progressivism as simply two sides of the same coin. Yet as the debate surrounding German historians during National Socialism has made clear, a certain methodology can never be associated a priori with a distinct interpretive or political position. Historians (as well as social scientists) working on behalf of the Nazi regime employed “modern” methods for “reactionary” means.¹³⁸ Conversely, interpretive changes sometimes develop independent of and without methodological innovations—Fritz Fischer’s studies on World War I constitute a case in point.

To reduce the historiography on modern Germany of several decades to a common denominator inevitably has to remain a futile undertaking. Yet the designation least inappropriate for this large body of works would lead to a dialectic argument: many if not most American historians continued to wrestle with the question of National Socialism’s origins. Yet the answers they developed took on very different forms.

¹³⁷ Statements such as Ernst Schulin’s who claimed that after World War II, “Anglo-American interest in German history influenced and assisted in the modernization of West German historical writing” seem to suggest otherwise. See Schulin, “German and American Historiography in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in Lehmann and Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past*, 31.

¹³⁸ See the contributions in Schulze and Oexle (eds.), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*.

Textbooks

Among the first postwar attempts to make sense of National Socialism in its European context was Hajo Holborn's concise *The Political Collapse of Europe*, published in 1951. Even though the study was much broader in scope, tracing the European decline and the accompanying emergence of the bipolar world order, it devoted considerable space to Germany's role in this decline. Developing out of an article Holborn had published two years earlier, the study was widely reviewed and generally very well received.¹³⁹ Hannah Arendt praised the book as a successful attempt to remind his audience that the interwar years were not only characterized by the rise and fall of the murderous Nazi regime but by the failure of democracy in most of Europe.¹⁴⁰ Holborn's study therefore served as a corrective to several wartime publications treating German history in isolation from its European context and tracing the beginnings of National Socialism back to the Reformation. Yet it did not simply "Europeanize" the German dictatorship as Gerhard Ritter attempted to do around the same time. Ritter had emphasized that totalitarianism developed out of the French Revolution and that National Socialism should be considered "not a Prussian plant, but an Austrian-Bavarian import."¹⁴¹

Among the few syntheses on modern Germany from the immediate postwar period was Koppel Pinson's *Modern Germany*. A student of Carlton Hayes' (to whom the book was dedicated) and specialist of German nationalism, Pinson devoted almost equal attention to the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Writing "from the standpoint of one

¹³⁹ Hajo Holborn, *The Political Collapse of Europe* (New York, 1951). See also Hajo Holborn, "The Collapse of the European Political System, 1914-1945," *World Politics* 1 (1949), 442-466.

¹⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt, "Review of *The Political Collapse of Europe*," *Journal of Modern History* 24 (1952), 186-187.

¹⁴¹ Ritter, *Geschichte als Bildungsmacht*, 29.

who finds liberal democracy, humanitarianism, and the ethical ideals of the Judeo-Christian tradition most congenial to his own frame of mind,” he identified the “unifying theme” of his work as “that of the tragic efforts made by liberalism and democracy to assert themselves in modern German history.”¹⁴² Pinson’s *Modern Germany* was decidedly more substantial and nuanced than A.J.P. Taylor’s notorious *The Course of German History* and was accordingly very well received.¹⁴³ Even the reviewer in *Historische Zeitschrift* 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.”¹⁴⁴

This review by the German historian Hans Herzfeld was remarkable: during the Weimar years, Herzfeld had been an ultra-nationalist historian and proponent of the notorious *Dolchstoßlegende* (stab-in-the-back myth), to which he had even devoted a “scholarly” study.¹⁴⁵ Herzfeld, who in 1938 had been dismissed from his professorship at the University of Halle due to a Jewish grandfather, indeed modified his views after World War II. Yet this review was still emblematic of the postwar tendency of many German historians to demand understanding and empathy (*Verständnis* and *Einfühlen*) toward the complexities of modern Germany. Unsurprisingly, a popular charge against foreign scholars was the lack of precisely these qualities, which then made it easy to reject their views. In the case of Pinson’s *Modern Germany*, Herzfeld at least acknowledged the author’s efforts to provide an

¹⁴² Koppel S. Pinson, *Modern Germany: Its History and Civilization* (New York, 1954), 9.

¹⁴³ See the reviews by John L. Snell, *Journal of Modern History* 27 (1955), 185-186; Hans Kohn, *Jewish Social Studies* 17 (1955), 153-154; Chester V. Easum, *American Historical Review* 61 (1956), 389-399; Hans W. L. Freudenthal, *Catholic Historical Review* 41 (1955), 209-211.

¹⁴⁴ Hans Herzfeld, *Historische Zeitschrift* 182 (1956), 402-405, quote on 402.

¹⁴⁵ Hans Herzfeld, *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und die Auflösung der Einheitsfront im Weltkriege* (Leipzig, 1928).

“objective” analysis of recent German history, but he “inevitably”—as Herzfeld put it—fell short in some respects as well.¹⁴⁶

Judgments such as this 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 Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (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.”¹⁴⁷ Ironically, one of the historians charged with having such a handicap was Epstein’s fellow émigré Peter Gay.

Prussia and the Iron Chancellor

As in West Germany—and even more so in its Eastern counterpart—the history of Prussia occupied many American scholars. Gordon Craig’s seminal *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, published in 1955, exemplifies this trend. Rather than to dissect a supposedly

¹⁴⁶ Herzfeld, *Historische Zeitschrift* 182 (1956), 402.

¹⁴⁷ Klaus Epstein, “Three Studies of German Socialism,” *World Politics* 11 (1959), 650-651.

identifiable German character, Craig analyzed how German political life had come to be characterized by “authoritarian government, militarism, and aggression.”¹⁴⁸ In a formulation of almost *Sonderwegian* character, he claimed that after the end of the military reform period of the early nineteenth century—not accompanied by political reforms—the Prussian army had become the strongest opponent of political change. In Craig’s own words, “the subsequent political development of Prussia and Germany was dependent, to a far greater extent than is true of any other country, upon the organization of the army, its relationship to the sovereign power and the will of its leaders.”¹⁴⁹ While Craig abstained from a sensationalist denunciation of “Prussian militarism,” he nevertheless did not shy away from clear judgments. About the behavior of the German military leadership during the crucial years 1933 and 1934 he wrote that it lacked “any trace of the moral courage, the spiritual independence, and the deep patriotism which had marked the careers of such great soldiers of the past as Scharnhorst, Boysen, and Gneisenau.”¹⁵⁰ As earlier statements by Craig illustrate, the Princeton historian was, soon after World War II, very much convinced of the necessity of rethinking the basic tenets of the German past. A few years prior to the publication of his study on the Prussian army, Craig had praised Friedrich Meinecke’s attempt to reevaluate Prussian-German militarism in *Die Deutsche Katastrophe* but criticized his reluctance “to

¹⁴⁸ Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (Oxford, 1955), xiii.

¹⁴⁹ Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945*, xiv-xv. Craig also placed his study in the political context of his own times. Most likely referring to what President Eisenhower would a few years later deplore as the “military-industrial complex” in the United States, he wrote: “We live in an age in which military influence in both foreign and domestic policy is marked and is growing, and there is little hope that this tendency will be reversed in the foreseeable future. The ideal aim of the healthy state is that its military establishment shall remain merely the executive will of the sovereign power... Perhaps reflection upon the history of another people, whose political aspirations were defeated in part by their inability to set proper limits to the activities of their military leaders, may help us avoid dangerous mistakes in our own time.” Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*, xix-xx.

¹⁵⁰ Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945*, 503.

conclude that Hitlerism was, in fact, a logical outcome of Germany's development in the nineteenth century."¹⁵¹ Later in his career Craig would adopt positions very different from the ones outlined here. His views from the 1950s are therefore all the more remarkable.

A student of Hajo Holborn's, Walter B. Simon, advanced an interpretation of early nineteenth century Prussia very similar to Craig's. In his dissertation on the constitutional, agrarian, and military aspects of the Prussian reform movement, Simon evaluated the movement as "on balance a failure," for while it was undoubtedly not devoid of accomplishments, "it fell far short of the objective that its moving spirits had set themselves and because its successes were on the whole minor compared to its frustrations."¹⁵² Very much in the spirit of the times, Simon emphasized the long-term consequences of the reforms' failure: the survival of "the authoritarian principle in the social structure" and of "the feudal principle in the social structure" was what "led Prussia on to the later 'turning points' of 1848 and 1866."¹⁵³ In this respect, Simon argued along the lines of Friedrich Meinecke's *Deutsche Katastrophe*, which had seen 1819 as the year when the "kulturwidrige Seite" ("dark side") of Prussia triumphed over the "kulturfähige Seite" ("bright side"), with far-reaching and long-lasting consequences.¹⁵⁴ And while Simon did not measure the Prussian development against that of an idealized "West" (he stated explicitly that "it would not, indeed, have been possible for Prussia in 1819 to duplicate British or French politics and society") he nevertheless argued that "it would have been possible for Prussia in 1819 to

¹⁵¹ Gordon Craig, "Review of Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*," *American Political Science Review* 44, no. 4 (1950), 1030.

¹⁵² Walter B. Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement, 1807-1819* (Ithaca, NY, 1955).

¹⁵³ Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement, 1807-1819*, 240.

¹⁵⁴ Meinecke, *Die Deutsche Katastrophe*, 23-24. However, this was only Meinecke's early postwar position, which he renounced soon afterwards (see chapter 1).

have turned her back definitely on the authoritarian principle in her political structure and on the feudal principle in her social structure” and that the failed reforms of the 1810s laid the groundwork for Bismarck’s subsequent “ministerial absolutism.”¹⁵⁵

Immediately after World War II, William O. Shanahan published his Columbia University dissertation analyzing the so-called *Krümpfer* system, with which the Prussian military leadership managed to circumvent the military restrictions placed on Prussia by the Treaty of Paris in 1808. After World War I, Shanahan argued in his study, the Allies had tried to learn from Prussia’s swift military recovery in the early nineteenth century, yet the 1920s and 1930s had proven their failure. Therefore Shanahan expressed his hope that this time, in 1945, “his interpretation ... may help devise a more certain means of restraining German military ambition.”¹⁵⁶ While this pronouncement may sound rather presentist, Shanahan’s concern about the future of German militarism apparently did not weaken the study, which Hans Rothfels reviewed quite positively.¹⁵⁷ And the military historian Alfred Vagts noted in his review that “the per se legitimate inclination of the historians of seeing parallels between Prussia-Germany of 1807-13 and of 1919-39 has been suppressed, maybe too much so.”¹⁵⁸ At the same time, Shanahan clearly distanced himself from most German historians who had written on the same period, remarking that they had viewed “Stein as a

¹⁵⁵ Simon, *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement, 1807-1819*, both quotes on 240.

¹⁵⁶ William O. Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms 1786-1813* (New York, 1945), 7.

¹⁵⁷ Hans Rothfels, “Review of William O. Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms 1786-1813*,” *American Historical Review* 52 (1946), 117-118.

¹⁵⁸ Alfred Vagts, “Review of William O. Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms 1786-1813*,” *Journal of Modern History* 18 (1946), 271. Vagts added: “The occasional proposals for the preparation of a total mobilization of Prussia between 1807 and 1813, for example, not only would have provided striking parallels with later military totalitarianism; they would also have illustrated more definitely what Clausewitz might have had in mind when he dealt with total or “absolute” war in *Vom Kriege*.”

phenomenon of German nationalism rather than a prophet or spokesman for liberal political institutions.”¹⁵⁹

In contrast to Simon and Shanahan who traced Prussia’s development during the early nineteenth century, Eugene N. Anderson focused on the conflicts between liberalism and conservatism in Prussia during the late 1850s and early 1860s.¹⁶⁰ The issues at the heart of these struggles, according to Anderson, had been caste and privilege, the police state, militarism, the political and economic interests in unification, and finally the notorious *Verfassungskonflikt* (constitutional conflict) in the Prussian state parliament. Author of an earlier work on *Nationalism and the Cultural Crisis in Prussia 1806-1815*, Anderson’s sympathies were clearly on the side of the Liberals.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless he argued that the Liberals had weakened themselves decisively by clinging to an elitist understanding of politics—and thus the three-class voting system—instead of seeking mass support, which would have forced them to support the introduction of the universal suffrage. In this respect, Anderson argued along the lines of Eckart Kehr and Hans Rosenberg, whom he had befriended during the 1920s and early 1930s, when he spent a few years at the University of

¹⁵⁹ Shanahan, *Prussian Military Reforms 1786-1813*, 235.

¹⁶⁰ Eugene N. Anderson, *Social and Political Conflict in Prussia, 1858-1864* (Lincoln, NE, 1954). Anderson who had received his PhD at the University of Chicago in 1928, taught at American University (1932-1941), the University of Nebraska (1946-1955), and UCLA (1955-1968). From 1941-1945, Anderson served in the OSS as the head of the section for Central Europe.

¹⁶¹ Eugene N. Anderson, *Nationalism and the Cultural Crisis in Prussia, 1806-1815* (New York, 1939). This was a collection of seven biographical sketches on “contemporaries in the first period of German nationalism”, including the philosophers Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Ernst Moritz Arndt, the playwright Heinrich von Kleist, and Frederick William III. Anderson noted in his preface that the emergence of National Socialism had stirred his interest in what he considered the beginnings of German nationalism.

Berlin. When Rosenberg immigrated to the United States, Anderson provided him with the names of potential employers and contacts and wrote letters of recommendation.¹⁶²

In the previous chapter, we saw that the evaluation of Otto von Bismarck occupied many historians in postwar Germany. Whether a genius diplomat who appeared even more outstanding after his predecessors had gambled away the German Empire he helped establish, or the insidious Chancellor who out of ulterior motives ruthlessly pursued policies against Catholics, Poles, and other minorities—no German historian questioned his historical significance. Among the Americans, it was the young Otto Pflanze who joined the debate surrounding the Iron Chancellor. While he later adopted a more favorable perspective on Bismarck, joining German conservatives in their rejection of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's interpretation, his early writings expressed a different view. In an article on "Bismarck and German Nationalism" Pflanze quite explicitly drew a line from Bismarck via Ludendorff to Hitler, distinguished between Bismarck's strand of nationalism and early nineteenth century liberal nationalism and concluded: "The German conservatives ... became themselves the prisoners of the nationalistic sentiment with which they sought to broaden their popular support... Out of this unfortunate chemistry of more than a century came the unstable compound of National Socialism. Many were the chemists who unknowingly had a hand in its creation. Bismarck was certainly one of them."¹⁶³ Pflanze's harsh verdicts on Bismarck inevitably met with a negative response among historians such as Hans Rothfels who

¹⁶² See Ritter (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke*, 328-330.

¹⁶³ Otto Pflanze, "Bismarck and German Nationalism," *American Historical Review* 60 (1955), 548-566, quote on 566.

expressed his discontent with Pflanze's "very mediocre article" in a letter to Fritz T. Epstein.¹⁶⁴

Weimar and Nazi Germany

Understandably, Americans also turned their attention to the Weimar Republic. William Halperin's study, published in 1946, provided the first synthesis of the first German democracy's rise and fall. Beginning with an account of the German Empire and World War I, Halperin focused mainly on political, economic, and social developments between 1918 and 1933. His sympathies were overall on the side of the Social Democrats, whom he saw as the main defenders of the Republic. Nevertheless, Halperin argued that the reformist—instead of revolutionary—course, which leading Social Democrats had pursued during the transition period from Empire to Republic, constituted a grave mistake with far-reaching consequences.¹⁶⁵ Yet he also expressed admiration for Stresemann's achievement as foreign minister, in particular for his reconciliatory course toward France. In a review of a reprint edition almost twenty years later, Gordon Craig still characterized it as "the clearest and most comprehensive introduction to the politics of the period which it covers."¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, one reviewer castigated Halperin for his alleged bias toward the conservative elites who—as

¹⁶⁴ Hans Rothfels to Fritz T. Epstein, January 19, 1959, BAK, NL Fritz T. Epstein, Box 82. It seems likely that Rothfels regarded the issue of "quality" as synonymous with "interpretation." Hans Mommsen, at the time Rothfels' *Assistant* (research associate), remembers that Rothfels asked him to assist with research in rebutting Pflanze. Hans Mommsen, note to the author, July 28, 2002.

¹⁶⁵ S. William Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy: a Political History of the Reich from 1918 to 1933* (New York, 1946), v: "The honest, well-meaning men of the Social Democratic Party made one mistake after another. Confusion and faintheartedness marked their tortuous course. While they blundered, the republic's inveterate enemies—the Junkers, the militarists, and one section of the industrial plutocracy—carried on with impunity... The decline of militancy in the trade unions and the fateful split in the ranks of German labor worked incalculable harm to the democratic cause."

¹⁶⁶ Gordon Craig, "Review of S. William Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*," *Journal of Modern History* 36 (1964), 107.

Halperin argued—were instrumental in installing Hitler as Chancellor in 1933. Ross J. Hoffman, a Fordham University historian, reminded the readers that these elites had, after all, attempted to assassinate Hitler in 1944, and that the German Communists “favored Hitler’s coming to power because they believed it [would] hasten their own hour of opportunity.”¹⁶⁷ Hoffman insisted that it was “financial extravagance and socialist legislation” that had contributed to the democracy’s demise and that the conservatives, the “genuine opponents of National Socialism”, adhered to the “traditional decencies, liberties, and sanities of Western Christian Civilization.”¹⁶⁸ With this evaluation, Hoffman was very much in tune with German conservatives such as Gerhard Ritter, Hans Rothfels, and later Karl Dietrich Erdmann.

That German and American historians could also be in absolute interpretive agreement with each other is evidenced by their responses to William Shirer’s simplistic yet immensely successful *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. While the reactions of German and American media as well as the general public differed dramatically, historians on both sides of the Atlantic provided similarly devastating evaluations of the study.¹⁶⁹ Klaus Epstein’s comprehensive assessment in *The Review of Politics* turned out as least as negative as Martin Broszat’s in *Historische Zeitschrift*, and its tone was even more blunt. Epstein argued that Shirer’s “one-sided misjudgments on Germany’s political history appear[ed] relatively insignificant when compared with his systematic prejudice when dealing with

¹⁶⁷ Ross J. Hoffman, “Review of S. William Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*,” *Political Science Quarterly* 62 (1947), 128-130, quote on 129.

¹⁶⁸ Hoffman, “Review of S. William Halperin, *Germany Tried Democracy*,” 129-130.

¹⁶⁹ For the reception by the non-professional audience, see Gavriel Rosenfeld, “The Reception of Williams Shirer’s *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* in the United States and West Germany, 1960-62,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1994), 95-128.

Germany's cultural heritage" and accused Shirer of "rewarming of the wartime tale that German history is a one-way road leading from Luther to Hitler."¹⁷⁰ The review in the *American Historical Review* was hardly more positive.¹⁷¹

Studying the German Mind

The texts discussed thus far testify to the impressive state of German historiography in the United States. Other important works examined the history of social democracy—Peter Gay's study on Eduard Bernstein and Carl Schorske's analysis of the disintegration of the German labor movement in the early twentieth century are prime examples.¹⁷² Yet the main contributions of American scholars took place in the realm of intellectual and cultural history. They deserve special attention not only as scholarly achievements per se, but also as examples of a genre that was underrepresented among West German historians during the same period. It would also take a comparatively long time for these studies to be recognized in the Federal Republic, through either reviews or translations. What was particularly remarkable about these studies was the absence of anything comparable written by German historians.

Leonard Krieger, in his *The German Idea of Freedom*, addressed the question of whether the "Germans' failure to achieve, under their own power, a liberal democracy in the western sense mean[t] simply the triumph of conservatism over generic liberalism in

¹⁷⁰ Klaus Epstein, "Shirer's History of Nazi Germany," *The Review of Politics* 23 (1961), 232 and 245.

¹⁷¹ William O. Shanahan, "Review of William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*," *American Historical Review* 68 (1962), 126-128, labeled the book "woefully inadequate" and identified "selectivity [as] characteristic of the author's method." See also George Mosse's review in *The Progressive* (December 1960), 40-42.

¹⁷² Peter Gay, *Eduard Bernstein and the Dilemma of Democratic Socialism* (New York, 1952); Carl Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: the Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, MA, 1955).

Germany or was a peculiar German attitude toward liberty involved in its defeat.”¹⁷³ Krieger clearly believed the latter, for he argued that an “age-old association of liberty with the authoritarian state” characterized German history.¹⁷⁴ Beginning in the seventeenth, but concentrating on the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Krieger traced the development of conceptions of liberty held by prominent German thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Stein, Hardenberg, and Humboldt. Krieger did not write intellectual history detached from its social context, however; in this respect, his advisor Hajo Holborn might have influenced him.¹⁷⁵ *The German Idea of Freedom*, although not comparative, emphasized the German deviation from the western, that is, British and French, development, for the Germans failed to establish a liberal democracy in the western sense. American historians received *The German Idea of Freedom* very favorably, stressing above all Krieger’s ability to illuminate the interplay between ideas and their context. One reviewer even labeled the study “one of the three or four most important books on German history published by an American since 1945.”¹⁷⁶

In West Germany, Thomas Nipperdey was as appreciative of Krieger’s approach as the American reviewers had been, and he classified the study as one of the outstanding works

¹⁷³ Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom: History of a Political Tradition* (Boston, 1957), ix.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 468.

¹⁷⁵ Several years earlier, Hajo Holborn had published “Der deutsche Idealismus in sozialgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 174 (1952), 359-384.

¹⁷⁶ James J. Sheehan, “Review of Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom: History of a Political Tradition*,” *American Political Science Review* 70 (1976), 1280. This was a review of the (unrevised) 1973 reissue

in the area of the history of ideas that had been published in the preceding decade.¹⁷⁷ And yet Nipperdey had slight reservations regarding Krieger's perspective: the latter viewed the history of German liberalism from a strictly "liberal-democratic perspective." This did not give due consideration to the conflict between liberty and unity in German history, the notorious *nationale Frage*. For the liberals in Germany had not only to "push through a constitution, but first to found a [national] state."¹⁷⁸ Finally, Nipperdey also pointed out the absent comparative perspective, adding that especially the French challenges to German liberalism in the nineteenth century deserved more attention.

A few years later, Fritz Stern and George Mosse published their studies on intellectual origins and precursors of National Socialism. In his *The Politics of Cultural Despair* Stern focused on three representatives of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cultural criticism, Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn, and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck.¹⁷⁹ Stern argued that while historians in their search for the causes of National Socialism had thus far examined everything "from the dangers of Article 48 of the Weimar constitution to the role of Big Business," they had not "sufficiently reckoned with the politically exploitable discontent which for so long has been embedded in German culture."¹⁸⁰ Lagarde, Langbehn, and Moeller van den Bruck were, according to Stern, uprooted intellectuals who felt alienated from the progress of modernity, rationalism, and science, and who hated above all,

¹⁷⁷ See Thomas Nipperdey, "Review of Leonard Krieger, *The German Idea of Freedom: History of a Political Tradition*," *Historische Zeitschrift* 197 (1963), 415.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 415.

¹⁷⁹ See Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1961).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xv. Article 48 of the Weimar constitution granted the *Reichspräsident* far-reaching political power. Some historians argued that this constitutional element had weakened the Weimar Republic from the outset.

liberalism. They wanted to overcome these evils of modernity by a “conservative revolution,” and their ideas taken together constituted what Stern termed the “Germanic ideology.”¹⁸¹ What proved fatal for the course of German history was that the National Socialists appropriated some elements of this ideology. Furthermore, the ideology also affected the “educated, civilized classes” who were thus likely to be attracted by at least some elements of National Socialism.¹⁸² Finally, while Stern conceded that “the conservative revolution was a European phenomenon,” he emphasized that “only in Germany did it become a decisive intellectual and political force.”¹⁸³

In contrast to Stern, George Mosse focused not only on intellectuals (or, as Stern had dubbed Lagarde, Langbehn, and Moeller van den Bruck, “‘anti-intellectual’ intellectuals”¹⁸⁴) but on figures of high and popular culture alike.¹⁸⁵ Mosse explicitly rejected Gerhard Ritter’s attempted Europeanization of National Socialist ideology and stated that “rather than to explain away this fact [that the *völkisch* movement had “deeply penetrated into the national fabric”] it would seem more profitable to ask how this could have been accomplished.”¹⁸⁶ Like Stern, Mosse emphasized that historians thus far had not taken National Socialist ideology seriously enough, either because they had regarded it as mere propaganda, or because they had “found these ideas so nebulous and incomprehensible that they have

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 267.

¹⁸² Ibid., 292-294.

¹⁸³ Ibid., xxiii.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 276.

¹⁸⁵ See George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York, 1964).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 8.

dismissed them as unimportant.”¹⁸⁷ The essential element in the “völkisch” ideology for Mosse was “the linking of the human soul with its natural surroundings, with the ‘essence’ of nature.”¹⁸⁸ Mosse also devoted considerable attention to the dissemination of these ideas, for “education preeminently institutionalized the ideology. Before 1918, no political organization or group of like-minded people was as important as educators in anchoring the Germanic faith within the German nation.”¹⁸⁹ And since “völkisch” ideas in the 1920s permeated not only the National Socialists but the entire German Right, the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 was anything but an accident for Mosse even though he made it clear that it was not inevitable, either.¹⁹⁰

American reviewers praised Stern’s *The Politics of Cultural Despair* as an “important contribution to the understanding of the roots of National Socialism” which at the same time paid attention to cultural pessimism beyond Germany.¹⁹¹ Yet the same reviewer sharply criticized Mosse for his “vastly exaggerated” conclusions, especially regarding Wilhelmine Germany, which that he had forced “into a Volkish strait jacket.”¹⁹² Klemens von Klemperer, a fellow émigré historian who belonged to Mosse and Stern’s generation, like them was educated in the United States, but unlike them was a conservative Catholic, added, “Just because it is understandable and indeed inevitable that in these days German history should

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 1.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 152.

¹⁹⁰ See Ibid., 8.

¹⁹¹ Klaus Epstein, “Review of Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology*,” *American Historical Review* 67 (1962), 713.

¹⁹² Klemens von Klemperer, “Review of George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*,” *American Historical Review* 71 (1966), 609.

be written with the catastrophe in mind, it is up to the historian to exercise the necessary restraint.”¹⁹³

Klemperer’s reviews once again demonstrate the variety of opinions among German, or Central European, émigré historians that has often been obscured as a result of the exclusive focus on leading figures such as Hans Rosenberg, Felix Gilbert, Hajo Holborn, and Fritz Stern. More importantly, what both contemporary reviewers and some later observers noted regarding most of these intellectual and cultural histories was the conceptual problem of relating the German development to that of the “West.” For not only were few of the studies truly comparative in nature, but they also tended to gloss over illiberal and anti-democratic traditions in the supposed model democracies of England and France.¹⁹⁴

In contrast to the United States, the reception of Stern’s and Mosse’s studies in Germany was by and large a non-reception. *Historische Zeitschrift* reviewed neither of the two, and even though *The Politics of Cultural Despair* was published in German in 1963, it seems not to have stimulated further research among German historians.¹⁹⁵ Several factors might account for this fact: First, historians of Gerhard Ritter’s generation, whose influence was waning anyway during the 1960s, were likely to ignore studies that all too critically examined the ideological orientations of the German *Bildungsbürgertum*. Second, if German historians in the 1960s examined the roots of National Socialism, they generally focused on the Weimar Republic, debating, for example, whether the Social Democrats in the 1918

¹⁹³ Ibid., 609. The significance of Mosse’s *Crisis* emphasizes Saul Friedländer, “Mosse’s Influence on the Historiography of the Holocaust,” in Payne et al. (eds), *What History Tells*, 135.

¹⁹⁴ See Barkin, “German Émigré Historians in America,” 159.

¹⁹⁵ Fritz Stern, *Kulturpessimismus als politische Gefahr. Eine Analyse nationaler Ideologie in Deutschland* (Bern and Stuttgart, 1963).

revolution had failed to push through more democratic reforms—which might have decisively weakened anti-democratic forces in Germany instead of making the Nazi rise to power possible in 1933.¹⁹⁶ Alternatively, they argued about missed opportunities and misguided policies at the end of the Weimar Republic.¹⁹⁷ And third, historians of National Socialism were caught up in the fascism/totalitarianism debate—and both concepts did not pay much attention to ideology in a long-term perspective. Similarly, younger German historians such as Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen focused on the structure of the National Socialist regime rather than its ideological roots.¹⁹⁸

And yet the non-reception of the American studies in intellectual and cultural history by the German contemporaries remains puzzling for another reason. After all, Krieger, Stern, and Mosse outlined a German Sonderweg, and even though theirs was ideological, one might have expected the German historians who in the 1970s developed a social and political Sonderweg thesis to pay more attention to it. What makes this lack of reception even more surprising is the fact that these German scholars were generally very aware of American literature on German history because of their contacts with American historians.

In recent debates about the “brown roots” of German social history some younger German observers have explained Wehler’s and other social historians’ focus on structures

¹⁹⁶ See the studies on the German soviets 1918/19, which were published at the same time: Eberhard Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innenpolitik, 1918-1919* (Düsseldorf, 1962); and Peter von Oertzen, *Betriebsräte in der Novemberrevolution. Eine politikwissenschaftliche Untersuchung über Ideengehalt und Struktur betrieblicher und wirtschaftlicher Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Revolution 1918/19* (Düsseldorf, 1963).

¹⁹⁷ In the 1950s and early 1960s, Karl Dietrich Bracher and Werner Conze clashed about the role of Chancellor Heinrich Brüning. Compare Bracher’s seminal *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik. Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie* (Villingen, 1955) and Conze’s articles “Die Krise des Parteienstaates in Deutschland 1929/30,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 178 (1954), 47-83; and “Brünings Politik unter dem Druck der großen Krise,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 199 (1964), 529-550.

¹⁹⁸ See Martin Broszat, *Der Staat Hitlers. Grundlegung und Entwicklung seiner inneren Verfassung* (Munich, 1969); and Hans Mommsen, *Beamtenum im Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart, 1966).

and processes instead of agency and ideology by their allegiance to their teachers, above all Werner Conze and Theodor Schieder. Conze and Schieder had compromised themselves during the Nazi years and thus were not very interested in questions of agency and individual responsibility.¹⁹⁹ By resorting to structural and process-oriented approaches, their students avoided these tricky issues—and remained in their advisers’ good graces. While these views on social history have been developed within a specific German context as an exercise in “intellectual parricide,” to borrow Charles Maier’s term,²⁰⁰ Steven Aschheim has recently provided a less polemical yet similar explanation. In his comparison of German-Jewish intellectual and cultural historians and German (non-Jewish) social historians, Aschheim has labeled Wehler’s and others’ brand of social history as being “at once *skeptical* and *protective*” and “a navigation exercise: formulating a necessarily critical narrative of the past while at the same time leaving questions of personal complicity and ideological and intellectual convictions relatively untouched.”²⁰¹

In contrast to these critics, I argue that Wehler and others tended to view intellectual history as an inappropriate approach for less opportunistic or even implicitly apologetic reasons. German historians of Wehler’s generation associated intellectual history—or rather *Geistesgeschichte/Ideengeschichte*—with an older German historiographical tradition,

¹⁹⁹ See Peter Schöttler, “Von der rheinischen Landesgeschichte zur nazistischen Volksgeschichte oder die ‘unhörbare Stimme des Blutes,’” in Winfried Schulze and Otto G. Oexle (eds.), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 89-113; Götz Aly, “Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze oder die Vorstufen der physischen Vernichtung,” in *ibid.*, 163-182; Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker*, 563ff.

²⁰⁰ Charles S. Maier, “Comment,” in Hartmut Lehmann and James van Horn Melton (eds.), *Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s* (Cambridge, UK, 1994), 395.

²⁰¹ Steven Aschheim, “The Tensions of Historical Wissenschaft: The Émigré Historians and the Making of German Cultural History,” in Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton, 2007), 52.

namely Friedrich Meinecke's, which they considered either potentially apologetic or simply not very fruitful heuristically.²⁰² Within the German historiographical context of the 1950s and early 1960s, this assessment was certainly not entirely unfounded.

In addition, the biographical background of the respective historians offers another explanation of their methodological and theoretical orientation. While Aschheim reveals very convincingly how the personal experiences of Fritz Stern, George Mosse, Peter Gay, and Walter Laqueur influenced their scholarly work, he fails to provide the same analysis for the slightly younger German social historians. Unlike the German-Jewish émigrés, this generation of German social historians had, of course, not been personally affected by Nazi anti-Semitism in the 1930s. Therefore they might have been less likely to attach overriding importance to this ideology as a causal factor. For the same generation's historiography on National Socialism, one could posit a similar argument in explaining the relative neglect of its victims by non-Jewish German historians. For those growing up in the "society of perpetrators," the focus on those perpetrators rather than the victims of National Socialism should not be too surprising. Finally, one has to note the age difference of ten to twenty years between intellectual/cultural historians (born in the late 1910s to mid-1920s) and social historians (born between ca. 1930 and 1940). This difference meant that as students, the latter encountered historical professions that had begun to pay more attention to the social sciences. These observations are neither a verdict in favor of social history nor one against intellectual

²⁰² See Paul Nolte, "Die Historiker der Bundesrepublik. Rückblick auf eine 'lange Generation,'" *Merkur* 53 (1999), 413-432; for Wehler's statements on intellectual history, see his "Geschichtswissenschaft heute," first in Jürgen Habermas, *Stichworte zur geistigen Situation der Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1979) and later in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung. Studien zu Aufgaben und Traditionen deutscher Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen, 1980), 13-41. For the debate about "structure" vs. "agency"/"intention" in a different context, see also Norbert Frei, ed., *Martin Broszat, der "Staat Hitlers," und die Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2007).

and cultural history. Yet they offer an explanation that does not suspect the German social historians of Wehler's generation a priori of ulterior motives. More generally, to label certain methodologies per se "apologetic" seems only possible through a very selective reception of historiographical developments of recent decades. The fourth chapter will continue the discussion of these questions.

This survey of the postwar American field of modern Germany illustrates a number of issues. Although there was certainly no clear consensus, some specific interpretations existed, which many scholars adhered to. One of them was the unfortunate dominance of Prussia in Germany and in particular the disadvantageous role of the authoritarian Prussian elites. In addition, the development of liberalism in Germany and the significance of a distinct "Germanic ideology" preoccupied a number of intellectual and cultural historians. Implicitly or explicitly, Germany's deviance from a "Western" trajectory provided a subtext to most of these intellectual and cultural histories. While not deterministic, these studies assumed that the causes of the rise of National Socialism were to be found primarily within the cultural traditions and history of the German people, albeit not completely isolated from the European context. In addition, many Americans argued that these causes did not solely develop during the turbulent Weimar years, but in fact originated already in the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, a broader range of views characterized the American field of modern Germany. Scholars such as Sidney Fay persistently opposed what they perceived as blatant anti-German pamphlets— an understandable albeit historically inaccurate response to Nazi Germany's murderous path. Émigrés of the first (Klemens von Klemperer) and second generation (Klaus Epstein) cautioned against what they considered all-too-schematic

critiques of German history. To be sure, immediately after World War II almost everyone thought the reconsideration of the recent German past to be crucial. But the directions in which American scholars took this reconsideration began to vary by the 1950s, a development that continued and grew ever-more complex during the following decades, which will become apparent in the chapter analyzing the German historical profession during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

CHAPTER 3

German Historians Encounter the United States during the 1950s and 1960s

The analysis of the German and the American historical professions provided in the first two chapters has revealed the degree to which historians on both sides of the Atlantic attempted to (re-)establish intellectual and organizational ties with one another. As far as Americans were concerned, intellectual cooperation with Germans 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, Americans often simply continued to value scholarly contacts with their German colleagues. Therefore they sometimes demonstrated considerable understanding if Germans had made certain concessions to National Socialist ideology in their writings, or had even belonged to National Socialist organizations. Sometimes, their own conservative political views helped facilitate intellectual rapprochements, in particular as the new bipolar world order regrouped previous alliances.

As for the Germans, idealistic academic internationalism did not always constitute the main motivation for reaching out to the other side of the Atlantic. Some German scholars recognized all too well that a transatlantic orientation could be materially or politically advantageous, and that the conditions of the Cold War made it possible for them to rally

under the ideological umbrella of the “West.”¹ In his attempt to find international partners for the journal *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, editor Gerhard Ritter joined forces with the American church historians Roland Bainton and Harold Grimm. Both were Germanophiles who also harbored deep reservations about ethnic and religious diversity in American historiography and society.² Whereas Ritter was clearly attracted by the similarly conservative ideological outlook of his American colleagues, Martin Göhring, founding director of the recently established *Institut für Europäische Geschichte* (IEG) in Mainz, was hoping for financial support when he wrote to Guy Stanton Ford, secretary general of the American Historical Association. Even though Göhring was motivated “by the question of organizing close contacts between American, English, French and German historians,” he also asked for a monetary contribution for the establishment of a library at the institute.³

As mentioned in the first chapter, some established scholars resumed their contacts with American colleagues fairly soon after the end of the war. Some spent one or two semesters as visiting professors, while others went on lecture tours. A few historians participated in faculty exchange programs, sponsored by the various organizations that explicitly or implicitly aimed at exposing German academics to “Western” approaches. This chapter seeks to determine whether and how these older scholars were influenced by their

¹ 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, 2005), 139-195. For the political realm, see Ronald J. Granieri, *The Ambivalent Alliance: Konrad Adenauer, the CDU/CSU, and the West, 1949-1966* (New York, 2003).

² 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.

³ Martin Göhring to Guy Stanton Ford, 8 October 1951, Library of Congress, AHA papers, Box 174, Secretary File. He added that it was “our intention [...] to achieve a revision of history’s interpretation by means of international cooperation, one of the most urgent tasks of our day.”

contacts with American academia and the United States more generally. The cases of these individuals differ from a younger generation of German historians insofar as the former did not always show the openness so characteristic of the latter. In some cases, it will also become apparent that established scholars went to the United States in order to promote certain views on German history. For some of them, travelling to the United States took on the form of a distinct mission. The historians introduced below range from far-Right (Walther Hubatsch) and nationalist-conservative (Gerhard Ritter) to moderate-conservative (Karl-Dietrich Erdmann) and comparatively liberal (Fritz Fischer⁴), which indicates that scholars of different persuasions maintained contacts with American colleagues. The inclusion of the medievalist Fritz Ernst illustrates that the German-American scholarly community extended beyond historians of modern Germany.

Yet for a younger generation of Germans, born between the late 1920s and the early 1940s, the United States came to embody something else. While one should not invoke the cliché of America as the “country of unlimited possibilities” (*das Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten*), the proverbial phrase coined in the early twentieth century by the German banker Ludwig Max Goldberger, many Germans experienced their exchange visits as extremely enriching.⁵ They encountered not only a different academic system, but also an excitingly different culture in general. Many left the United States with a clear sense of what they had been missing in German society and academia, without uncritically embracing everything that was introduced to them. For most of the former exchange students, the United

⁴ This designation refers to Fischer’s position within the West German historical profession of the 1950s and 1960s; his overall political trajectory is decidedly more complex.

⁵ Ludwig Max Goldberger, *Das Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten* (Berlin, 1905).

States became and remained a place to which they would frequently return, and where they would develop and maintain many intellectual ties.⁶ This chapter therefore analyzes the encounters of this younger generation of German historians with the United States, during their student years as well as in their early professional careers. It asks to what extent these formative experiences influenced the scholarly work of these historians. Did they develop an interest in the area or time period they had studied at American universities? Did they borrow methodologically from American scholars they had encountered during their visits? Or did certain interpretations prevalent in the United States leave a mark on their later scholarship? The four historians on whose experience the section focuses are the two main protagonists of the *Bielefelder Schule* Jürgen Kocka and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, the liberal social and political historian Volker Berghahn, and Klaus Schwabe, a diplomatic historian and student of Gerhard Ritter. As for the older generation, the sample likewise illustrates the different background of historians developing ties to the United States.

The Older Generations

In contrast to other Germans of his generation, Ritter was well connected with the American historical profession. His personal papers include yearlong correspondence with a number of scholars on the other side of the Atlantic.⁷ As we have seen in the first chapter,

⁶ See, for example, the comments by Jürgen Kocka, “Wir sind ein Fach, das nicht nur für sich selber schreibt und forscht, sondern zur Aufklärung und zum Selbstverständnis der eigenen Gesellschaft und Kultur beitragen sollte,” in Rüdiger Hohls and Konrad H. Jarausch (eds.), *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart and Munich, 2000), 384.

⁷ Among them were 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 DC), 1938, 1947-1948; Harold J Grimm, 1948-1967; Felix E. Hirsch (New York), 1947-1966; Helmut Hirsch

Ritter repeatedly attempted to capitalize on these contacts in order to have his books published in the United States. When Ritter embarked on a lecture tour between January and May of 1953, it was obvious that he thought of himself as being on an important mission: the self-appointed spokesperson of the German historical profession set out to explain to American colleagues as well as the broader public what contemporary German historians thought and, subsequently, the proper way of understanding German history after the collapse of the Nazi regime.⁸ After the end of his trip, Ritter wrote to Hans Rothfels that his “U.S. trip [had] been fruitful in every respect, I believe, successful as well, and also delightful for me personally. I returned to Germany deeply impressed.”⁹ Of course, one can only speculate what made Ritter’s tour so “fruitful” and “successful”, and what impressed him, but it seems likely that the American audiences responded well to the Freiburg historian’s interpretations of German history and his comments on contemporary West Germany. Five years later, Ritter returned to deliver a series of lectures at Tulane University, Rice Institute (renamed Rice University two years later), and Ohio State University.¹⁰ During this visit, Louisiana State University Press expressed interest in publishing Ritter’s lectures,

(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, Conn.), 1947-1967 (the years indicate the period of correspondence).

⁸ Ritter lectured on “Lutheranism, Catholicism, and the Humanistic view of life”; “The political attitude of the German (academic) youth today”; “The Protestant church and its relations to public life in Germany today”; See the manuscripts in BAK, NL Gerhard Ritter, Box 225.

⁹ Gerhard Ritter to Hans Rothfels, May 21, 1953, BAK, NL Hans Rothfels, Box 1.

¹⁰ This time, Ritter’s lectures dealt with “The Problem of Militarism in Germany”; “The nature and the policies of the New German Army”; “The historical roots of National Socialism” (o.O.); and “The political attitude of the German army 1914 – 1945: from obedience to revolt”—all of them politically “hot” topics. See the manuscripts in Ritter’s Nachlass, BAK, NL Gerhard Ritter, Box 228.

but this never happened.¹¹ Nevertheless, it seems clear that Ritter's trips to the United States unfolded in a satisfactory way for the German historian. The high esteem in which many American colleagues held him became evident once again when in 1965 Ohio State University Press published his *The German Problem*, a collection of essays that had previously appeared in German. Three years earlier, Ralph Lutz of Stanford University had 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."¹²

In 1952/1953, Ritter's colleague and later opponent Fritz Fischer toured several American universities on a trip organized by the Governmental Affairs Institute. This institute, which first operated under the auspices of the American Political Science Association and later as an independent organization, organized exchanges of political leaders and younger academics (participants had to be between 30 and 45 years of age) from Germany and Austria.¹³ Given the Governmental Affairs Institute's links to political science, it was not surprising that Fischer came to meet social scientists as much as historians. The main goal of these tours was to familiarize the German guests with both the theoretical and methodological foundations of American political science and to reveal how academics in this field were connected to policy makers. In a letter to the University of Hamburg's administration, in which Fischer asked for a leave of absence, he emphasized that "the

¹¹ See the correspondence in BAK Koblenz, NL Gerhard Ritter, Box 409, Folder "Amerikafahrt September – Oktober 1958."

¹² Ralph Lutz to Gerhard Ritter, November 16, 1962, BAK, NL Gerhard Ritter, Box 353.

¹³ For the origins and the development of the institute, see Henry J. Kellermann, *Cultural Relations as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy: the Educational Exchange Program Between the United States and Germany, 1945-1945* (Washington, D.C., 1978), 138.

methods [of political science] in the United States is of great importance for the modern historian.”¹⁴

Fischer’s stay first led him to the University of Virginia for ten weeks, where he received “a good and intensive introduction” to Political Science.¹⁵ He then spent nearly two months at Princeton, Yale, and Harvard, meeting with political scientists as well as historians working on German history. During the remaining three-and-a-half months, Fischer toured sixteen universities in the Midwest, the West Coast and Southwest, and finally, the South. At Berkeley, Fischer encountered David Hoggan, then a young visiting assistant professor, whom he found to be “excellent on German history.” Hoggan later went on to have a questionable career on the German far right, espousing the aforementioned dubious thesis regarding Hitler’s supposedly peaceful foreign policies (see chapter 2). Fischer’s trip ended at Columbia University, where he attended the illustrious seminar on European politics of émigré political scientist Franz Neumann, which attracted prominent scholars from several universities in and around New York City.¹⁶

The generally positive, and at times even enthusiastic, tone of Fischer’s report was at least in part the likely result of Fischer’s gratitude toward the Governmental Affairs Institute. Still, what remains striking is Fischer’s repeated characterization of various scholars as

¹⁴ See Fischer’s letter to the president of the University of Hamburg, in which he describes purpose and structure of the trip and asks for the permission to take a leave of absence. Letter, June 21, 1952, BAK, NL Fritz Fischer, Box 50. Fischer added that he had never been to the United States before and had not had a leave of absence in more than five years.

¹⁵ Fritz Fischer, Report to the Governmental Affairs Institute, August 19, 1953, BAK, NL Fritz Fischer, Box 109.

¹⁶ Fritz Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known*, 206, lists besides Neumann and Columbia’s historian of Eastern Europe Henry Roberts the scholars Hajo Holborn, Felix Gilbert, Herbert Marcuse, Leonard Krieger, H. Stuart Hughes, and Carl Schorske. Holborn told Fischer that he was “happy to learn that you have got safely back to the civilized eastern part of this country and I am looking forward to seeing you soon.” Hajo Holborn to Fritz Fischer, April 29, 1953, BAK, NL Fritz Fischer, Box 51.

“progressive” and “modern,” in contrast to others whom he perceived as “traditional” and “conservative”. Fischer also noted the different social backgrounds of students he encountered at Ivy League and other universities. Occasionally, he remarked on the atmosphere of the places he visited. At the University of Virginia, for example, he seemed to be impressed by “the abilities for students to discuss political and administrative problems freely.”¹⁷

After having submitted his report, Fischer published an article on “subjectivity” and “objectivity” in American historiography—for several reasons a noteworthy text.¹⁸ Apparently under the impression of his encounters with social scientists in the United States, Fischer drew a picture of a historical profession under pressure to justify its relevance vis-à-vis the social sciences. Moreover, Fischer discussed Charles Beard’s critique of Friedrich Meinecke’s brand of historicism, which the American historian saw as fundamentally opposed to the spirit of the enlightenment. While Fischer admitted that Meinecke himself had drawn a sharp distinction between “Western positivist rationalism” and the German tradition of historicism,¹⁹ he still took the side of Meinecke against Beard. He distanced himself in particular from Beard’s famous dictum of “written history as an act of faith.”²⁰ This, however, was precisely the charge Fischer’s opponents would level against him during the “Fischer Controversy” surrounding the German Empire in World War I. And while Fischer

¹⁷ Fischer, Report to the Governmental Affairs Institute, August 19, 1953, 2.

¹⁸ See Fischer’s article “Objektivität und Subjektivität. Ein Prinzipienstreit in der amerikanischen Geschichtsschreibung,” in Alfred Herrmann (ed.), *Aus Politik und Geschichte. Festschrift für Ludwig Bergsträsser zum 70. Geburtstag* (Düsseldorf, 1954), 167-182.

¹⁹ The most thorough analysis of this complex subject is still Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middleton, Conn., 1968).

²⁰ This was the title of Beard’s 1933 AHA presidential address, subsequently published in *American Historical Review* 39 (1934), 219-231.

in his later work consistently emphasized the need to produce “critical” rather than “affirmative” historical texts, in this case he defended a historiographical approach that sought to “understand” rather than to “judge.”

A year later, Waldemar Gurian, whom Fischer had come to know during his 1952/53 tour, inquired whether he would be interested in a visiting professorship at Notre Dame.²¹ After difficult negotiations with the University of Hamburg’s administration, which was not excited about Fischer’s request for yet another leave of absence, he spent the spring semester of 1955 in Indiana. During his two stays in the United States in the 1950s, Fischer managed to establish a number of contacts with American historians, such as Hans Gatzke, Gordon Craig, Hans Rosenberg, and Hajo Holborn. These ties would prove useful in the 1960s, when his magnum opus *Griff nach der Weltmacht* alienated him from most of his German colleagues.²²

Of course, exchange programs and visiting professorships were not limited to Germans working on modern history. Sponsored by a Rockefeller Foundation grant, the Heidelberg University medievalist Fritz Ernst visited a large number of universities across the United States, in order to “study institutions of higher learning and the general educational system of the country.”²³ Ernst appeared to be particularly impressed by the “strength of the educational interests” at American universities; whereas in Germany education (*Erziehung*) consisted only of teaching (*Unterricht*), in the United States—and in

²¹ Waldemar Gurian to Fritz Fischer, January 6, 1954, BAK, NL Fritz Fischer, Box 50.

²² See Fischer’s list of acquaintances among American historians and political scientists, containing ca. 45 names, without date (handwritten addition “likely 1952/53”) BAK, NL Fritz Fischer, Box 1.

²³ Fritz Ernst, “Report to the Rockefeller Foundation on my tour to the U.S.A.” without date, Leo Baeck Institute, New York, George L. Mosse Papers, Box 31/28.

Great Britain—teaching was only part of university education. His impressions ultimately confirmed his opinion that “certain reforms of the German universities (and secondary schools) [were] absolutely necessary.” Ernst emphasized two particularly important aims: German universities should significantly enlarge their faculties, in order to allow for a closer faculty-student interaction, and they should establish a “*Studium Generale*” (which he apparently based on the American college model, in order to provide students with a more comprehensive education).

Yet Ernst devoted his time to more than merely educational reform questions. Similar to other German historians, he revealed an acute interest in American views on both contemporary Germany and German history, and he published the results in a long review essay of both academic and more popular studies. Ernst conceded that for many Americans the immediate impressions of National Socialism had altered their perspective on modern German history.²⁴ Yet he also declared: “Those who have lived under a dictatorship know what resistance means. Those who have never lived under a dictatorship will hardly be able to comprehend it.”²⁵ In this context Ernst cited Hans Rothfels’s *The German Opposition to Hitler* (published in 1948) as “the only scholarly account of the opposition to Hitler” without mentioning Franklin Ford’s AHR article that had appeared two years earlier.²⁶ While Ernst’s review essay seemed to suggest a dichotomy between reliable historical works produced by historians who had lived through the Nazi dictatorship and studies written by foreigners

²⁴ Fritz Ernst, “Blick auf Deutschland: Ausländische Stimmen zur neuesten deutschen Geschichte,” *Die Welt als Geschichte* 10 (1950), 192-212, quote on 207. “We can understand that National Socialism has retroactively revised German history for many people—we know how this has happened to ourselves.”

²⁵ Ernst, “Blick auf Deutschland: Ausländische Stimmen zur neuesten deutschen Geschichte,” 211.

²⁶ Franklin L. Ford, “The Twentieth of July in the History of the German Resistance,” *American Historical Review* 51 (1946), 609-626.

lacking this important dimension, he acknowledged the research of a number of American historians. Moreover, if Ernst criticized many American studies on German history as overly simplistic, he recognized that the emergence of these simplistic views was not too surprising. Perhaps most importantly, Ernst insisted that Germans today could no longer afford to ignore foreign views of German history—something that he believed previous generations had tended to do.²⁷ All in all, this essay demonstrated that some German historians were no longer advocating the overly defensive positions characteristic of previous decades.

Ernst returned to the United States 1955 to take up a visiting professorship at the University of Wisconsin.²⁸ Most likely Chester Easum, who had taught in Madison since 1927 and who at the time was serving as a cultural attaché at the American Embassy in Bonn, had arranged Ernst's visit. Yet the German historian also developed a good relationship with George Mosse, who had just arrived at Madison from the University of Iowa. Subsequently, Mosse even attempted to convince Ernst to accept a permanent appointment at the University of Wisconsin, since the history department wanted to strengthen its focus on Central European history. However, the German historian was not ready to give up his position at the University of Heidelberg.²⁹

²⁷ Ernst, "Blick auf Deutschland: Ausländische Stimmen zur neuesten deutschen Geschichte," 204: "Den Luxus der deutschen Generationen seit 1871, sich um das ausländische Urteil nicht zu kümmern, können wir uns heute nicht mehr leisten, und das nicht nur aus sogenannten taktischen Gründen."

²⁸ See Fritz Ernst's letter to Hans Rothfels, March 23, 1955, in which he showed himself impressed by Wisconsin's history department. BAK, NL Hans Rothfels, Box 1.

²⁹ George L. Mosse to Fritz Ernst, April 6, 1956; Ernst to Mosse, May 25, 1956; Mosse to Ernst, May 28, 1956; and Ernst to Mosse, June 1, 1956. LBI, George L. Mosse Papers, Box 34/50. Mosse and Ernst also discussed the hire of a historian of modern Germany. Henry Cord Meyer, then at Pomona College, had just published his study on the *Mittleuropa* concept and was the preferred choice, but ultimately did not accept the offer. Ernst commented on this development: "I regret very much that Meyer could not accept the position... Nowadays one has to be careful with American specialists of Germany who are of German ancestry, that they don't have Nazi sympathies—which he [Meyer] certainly does not have." It is unclear how Ernst came to this conclusion regarding American historians of German origins.

As the previous chapter has revealed, American historians of modern Germany were a rather diverse group, methodologically as well as politically. Thus, it might not be too surprising that even an arch-conservative such as Walther Hubatsch, a specialist in naval history at the University of Bonn who throughout his career remained a 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—and upon his return, he wrote about his experiences in a German newspaper.³⁰ In an overall fairly sympathetic account, Hubatsch expressed his admiration of the “fairly uniform historical consciousness” among American citizens of different religious and ethnic backgrounds—an evaluation that might have come as a surprise to Americans themselves. Equally sweeping—and unconvincing—was Hubatsch’s claim that college textbooks available in the United States did not conform to “scholarly standards.” The “proof” for this assertion was an appendix to a sourcebook edited by Louis N. Snyder (who had received his PhD under Walter Platzhoff at the University of Frankfurt in 1932), which erroneously labeled several countries in Africa and Asia as German colonies and protectorates.³¹ This admittedly rather embarrassing mistake, however, did little to diminish the overall value of the publication, which American historians reviewed rather positively. Instead, it seems likely that Hubatsch took offense to Snyder’s introductions to the documents, which ran counter to his own views. Examples include Snyder’s brief vignettes on a number of World War I documents, which

³⁰ Walther Hubatsch, “Geschichte—Kein verstaubter Plunder. Historische Wissenschaft in den USA: Eindrücke eines deutschen Gastprofessors,” *Die Welt, supplement “Geistige Welt,”* July 2, 1960.

³¹ Louis N. Snyder (ed.), *Documents of German History* (New Brunswick, 1958), 602. Here, a list of “German Colonies and Protectorates in 1911” included Madagascar, Cambodia, and Morocco. Despite this glaring mistake, Snyder’s sourcebook contained a reliable selection of documents, albeit with heavy emphasis on the German Empire and Nazi Germany.

were more critical of the German Empire's actions than Hubatsch's—in particular the introduction to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.³²

Despite such sweeping criticism, Hubatsch acknowledged the sophistication of the American historical profession, evidenced by some impressive studies produced by American historians of modern Europe, such as R.R. Palmer's *The Age of Democratic Revolution, 1760-1800*. Yet like other German Conservatives of the time, he also fell back on the common argument that it was difficult, especially for younger American scholars, “to do justice to the complex historical events in Europe.” Rather than engaging a view held by an American colleague with whom they disagreed, historians such as Hubatsch—or Gerhard Ritter—simply declared it the result of a lack of empathy and understanding toward the conditions of European and particularly German history. This ability to empathize (*empfinden*) was something foreigners supposedly often lacked.³³

Hubatsch's guest professorship also seems to have 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.³⁴ Henry Cord Meyer, a student of Hajo Holborn who had written his dissertation on the history of the *Mitteleuropa* concept in Germany—which was immensely popular among political and economic elites during World War I—provided a surprisingly sympathetic preface to the

³² See Snyder (ed.), *Documents of German History*, 335, 337, 341, and in particular 362/363 (the introduction to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk).

³³ For a comparable response, see Ritter's comments on Plessner's *Verspätete Nation* or Hans Herzfeld's criticism of Koppel Pinson's *Modern Germany* in chapter 2.

³⁴ Walter Leo/Walter Bussmann (eds.), *Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte, Vol. IV part 2* (Konstanz, 1955)

study.³⁵ Meyer was probably not far off the mark when he noted that Hubatsch gave “an indication of the way Germans are likely to consider major aspects of their history in the twentieth century.”³⁶ 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 magnum opus *Griff nach der Weltmacht*) as differing markedly from Hubatsch.³⁷ Yet Meyer claimed that by engaging Hubatsch’s interpretations, American readers would “stand to lose only two expandable qualities—our ignorance and our prejudice.”³⁸ 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.”³⁹ 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

³⁵ Henry Cord Meyer, *Mittleuropa in German Thought and Action, 1815-1945* (The Hague, 1955).

³⁶ Henry Cord Meyer, “Introduction,” in Walther Hubatsch, *Germany and the Central Powers in the World War 1914-1918* (Lawrence, 1963), xi.

³⁷ Interestingly, in *Germany and the Central Powers in the World War*, 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.

³⁸ Meyer, “Introduction”, xi.

³⁹ 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.

well as by the interests of state of the Central Powers.”⁴⁰ Moreover, 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.⁴¹ 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. 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.

The report of Karl Dietrich Erdmann on a four-week lecture tour during March and April of 1964 offers another glimpse into the experiences of established German historians in the United States (and Canada). The German Embassy in Canada had asked Erdmann, a leading historian of his generation and one of the most influential figures in the German historical profession, to counter talks given by the British historian A.L. Rowse at McGill University during the winter of 1962-63, which had supposedly implied a “collective condemnation” (*Kollektivverurteilung*) of German history.⁴² The Canadian audiences in Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, and Toronto responded positively to Erdmann’s lectures, yet the echo in the United States turned out comparatively mixed. Erdmann reported that while the talk at Brandeis University had led to a “tough but fair discussion,” the “Fischer

⁴⁰ Hubatsch, *Germany and the Central Powers in the World War 1914-1918*, 108.

⁴¹ Hubatsch, *Germany and the Central Powers in the World War 1914-1918*, 64.

⁴² Report Karl Dietrich Erdmann, “Bericht über die Vortragsreise in Kanada und USA vom 17.3.-15.5.64,” April 18, 1964, BAK, NL Karl Dietrich Erdmann, Box 109.

Controversy” had overshadowed his visit at Yale. This controversy had taken on the form of a public scandal only when conservative German historians managed to orchestrate the cancellation of Fischer’s lecture tour to the United States.⁴³ Hajo Holborn, the senior German historian at Yale, (correctly) perceived Erdmann to be on a more political than scholarly mission, and since the German government had recently canceled Fritz Fischer’s lecture tour to the United States for political reasons, Holborn openly regretted having arranged Erdmann’s visit at Yale.⁴⁴ This episode, as well as the *Fischer-Kontroverse* as a whole, revealed American objections to political intervention in academic affairs.

The Younger Generation

While the visits of established historians only rarely took on such an almost contentious character, young German students encountered the United States in a very different way. Their experiences were made possible through the establishment of exchange programs during the postwar years. For example, the Smith-Mundt Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in January 1948, established for the first time “a worldwide peacetime program of informational and educational exchange.”⁴⁵ Yet while exchange programs enabled young Americans to study in many different countries (and students from these countries to come to

⁴³ Philipp Stelzel, “Fritz Fischer and the American Historical Profession: Tracing the Transatlantic Dimension of the Fischer-Kontroverse,” *Storia della Storiografia* 44 (2003), 68-73.

⁴⁴ Hajo Holborn to Gerhart H. Seger (German Information Center, New York), March 18, 1964, BAK, NL Karl Dietrich Erdmann, Box 109. Holborn wrote “As you have probably heard, the American universities in which Professor Fritz Fischer was supposed to speak according to the wishes of the German Information Center, have decided to make it possible for Professor Fischer to undertake his lecture trip in this country. Probably under the circumstances I should not have invited Professor Erdmann, but we will make the two speeches possible in some fashion. The Fischer affair is a rather sad affair for German-American cultural relations and I am afraid that the German official agencies will be bothered with it for a long time to come.”

⁴⁵ Kellermann, *Cultural Relations as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy*, 6.

the United States), in the case of West Germany they were “conceived and designed more sharply than any other program as an instrument of foreign policy.”⁴⁶ The United States government first targeted politicians, business leaders, journalists, professors, attorneys, and others whom it considered to represent the German elites. Soon, however, the focus shifted increasingly towards the realm of education.⁴⁷ Part of a broader development in the area of education in general, which sent German high school students and teachers to the United States as well, numerous German university students encountered the United States starting in the early 1950s (the Fulbright Program for West Germany began in 1952-53). While the exchange programs more and more came to target high school, the number of university students still remained significant.

The scholars under review here were born between 1929 and 1941; they belong to the so-called “long generation” (Paul Nolte) of postwar West German historians.⁴⁸ This generation shared fewer common generational experiences than other groups of academics that historians have recently identified for West Germany, such as the “Forty-Fivers,” whom A. Dirk Moses has classified as having been born between 1922 and 1932.⁴⁹ Older representatives of this “long generation” had memories of Nazi Germany during peacetime and the Hitler Youth; some of them even participated in the *Volkssturm* during the very last

⁴⁶ Kellermann, *Cultural Relations as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy*, 3.

⁴⁷ Brian M. Puaca, *Learning Democracy: Education Reform in West Germany, 1945-1965* (New York, 2009), 71

⁴⁸ Paul Nolte, “Die Historiker der Bundesrepublik: Rückblick auf eine ‘lange Generation,’” *Merkur* 53 (1999), 413-431.

⁴⁹ A. Dirk Moses, “The Forty-Fivers: a Generation between Fascism and Democracy,” *German Politics and Society* 17 (1999), 94-126. See also his more recent study *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge, UK, 2007).

stages of World War II.⁵⁰ By contrast, those historians born in the late 1930s and early 1940s obviously remember the postwar rather than the war years. Yet historians of the “long generation” form a distinct group in the sense that they occupied influential roles in the West German historical profession beginning in the early 1970s while also striving to reach a broader audience as public intellectuals. In addition, most of them share an attitude of fundamental and consistent sympathy for the United States. This sympathy may have been weakened temporarily, by events such as the Vietnam War, but was never completely altered. In this respect, their sentiments resemble those among the postwar West German politicians who, like the former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, consistently maintained the significance of close German-American relations. They differ from those of the generation of 1968, who came to associate the United States with militarism and imperialism rather than with the Marshall Plan, American support during the Berlin Crisis of 1948, or student exchanges such as the Fulbright Program.

Hans-Ulrich Wehler (born 1931) exemplifies this generation and its attitudes. For Wehler, who came to the United States on a Fulbright fellowship in 1952/53, Ohio University—and the way history was taught there—contrasted very favorably with the Universität Bonn. Working with a former student of the distinguished cultural historian Merle Curti whom Wehler recalls as the “best man in Athens,” he was introduced to interdisciplinary approaches.⁵¹ Typical for most German students in the United States at that time, he took courses in a number of different fields, including economics and journalism

⁵⁰ Hans-Ulrich Wehler describes the war years in “*Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*”: *Ein Gespräch mit Manfred Hettling und Cornelius Torp* (Munich, 2006), 19-25.

⁵¹ For the following see Wehler, “*Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*,” 39; and interview with the author, July 2, 2007.

(the latter of which he regarded as his future profession). As a Fulbright fellow, Wehler's stay in the United States was to have a non-academic, "cultural" dimension as well. He was therefore placed with an American host family—"mainstream liberals," according to Wehler—with whom he developed such a close relationship that he ultimately regarded them as second parents. While the international students, as Wehler recalls, were consciously isolated from the local population in Athens, by living with American families they were still somewhat integrated into the society.

Yet Wehler's experiences went far beyond Athens, Ohio. With an adventurousness and cleverness characteristic of both the historian and the human being, Wehler managed to obtain a social security card, which international students were not allowed to possess since they were not supposed to work. After finishing his studies at Ohio University, he first drove brand-new cars from the factory in Detroit to the West Coast, before hitchhiking his way back to the Midwest. Attracted by the atmosphere in California—"the tone was less rude than in Chicago or Detroit"—he decided to look for work there. Between July and December 1953, he worked as a welder in North Hollywood, the only white person among African Americans and Mexicans. Through invitations, Wehler also came in contact with his colleagues' families, and he remembers them as "amicable yet sometimes politically extremely narrow-minded."⁵²

Klaus Schwabe (born in 1932) describes his time at Miami University (Ohio) in 1952/53 in similarly positive terms, remembering in particular the friendly treatment by émigré scholars in a number of fields. Schwabe had been a student at Free University Berlin,

⁵² Wehler, "*Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*," 41.

where he had heard lectures on the United States by Ernst Fraenkel, an émigré political scientist who had returned to West Germany in 1951.⁵³ These lectures had aroused his interest in American history and society. “My first stay in the United States came about merely accidentally and seemed to me as a West-Berliner like winning in the lottery,” Schwabe remembers.⁵⁴ Having left Germany during his fourth semester, Schwabe took classes on the junior level. Like Wehler, he immersed himself in a number of different areas, including American history, anthropology, sociology, economics, and literature. Schwabe consciously avoided German history while at Miami University and therefore did not establish contacts with any American historians of Germany; he was more interested in those fields he knew he would not be able to study at home.⁵⁵ Yet the year at Miami University sparked his interest in American history, politics, and society. After his return to Germany Schwabe maintained a focus on some of the subjects he had encountered in Ohio; he later became a historian of twentieth century German and American history; his main works include a comprehensive account of American diplomacy toward Germany at the end of World War I, a short biography of Woodrow Wilson, and a synthetical study of twentieth century American foreign policy.⁵⁶

⁵³ See Simone Ladwig-Winters, *Ernst Fraenkel: ein politisches Leben* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009).

⁵⁴ Klaus Schwabe, e-mail to the author, January 19, 2010.

⁵⁵ Klaus Schwabe, e-mail to the author, October 23, 2006.

⁵⁶ Klaus Schwabe, *Deutsche Revolution und Wilson-Frieden 1918/19* (Düsseldorf 1972); an English translation was published later as *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking. Missionary Diplomacy and the Realities of Power* (Chapel Hill, 1985); *Woodrow Wilson* (Göttingen, 1972); *Weltmacht und Weltordnung. Amerikanische Außenpolitik von 1898 bis zur Gegenwart. Eine Jahrhundertgeschichte* (Paderborn, 2006).

Volker R. Berghahn's (born in 1938) experiences at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the late 1950s and early 1960s likewise left long-lasting impressions.⁵⁷ Berghahn came to Chapel Hill in the fall of 1959 and spent two academic years there. He concentrated primarily on history and political science, but he remembers a number of scholars from different disciplines who influenced him. His master's thesis adviser was the political scientist Charles B. Robson, an expert on Germany and the author of a book on post-World War II Berlin.⁵⁸ The history department at the time had not yet hired a historian of modern Germany; Enno E. Kraehe who specialized in nineteenth century Central European history joined the University of North Carolina in 1964, while John L. Snell, a twentieth century diplomatic historian, did not arrive in Chapel Hill until 1968. Berghahn had come to North Carolina with a keen interest in right-wing radicalism in the Weimar Republic as well as the young Federal Republic, and chose the Waffen SS/HAIG as the topic for his thesis, for which he received a double master's degree in history and political science.⁵⁹ His impression of the university's academic quality was overall positive, albeit with some exceptions. Berghahn was impressed by the global focus of UNC's history department, a striking difference to the situation at German universities, where the overwhelming majority of historians wrote and taught exclusively German history. Yet he found the teaching style of most professors only moderately stimulating, and the students were expected to prove a mastery of facts rather than the ability to wrestle with conceptual questions. Moreover, some

⁵⁷ Interview Volker R. Berghahn, April 19, 2006.

⁵⁸ Charles B. Robson, *Berlin: Pivot of German Destiny* (Chapel Hill, 1960). Robson had received his PhD from UNC's History Department in 1930 with a dissertation on *The Influence of German Thought on Political Theory in the United States in the Nineteenth Century*.

⁵⁹ Volker R. Berghahn, *The Waffen-SS/HAIG*, M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill 1961.

of the scholars of Southern history struck Berghahn as very conservative, some even as racist, but at least as staunchly opposed to the Civil Rights movement gaining ground around the time.

The late 1950s and early 1960s were an exciting time in North Carolina for precisely that reason. The Civil Rights movement affected Chapel Hill and its university as well—even though the peak of the movement was not reached until 1963-64.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Berghahn remembers entering restaurants with a group consisting of both African-American and white students, demanding that all of them be served. In addition, the recent German past was rather present, as several faculty members had been to Germany, either during the early 1930s or after the end of the war. Suddenly it became even more immediate, when William Shirer's bestseller *The Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany* was published. At Chapel Hill, this led to a public discussion in a large auditorium. The substantial and devastating criticism which most American historians leveled against Shirer had not yet resonated with the broader public—and maybe it never did.⁶¹ It seems, however, that the presence of the Nazi past did not influence American attitudes toward the young Germans, for Berghahn remembers a general hospitality. The relative importance attributed to extracurricular activities, which students at German universities were not used to pursuing, was also noteworthy for him.

Despite the overall very positive experience in North Carolina, Berghahn never seriously contemplated attending graduate school in the United States. Returning to Europe

⁶⁰ See the account by John Ehle, *The Free Men* (New York, 1965).

⁶¹ For the reception by the non-professional audience, see Gavriel Rosenfeld, "The Reception of Williams Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* in the United States and West Germany, 1960-62," *Journal of Contemporary History* 29 (1994), 95-128. Negative reviews by professional historians include William O. Shanahan, "Review of William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*," *American Historical Review* 68, (1962), 126-128; George Mosse's review in *The Progressive* (December 1960): 40-42; and Klaus Epstein, "Shirer's History of Nazi Germany," *The Review of Politics* 23 (1961), 230-245.

had been a forgone conclusion for him, and he had already established contact with Francis Carsten, a German émigré historian now teaching at the University of London. Carsten was at the time working on a study on the German Army during the Weimar Republic, the *Reichswehr*, and since Berghahn intended to write his dissertation on the *Stahlhelm*, the largest veterans' organization (as well as the largest paramilitary organization) in Weimar Germany, Carsten was the logical choice for an adviser.⁶² Berghahn received his PhD from the University of London in 1964, temporarily moved to Germany for his Habilitation, and taught in England until 1988, when he returned to the United States to accept an appointment at Brown University.

Jürgen Kocka (born in 1941) came to Chapel Hill soon afterwards; he studied Political Science during the academic year 1964-65. While a student at Free University of Berlin, Kocka had come across a job advertisement from the University of North Carolina, where Charles B. Robson was looking for a graduate research assistant. In 1965 Kocka received his M.A. with a comparative thesis on financial aspects of federalism in West Germany and the United States.⁶³ Like Berghahn, Kocka remembers the comparatively liberal atmosphere, with the Civil Rights Movement gaining momentum.⁶⁴ And similar to his older colleague Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Kocka's experience did not remain limited to the campus of his host university. After completing his M.A., Kocka taught German at Tougaloo

⁶² Francis L. Carsten, *Reichswehr und Politik, 1918-1933* (Köln, 1964); later published in English as *The Reichswehr and Politics* (Oxford, 1966). Berghahn's dissertation was published as *Der Stahlhelm. Bund der Frontsoldaten, 1918-1935* (Düsseldorf, 1966). See also Berghahn's obituary "Francis L. Carsten, 1911-1998," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 25 (1999), 504-510.

⁶³ Jürgen Kocka, *The Financial Relations between the Federal Government and States in the USA and Bund and Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany: A Comparative Study in the Financial Aspects of Federalism*, M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1965.

⁶⁴ Interview Jürgen Kocka, March 20, 2007.

College, a historically African-American institution in Jackson, Mississippi. Kocka later stated that “ever since then the United States [had] been the first foreign country for me, in my capacity as a historian and otherwise.”⁶⁵ And while he did not pay too much attention to historiographical trends among scholars of American history during this first stay, he traveled to Berkeley to visit Hans Rosenberg, who was already assuming the status of a foundational figure for younger German social historians.

These examples taken together suggest that the first encounter with the United States had a strong impact on the young Germans. Clearly, the students became aware of the cultural and political differences between the two societies. To be sure, one of the purposes of especially the early student exchanges was to provide the Germans with an opportunity to witness a supposed model democracy at work. Yet in some cases the cultural experience also included an introduction to racism in the American South. Academically, the Germans generally came in contact with a number of different disciplines, which the curriculum at their German universities usually did not allow. One cannot say that all students encountered methodological trends that had not yet reached the German historical profession. Some, such as Wehler, found their American host university more stimulating in this respect, whereas others, such as Berghahn, perceived most scholars as rather conventional. Yet the academic advising by their American professors seemed to surpass the treatment the students were used to in Germany; on average the distance between faculty and students was less pronounced in the United States. However, at these early stages of their careers, most Germans did not yet form long-lasting contacts with or even just get to know American

⁶⁵ Jürgen Kocka, “Wir sind ein Fach, das nicht nur für sich selber schreibt und forscht, sondern zur Aufklärung und zum Selbstverständnis der eigenen Gesellschaft und Kultur beitragen sollte”, in Hohls and Jarausch (eds.), *Versäumte Fragen*, 384.

historians working on modern Germany. Some of the people of this sample have even indicated that they tried to avoid German history, since this was what they were able to study at home. While in the United States, the goal was to expand not just their cultural but also their academic horizons, and this meant either exploring other disciplines or studying American history, which at the time was rather difficult in West Germany, due to course offerings that only rarely included the United States.

Return as Post-docs

For the overwhelming majority of German historians, these student programs constituted only the beginning of regular exchanges. Many returned after having completed their PhDs in Germany, in order to either collect material for a second project in American or German-American history, or to work in safe distance from academic and administrative duties at their German universities. To this date, programs such as the John F. Kennedy Memorial Fellowship at Harvard (established in 1967) enable younger German historians to do just that. In fact, former fellows have generally had successful subsequent careers in Germany.⁶⁶ Established German scholars came to appreciate places such as the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where Felix Gilbert served as a transatlantic intermediary between 1962 and 1975, hosting historians such as Theodor Schieder and Thomas Nipperdey. Visiting professorships constituted another option to solidify one's connections to the United States, which many Germans used repeatedly.

Hans-Ulrich Wehler returned to the United States in 1962. During his exchange year at Ohio University ten years earlier, he had noticed that history textbooks in the United States

⁶⁶ http://www.ces.fas.harvard.edu/german_studies/directories/German_Studies_Alumnae_Alumni_2008.pdf

treated American imperialism as an “aberration.”⁶⁷ He therefore decided to embark on a study of early American imperialism for his second book, the *Habilitation*. A fellowship by the American Council of Learned Societies provided the opportunity to work at Stanford University, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives. Long letters to his mentor Theodor Schieder during the fellowship tenure in 1962 and 1963 provide a comprehensive insight into Wehler’s views on American historians in particular and American society in general.

At Stanford, Wehler was surprised by the absence of Jewish faculty members, and the near-absence of Jewish graduate students, in his opinion a result of an unofficial policy by the Board of Trustees. By contrast, Wehler found Berkeley “more open but also more European.”⁶⁸ While he appeared to be impressed by the Europeanists working at both institutions, Wehler’s judgment on scholars of American history was decidedly critical: “Most of all the people in American history are terribly square and unreflected Hegelians with their [belief in the] god-given development of American history, so that even the beautiful weather for my wife and Markus [their son] cannot completely make up for it.”⁶⁹ However, Wehler’s reservations were not confined to historiographical issues. Writing about his acquaintances, he reported that “they tend[ed] to be on the “Left”, whatever this is supposed to mean in the United States, and the Left here is per se anti-German, with a hateful

⁶⁷ Interview Hans-Ulrich Wehler, July 2, 2007.

⁶⁸ Hans-Ulrich Wehler to Theodor Schieder, October 1, 1962, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 354.

⁶⁹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler to Theodor Schieder, October 1, 1962, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 354.

acrimony to boot. In Europe, the Left is still able to align itself with nineteenth century humanism; here it is without grounding and without any historical sensibility.⁷⁰

To be sure, Wehler also followed the political developments in the United States with keen interest. The debate about American involvement in Vietnam and, during the early 1960s, the Civil Rights movement could hardly escape anyone. On the latter issue Wehler remarked that

the real problem in this country is the Negro question. In the last few months we time and again had to talk about German anti-Jewish policies, and I am—God knows—not inclined to resort to apologetics. But the unshakeable self-assurance that ‘in this country’ this would never be possible now seems utterly ridiculous. The stories that are currently reported almost daily from the South defy description. I cannot deny that this blow to the self-righteous arrogance of the so-called Liberals sometimes provides me with a certain satisfaction. These things happen everyday, for the whole world to see—not like in our case under the conditions of a totalitarian regime—and the counter-reaction remains rather weak. I assume that the white upper class in the South will only be convinced through counter-violence.⁷¹

Considering his harsh judgment, it is not surprising that Wehler concluded: “We are looking forward to our return. It will do us much good to escape the idiocy of American suburban life, to paraphrase Marx in a contemporary way, and to leave the American colleagues to their tedious positivism and their beloved ‘facts’”.⁷²

Evidently, Wehler had come to see the United States in a different light, compared to his first exchange year a decade earlier. One can only speculate on the exact reasons, for American society arguably had not changed all that much—certainly not for the worse, if one

⁷⁰ Hans-Ulrich Wehler to Theodor Schieder, October 1, 1962, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 354.

⁷¹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler to Theodor Schieder, September 22, 1963, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 354.

⁷² Hans-Ulrich Wehler to Theodor Schieder, September 22, 1963, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 354.

uses standards of political progressiveness—since the early 1950s. Maybe his critical attitude was also a result of the progress that the West German society had made during the same time, slowly accepting the democratic political system and the country's integration into the Western bloc.⁷³ Yet whatever judgments Wehler may have rendered in his private correspondence, he never wavered in his public commitment to the rather close German-American political relationship during the postwar decades. Even if some of the letters from the early 1960s seem to suggest otherwise, he did not accept the crude anti-Americanism espoused by parts of the German student movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Four decades later, Wehler still adhered to similar positions. He was unequivocal in his rejection of the “militancy of the Bush government”, especially the administration's exploitation of the events of September 11, 2001 to pursue an aggressive foreign policy, and of the “missionary American nationalism” in general.⁷⁴ Yet he also denounced Chancellor Schröder's outspoken critique of the American invasion of Iraq, which he believed was merely a populist maneuver to ensure the reelection of the Red-Green Coalition. Wehler reminded the reader of the United States' ability to exert “reckless self-criticism” in order to renew itself, and suggested a more diplomatic approach to transatlantic relations.⁷⁵

⁷³ Arguably the most celebratory and teleological account of this development provides Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen. Band 2: Deutsche Geschichte vom 'Dritten Reich' bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (München, 2000).

⁷⁴ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “‘Our Rising American Empire’: Amerikas missionarischer Nationalismus und das Dilemma der deutschen Fehlentscheidung,” in Id., *Notizen zur deutschen Geschichte* (München, 2007), 147-158.

⁷⁵ See his essays written around the time of the second Iraq War “Europas Imperativ: Konfliktbereite Kooperation mit der amerikanischen Weltmacht,” and a review of a study on anti-Americanism, “Achtung: Sprengstoff Antiamerikanismus,” both in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Notizen zur deutschen Geschichte*, 139-147 and 158-160.

While the tone of some of Wehler's comments on the political situation in the United States and American society might already be surprising, his statement on the supposed positivism characteristic of historians of the United States is certainly more remarkable. After all, many of his later writings, most of all the programmatic texts, painted an American historical profession that was overall methodologically more advanced than its German counterpart. Wehler attacked in particular the leading representatives of diplomatic history in West Germany, such as Andreas Hillgruber and Klaus Hildebrand, as hopelessly old-fashioned, arguing that in the United States this sub-field had successfully modernized itself.⁷⁶ Here, he thought of the "Wisconsin School" of William A. Williams and his students, who believed that domestic factors shaped foreign policies, and in their works relied on economic or socioeconomic approaches. Rejecting the notion of a traditionally idealist American foreign policy, historians associated with the "Wisconsin School" focused on its course during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and interpreted American imperialist policies as primarily the result of business interests.⁷⁷ In the context of the Cold War, their challenge proved similarly explosive as the Germans' insistence on continuities in German history between 1871 and 1945.⁷⁸ Wehler had met Williams and some of students

⁷⁶ See, for example, Wehler, "Vorwort zur zweiten Auflage," in Wehler, *Krisenherde des Kaiserreichs 1871-1918. Studien zur deutschen Sozial- und Verfassungsgeschichte* (Göttingen, 2nd ed., 1979), 12, where 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."

⁷⁷ William A. Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland, OH, 1959); Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, NY, 1963); Lloyd Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Madison, WI 1964).

⁷⁸ Volker R. Berghahn/Charles S. Maier, "Modern Europe in American Historical Writing," in Anthony Molho/Gordon Wood (eds.), *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past* (Princeton, NJ, 1998), 393-414; 399.

while on the ACLS fellowship in 1962-63, and their discussions shaped Wehler's understanding of imperialism, as he later acknowledged.⁷⁹

One should note, however, that the Wisconsin School only constituted a vocal and influential minority among American diplomatic historians. Many of them rejected both their methodology and their interpretation and appeared to have had much in common with the West German diplomatic historians Wehler deemed methodologically deficient.⁸⁰ The next chapter will devote more space to this question of how American historians served as a foil against which Wehler often compared in particular his opponents within the German historical profession—and declared them insufficient.

While Wehler's opinion of his American colleagues remained ambivalent, the young German historian apparently managed to impress Berkeley's history department enough for them to offer him a professorship. As Wehler reported to Schieder, Hans Rosenberg had told him that he “stood very favorably, above all because of my SPD book [Wehler's dissertation on German Social Democracy and the nation state between the 1840s and World War I], but also because I was the youngest and had written the most (believe it or not: here they practice the horribly positivistic method of counting pages).”⁸¹ Ultimately Wehler declined the offer; apart from his reservations regarding life in the United States he correctly anticipated a

⁷⁹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Köln, 1969), preface. Forty-five years later, Williams' student Lloyd Gardner recalled Wehler's visit to Madison and characterized the German historian as “very intense.” Interview Lloyd Gardner, September 18, 2006.

⁸⁰ A survey of the field of international relations fifteen years after the peak of the Wisconsin School provides Charles S. Maier, “Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations,” in Michael Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, NY, 1980), 355-387.

⁸¹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler to Theodor Schieder, December 10, 1962, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 354. Just prior to his departure to the United States, Wehler had published the dissertation as *Sozialdemokratie und Nationalstaat: Nationalitätenfrage in Deutschland von Karl Marx bis zum Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Würzburg, 1962).

positive development of the German academic job market. Moreover, the *homo politicus* Wehler was drawn back to West Germany, as the outcome of Spiegel Affair of 1962 signaled the demise of postwar authoritarianism.⁸²

Back in Germany, however, Wehler encountered difficulties upon the completion of his study on the rise of American imperialism. The exact reasons are still not entirely clear: Wehler claims that the *Habilitation* commission at the University of Cologne's history department objected to what they perceived as overly critical treatment of the United States, which they deemed unacceptable given West Germany's indebtedness to the Cold War ally.⁸³ When Wehler published the study ten years later, Americans characterized it as an "excellent study"⁸⁴ and a "subtle piece of scholarship that deserved the attention of American historians."⁸⁵ Moreover, Walter LaFeber, a protagonist of the "Wisconsin School" (and an advisee of Fred Harvey Harrington, not William A. Williams) had just published his book on the same topic.⁸⁶ Some historians speculated that this prevented Wehler from submitting the

⁸² The Spiegel Affair in October 1962 was caused by the arrests of the editor and several journalists of the Hamburg-based news magazine *Der Spiegel* who were accused of treason. The magazine had published an article in the that questioned the policies of Defense Secretary Franz Josef Strauss and claimed that the German army was incapable of defending the country against the Warsaw Pact. The Affair ultimately resulted in the resignation of Strauss and a ruling by the German Supreme Court that the arrests had violated the freedom of the press. See David Schoenbaum, *The Spiegel Affair* (New Yoork, 1968).

⁸³ Wehler, Historiker sollten auch politisch zu den Positionen stehen, die sie in der Wissenschaft vetreten," in Hohls/Jaraus (eds.), *Versäumte Fragen*, 246-247; Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*, 140-141.

⁸⁴ Thomas Schoonover, "Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Der Aufstieg des amerikanischen Imperialismus: Studien zur Entwicklung des Imperium Americanum, 1865-1900," *Journal of American History* 62 (1976), 1011.

⁸⁵ Lloyd Ambrosius, Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Der Aufstieg des amerikanischen Imperialismus: Studien zur Entwicklung des Imperium Americanum, 1865-1900," *American Historical Review* 81 (1976), 212.

⁸⁶ LaFeber, *The New Empire: an Interpretation of American Expansion*.

study.⁸⁷ Wehler explained upon its eventual publication in 1974 that he himself had hesitated to request the *Habilitation* on the basis of this work when he had become aware of a number of books published by historians of the “Wisconsin School”, partly based on the same sources and advancing similar interpretations.⁸⁸ It should also be noted that Wehler, despite the rejection of his study on American imperialism, obtained his first appointment as a professor of *American* history at Free University Berlin in 1970, where he taught for one year before moving to Bielefeld.

Whatever the reason, Wehler eventually had to embark on another project, German imperialism during Bismarck’s tenure as Chancellor. As Wehler emphasized in the introduction to this study, his analysis of imperialism in the German Empire owed much to his previous project examining the rise of the American empire during the same period.⁸⁹ He also repeatedly referred to characteristics of American imperialism for comparative purposes, for example when he described the conflicts between imperialists and anti-imperialists during the 1890s, or when he sought to determine the domestic causes and side-effects of colonial expansion.⁹⁰

Despite his unwillingness to settle permanently in the United States, throughout his career Wehler remained among the German historians most closely connected to American colleagues and had intimate knowledge of the historiographical developments in the

⁸⁷ George W.F. Hallgarten, a historian of German imperialism who had emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1933, expressed this opinion in a letter to Karl Dietrich Erdmann, December 19, 1972, BAK, NL Karl Dietrich Erdmann, Box 160.

⁸⁸ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Der Aufstieg des amerikanischen Imperialismus: Studien zur Entwicklung des Imperium Americanum, 1865-1900* (Göttingen, 1974) 279.

⁸⁹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Köln, 1969), 11.

⁹⁰ Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, 126 and 482-483.

American historical profession. Moreover, Wehler held several visiting professorships at American universities, such as Harvard (1972 and 1989), Princeton (1976), Stanford (1983 and 2004), and Yale (1997). His selection as honorary foreign member of the American Historical Association in 2000 therefore not only recognized his significance for the West German historical profession, but also his role in the transatlantic scholarly community.⁹¹

For Klaus Schwabe, the *Habilitation* also provided an impetus to return to the United States.⁹² In this second book project Schwabe analyzed German and American peace strategies at the end of World War I. His *Doktorvater* Gerhard Ritter had alerted him to the existence of crucial documents in the United States—Schwabe suspects that Ritter may have hoped to benefit from his student’s research as well, as he was working on the final volume of his magnum opus *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk*, which covered World War I.⁹³ It was during this stay that Schwabe established the first working contacts with American historians of Germany such as Fritz T. and Klaus Epstein, John L. Snell, Hajo Holborn, and Gerhard Weinberg. Like Wehler, Schwabe received an ACLS fellowship, which brought him to Stanford University in 1965. Prior to that, he held visiting research professorships at Princeton (1963), where he became acquainted with the Woodrow Wilson biographer Arthur S. Link, and the University of Maryland (1964). He then moved on to Washington D.C. and finally Stanford, where he met two young historians of modern Germany, James J. Sheehan

⁹¹ See Andreas Daum, “German Historiography in a Transatlantic perspective: interview with Hans-Ulrich Wehler,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.* 26 (2000). This interview was conducted when Wehler received the AHA’s honor, and in it he reflected on the development of the transatlantic scholarly community.

⁹² Klaus Schwabe, email to the author, January 19, 2010.

⁹³ Gerhard Ritter, *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk: das Problem des “Militarismus” in Deutschland. Vol. IV: Die Herrschaft des deutschen Militarismus und die Katastrophe von 1918* (München, 1968).

and David Schoenbaum. Back at the University of Freiburg, Schwabe also taught American students (from Wayne State University) who were in Germany for a summer school, and U.S. servicemen from the University of Southern California. While Schwabe thus established contacts with scholars specializing in both German and American history, this second stay and the book that resulted from it led him to maintain a strong interest in American history throughout his career.⁹⁴ As an established professor in West Germany, he repeatedly returned to the United States, to places such as Princeton (1979), where he held a research professorship; and Ohio State University (1984) and Georgetown University (1990), where he taught for two semesters.

Like his older colleagues Wehler and Schwabe, Jürgen Kocka returned to the United States in order to embark on his second project. After receiving his doctorate in 1968, Kocka spent a year at Harvard University's Charles Warren Center and at the School for Business Administration, where he worked on a comparative study of white-collar workers (*Angestellte*) in the United States and Germany between 1890 and 1940.⁹⁵ While the largest part of the study focused empirically on the development of American white-collar workers, Kocka also intended to contribute to the discussion about the roots of National Socialism. As he stated in the English translation of the book, "Through the confrontation with the U.S. experience—economically similar, but socially and politically so dissimilar—it is possible to isolate, and interpret the special character of German white collar history from the late

⁹⁴ Accordingly, his *Venia Legendi* (permission to teach), which Schwabe received at the University of Freiburg on the basis of his second book/*Habilitation*, encompassed "modern and recent history, especially American history".

⁹⁵ Jürgen Kocka, *Angestellte zwischen Faschismus und Demokratie: Zur politischen Sozialgeschichte der Angestellten: USA 1890 bis 1940 im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1977).

nineteenth century though the triumph of National Socialism.”⁹⁶ These remarks suggest that Kocka viewed his study as a contribution to the *Sonderweg* debate, which would unfold in the 1970s.

At the Charles Warren Center, immigration historian Oscar Handlin became an important contact; at the School for Business Administration it was Alfred D. Chandler, whom Kocka met through the émigré historian of entrepreneurship Fritz Redlich.⁹⁷ Moreover, Kocka was fascinated by the “New Economic History” in general and by particular historians such as Donald McCloskey, David S. Landes, and Alexander Gerschenkron. By the mid-1970s, the New Cultural History also drew his attention. Apart from particular historiographical trends, Kocka remembers distinct differences between German and the American historical professions: the latter was more open and less organized along the lines of distinct “schools.” Moreover, Kocka perceived history and politics as more separated from each other than in West Germany, since some historians were methodologically “progressive” and stimulating yet politically conservative. All in all, he found the American field to have three main advantages: its less contentious atmosphere, its more open institutional organization, and finally, its openness to new directions in historiography, which Kocka perceived as pioneering. And despite—or maybe because of—the alleged separation of scholarship and politics, Kocka believed that American contemporaries could be indispensable allies in the process of modernizing the West German historical profession that Kocka deemed to be necessary.

⁹⁶ Jürgen Kocka, *White-Collar Workers in America 1890-1940: A Social-Political History in International Perspective* (London, 1980), ii.

⁹⁷ Interview Jürgen Kocka, March 20, 2007; Kocka, “Nachruf Fritz Redlich”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 5 (1979), 167-171.

Like Wehler and Schwabe, Kocka returned repeatedly to the United States in the following decades, as a research fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (1975/76) and the Institute for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford (1994/95); and as visiting professor at the University of Chicago (1984), the New School (1990), and UCLA (2009).

Through their close relations with American historians of modern Germany, many of these Germans became themselves transatlantic intermediaries. After they had established themselves in the German historical profession, they often served as mentors for American graduate students researching in Germany. Other historians such as Hans Mommsen, who established connections with American colleagues later in his career and also frequently came to the United States as a visiting professor, in turn advised young Americans such as Thomas Childers and Eric Weitz while they conducted dissertation research in Germany. He also introduced some young Americans to the comparatively harsh German discussion style in research colloquia, as Christopher Browning remembers his experiences while being on a Humboldt Post-doc Fellowship in the spring of 1981.⁹⁸ Similarly, the social historian Gerhard A. Ritter advised James J. Sheehan and Margaret L. Anderson during their research years in West Germany. And when Hans-Ulrich Wehler taught as a visiting professor at Princeton University in 1976, Charles Maier substituted for him in Bielefeld.⁹⁹

These American historians of roughly the same age cohort became permanent interlocutors and in parts close personal friends of especially proponents of the *Bielefelder*

⁹⁸ Christopher Browning, note to the author, January 27, 2010. Hans Mommsen was a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in 1972/73 and taught at Harvard (1974) and UC Berkeley (1978).

⁹⁹ Charles S. Maier, interviews with the author, October 30/November 1, 2006.

Schule. Teaching at prestigious American universities and training the next generation of American historians of modern Germany, this group included Gerald D. Feldman (Berkeley), Charles S. Maier (Princeton, Duke, Harvard), Henry A. Turner (Yale), and James J. Sheehan (Northwestern, Stanford). While the Bielefelder generally associated themselves in the West German historical profession with politically and methodologically like-minded historians, in the United States they cast a wider net, which could hold even the politically conservative and methodological rather traditional Henry Turner.

More generally, the examples of Wehler, Schwabe, Berghahn, and Kocka reveal that an exchange year in the United States in most cases established the foundation for long-lasting relationships with the country in general and its historians in particular. While the Germans usually became acquainted with American society and academic culture during their first visits, they formed working relationships with American historians as postdoctoral researchers. It seems that the age difference between Wehler and Schwabe (born in the early 1930s) on the one hand and Berghahn and Kocka (born in the late 1930s and early 1940s), which led them to grow up in West Germany under very different circumstances, did not lead to diverging perceptions of the United States. Throughout their careers these historians maintained a generally sympathetic attitude toward the country and avoided both the crude anti-Americanism characteristic of parts of the 1968ers and the unreflected pro-Americanism of some German conservative politicians and journalists.

This distinct *political* attitude went hand in hand with a certain *historiographical* position. In contrast to previous generations, whether that of Fritz Ernst (born in 1905) and Fritz Fischer (born in 1908) or Gerhard Ritter (born in 1888), this generation of historians adopted a non-defensive attitude toward German history in the United States. No German

historian of this younger generation ever resorted to the position that American colleagues might be at a disadvantage when writing German history, because of their lack of *Einfühlungsvermögen*. Scholarly disagreements certainly continued to exist, but they were not accompanied by the essentialist arguments older Germans had been likely to use.

As a result of their visits to the United States, as well as their contacts with American scholars, all of these younger historians acquired a close familiarity with trends in the American historical profession, which many of their German colleagues never gained. Throughout their careers, these scholars reviewed American studies on German and American history in German journals, thus contributing to a greater German awareness of historiography in the United States.¹⁰⁰ Since many of them became proponents of comparative history, the intimate knowledge of not only American historiography but also works on American history in particular proved useful.

This familiarity with the American historical profession led some of the German scholars to develop an argument about the counterpart at home. In particular Wehler and Kocka often stressed the West German historical profession's backwardness and thus its need to "modernize," methodologically as well as interpretively. This goal, they contended, could be achieved by adopting historiographical trends prevalent in the United States. Hand in hand with this call for modernization went the argument that the Germans' own project of history as *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* developed in cooperation and in agreement with American historians. The accuracy of this claim will be analyzed in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Review of Dan P. Silverman, *Reluctant Union. Alsace-Lorraine and Imperial Germany, 1871-1918*," *Historische Zeitschrift* 217 (1973), 450-451; Klaus Schwabe, "Review of Harold Stein, *American Civil-Military Decisions. A Book of Case Studies*," *Historische Zeitschrift* 210 (1970), 473-475; Id., "Review of Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War*," *Historische Zeitschrift* 210 (1970), 476.

CHAPTER 4

Walking Together on the *Sonderweg*: The Renewal of the West German Historical Profession as a Transatlantic Project?

On 25 July 1974, Hans-Ulrich Wehler sent a project proposal to the *Stiftung Volkswagenwerk* (Volkswagen Foundation), in which he outlined the contours of a new journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* and asked for financial support. Wehler discussed the journal's interdisciplinary orientation ("history is understood as a historical social science, in close cooperation with related social sciences, above all sociology, political science, and economics") as well as its temporal focus ("the journal will primarily tackle problems of the period since the industrial and political revolutions of the late eighteenth century").¹ Arguing for the necessity of the new publication, Wehler explained how *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. Moreover, the "quasi monopoly" of *Historische Zeitschrift* in the area of general history had led to a long-lasting "publication jam." Not surprisingly, Wehler emphasized in particular the support his undertaking had received abroad: he listed an advisory committee consisting of nineteen scholars from six countries and various

¹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler to Stiftung Volkswagenwerk, 25 July 1974, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 1301.

disciplines. With nine members, American historians and social scientists constituted by far the largest group.¹

Even though the Volkswagen Foundation declined to support the new project, the first issue of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* was published the following year.² Arguably the most important brainchild of the Bielefeld School, it soon assumed the role of one of the leading historical journals in West Germany. More than the many other projects that Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Jürgen Kocka, and other like-minded historians started during this time, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* symbolized the successful arrival of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* in the West German historical profession. By the late 1970s, the former mavericks had become part of the establishment. That historians in recent years have already begun to historicize the journal's scope and development also testifies to its importance in the field.³

How did this happen? Only a decade earlier, the notorious *Fischer-Kontroverse* had revealed the persistence of the old historiographical regime. Now a group of historians not only advanced new interpretations of late-nineteenth and twentieth century German history but also proposed to re-conceptualize the field of history as a historical social science. Their swift success—insofar as they managed to establish themselves as an important voice in the

¹ 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 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.

² G. Gambke (Stiftung Volkswagenwerk) to Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 6 December 1974, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 1301.

³ Lutz Raphael, "Nationalzentrierte Geschichte in programmatischer Absicht: Die Zeitschrift 'Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Zeitschrift für Historische Sozialwissenschaft' in den ersten 25 Jahren ihres Bestehens," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000), 5-37.

West German historical profession—in the early 1970s was due to a number of factors, which this chapter seeks to illuminate. It begins by providing the institutional and intellectual background of the 1960s, including the enormous expansion of higher education in West Germany. The chapter then traces the intellectual and institutional development of the Bielefeld School's *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. It places the movement's emergence in the context of broader historiographical processes during that decade, since calls for the profession's methodological renewal were not limited to this particular group of social historians. The chapter also asks to what extent these reforms took place in a transatlantic context: were American historians of modern Germany active participants, sources of inspiration, or merely attentive observers?

A Time of Transition

Around 1960, the West German historical profession found itself in a phase of transition. The generation of Gerhard Ritter and Hans Rothfels, for whom the late German Empire and World War I had been formative historical influences, had reached the stage of active retirement. Now the age cohort of Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze, and Karl Dietrich Erdmann, who had grown up during the tumultuous Weimar years, had established itself as dominating the field. By the end of the 1950s, Schieder had become the editor of West Germany's leading historical journal *Historische Zeitschrift*, Erdmann had—already in 1950—assumed the same position for the journal *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, and Werner Conze in 1957 had launched his influential Working Group for Social History (*Arbeitskreis für Sozialgeschichte*) at the University of Heidelberg. Subsequently, all of them chaired the *Verband der Historiker Deutschlands* (German Historians' Association), Erdmann from 1962 to 1967, Schieder from 1967 to 1972, and Conze from 1972 to 1976. All

three historians had made at least some concessions to the Nazi regime, and all of them managed to cover the brown spots in their biographies throughout their careers in the Federal Republic.⁴ Especially Conze and Schieder now conducted themselves as academic liberals in the sense that they mentored younger historians of very different political and methodological persuasions. During the 1960s, however, certain limits of what the historiographical establishment deemed acceptable, both interpretively and methodologically, still existed.

The unfolding of the *Fischer-Kontroverse* about the origins and course of World War I illustrates this ambiguous state very well. The main points of contention were Fischer's claim that the German Empire's civilian leadership had by and large agreed with the military leadership's far reaching war aims, and—above all—his assertion that the country bore a substantial part of the responsibility for the outbreak of the war.⁵ The controversy had begun with an article Fischer published in 1959, intensified with the appearance of Fischer's *magnum opus Griff nach der Weltmacht* in 1961, and reached its peak in 1964.⁶ That year, Fischer's opponents succeeded in cancelling his lecture to the United States, because they deemed it not to be in Germany's national interest to have Fischer present his "distorted" views abroad.⁷ The outcome of this scandal is well-known: Fischer was ultimately able to

⁴ Martin Kröger/Roland Thimme, *Die Geschichtsbilder des Karl Dietrich Erdmann. Vom Dritten Reich zur Bundesrepublik* (München, 1996); Winfried Schulze/Otto Gerhard Oexle (eds.), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999).

⁵ Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschlands 1914-1918* (Düsseldorf, 1961), 82.

⁶ Fritz Fischer, "Deutsche Kriegsziele, Revolutionierung und Separatfrieden im Osten 1914 bis 1918", *Historische Zeitschrift* 188 (1959), 249-310; See also the reply by Hans Herzfeld, "Zur deutschen Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg. Kontinuität oder permanente Krise?" *Historische Zeitschrift* 191 (1960), 67-82.

⁷ Ritter himself had urged the German Foreign Minister Schröder "to do something about the tour" because he did not think "it to be in the Federal Republic's national interest" to let Fischer present his views abroad. See

travel to the United States on funds provided by the American Council of Learned Societies organized by Fritz Stern and Klaus Epstein. The incident improved Fischer's standing enormously among the next generation of West German historians who were students at the time. "We followed Fischer," Gerd Krumeich (born in 1945) remembered, "because he irritated the elderly gentlemen who taught about subjects that the young considered outdated, such as the 'demonic nature of power,' about 'German spirit,' and 'German fate,' about Bismarck's historical greatness and such issues."⁸ The controversy was also the first of its kind to be conducted so extensively via non-academic outlets, as historians argued in newspapers, magazines, and even on television.⁹

Yet the controversy also illuminates the mechanisms with which conservative German historians battled these unwanted views on modern German history. Early in the debate, for example, the editors of the two most important scholarly journals, Theodor Schieder of *Historische Zeitschrift* and Karl Dietrich Erdmann of *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, had corresponded about how to most effectively counter Fischer's interpretation. Schieder and Erdmann tried to decide which journal was to print which rebuttal of Fischer, and Erdmann had proposed an article by Erwin Hölzle, a historian so compromised by his Nazi past that he had been unable to acquire a position at any West

Gerhard Ritter to Gerhard Schröder, January 17, 1964, in Klaus Schwabe and Rolf Reichardt (eds.), *Gerhard Ritter. Ein politischer Historiker in seinen Briefen* (Boppard, 1984), 587.

⁸ Gerd Krumeich, "Das Erbe der Wilhelminer. Vierzig Jahre Fischer-Kontroverse: um die deutschen Ziele im Ersten Weltkrieg stritten sich die Historiker, weil man vom Zweiten geschwiegen hatte," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 4, 1999, 56.

⁹ For the *Fischer-Kontroverse* as a public debate, see Klaus Grosse Kracht, *Die zankende Zukunft. Historische Kontroversen in Deutschland nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2005), 47-67.

German university.¹⁰ As Erdmann stated rather bluntly, one could “under no circumstances do without it [the article’s publication], if we are interested in a balanced evaluation of the German Empire during World War I, for both historical and political reasons.” Erdmann added that “in case this resulted in diplomatic problems (which I don’t expect), these would be outweighed by the political value of the publication of Hölzle’s article.”¹¹ Still, the same German historians tried very hard to avoid or at least limit these potential diplomatic disturbances.

Thus, when at the height of the debate 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. 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.”¹² 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.

¹⁰ Some American historians were well aware of Hölzle’s past. See the letter from Fritz T. Epstein to Günther Franz, November 1, 1975, emphasizing “dass Herr Hölzle die rassistische Politik des Dritten Reiches gebilligt und literarisch unterstützt hat. Die Einstellung von Herrn Hölzle ist den führenden amerikanischen Deutschlandhistorikern. . . . wohlbekannt.” BAK, NL Erwin Hölzle, Box 26.

¹¹ Karl Dietrich Erdmann to Theodor Schieder, December 27, 1961, BAK, NL Schieder, Box 235. Hölzle’s article appeared as “Das Experiment des Friedens im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914-1917,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 13 (1962), 465-522.

¹² Theodor Schieder to Gerhard Ritter, November 9, 1964, BAK, NL Schieder, Box 243.

The Fischer-Kontroverse therefore expanded the interpretive boundaries of the West German historical profession. Regardless of how plausible Fischer's arguments appear after fifty years, the debate's outcome signaled an interpretive pluralization of West German historiography. At the same time, Fischer's was a brand of diplomatic history that paid only limited attention to the social and economic foundations of the German Empire's foreign policy, although it discussed the influence of industrialist pressure groups. This is not to say that Fischer "failed" to provide a methodologically more "modern" study, but simply to emphasize that he went against prevailing wisdom interpretively but only to some extent methodologically.¹³ A younger generation of historians would challenge the historiographical establishment during the next decade—the period under review in this chapter. They were in the position to do so because higher education, and therefore the historical profession, in West Germany had undergone a significant quantitative, institutional change.

The Intellectual Genesis of the *Bielefelder Schule*

The methodological and interpretive "agenda" of the young historians already began to develop before the institutional context had been established. In the case of the *Bielefelder Schule*, one can see the intellectual roots in a number of publications as early as the mid-1960s. One could argue that only because the intellectual project *Bielefelder Schule* had been in the making for several years, the school's protagonists could establish their historiographical project at an impressive pace, once they had acquired institutional

¹³ Calling Fischer's somewhat traditional methodology "a blessing in disguise," Volker Berghahn has argued that Fischer was ultimately successful because he beat the historiographical "old guard" with its own weapons, i.e. diplomatic documents. See Volker R. Berghahn, "Fritz Fischer und seine Schüler," *Neue Politische Literatur* 19 (1974), 143-154, quote 148.

influence. For only a decade after the foundation of the University of Bielefeld, many contemporaries viewed the *Bielefelder Schule* not just as representing a new and interesting historiographical development, but as part of the West German historical profession's establishment. The focus on a few selected "big ideas" presented in a limited number of publications does not imply that "great books make historiography," since historiographical changes need their proper institutional context, as we will see in the next section of this chapter. Yet in retrospect it appears that the early publications of the Bielefelder, that is, the publications prior to the actual emergence of the *Bielefelder Schule*, foreshadow the main elements of that school.

For the intellectual development of at least two representatives of the *Bielefelder Schule*, Hans-Jürgen Puhle and Jürgen Kocka, one also needs to give credit to Gerhard A. Ritter (no relation to the conservative Gerhard Ritter). Ritter, a historian of the German labor movement, of German and British parliamentarianism, and of the German welfare state, had studied at the Free University Berlin during the 1950s and completed his PhD under Hans Herzfeld with a dissertation on the German labor movement in Wilhelmine Germany.¹⁴ In Berlin, he also came to know Hans Rosenberg, then on a visiting professorship, and developed close professional and personal ties with him.¹⁵ After he had received his first professorship in 1962, Ritter became a key figure in the development of social history in the

¹⁴ Gerhard A. Ritter, *Die Arbeiterbewegung im Wilhelminischen Reich. Die Sozialdemokratische Partei und die Freien Gewerkschaften, 1890-1900* (Berlin, 1959).

¹⁵ Gerhard A. Ritter, "Hans Rosenberg 1904-1988," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 15 (1989), 282-302. A framed photo of Hans Rosenberg, standing next to a bust of his *Doktorvater* Friedrich Meinecke, hangs on a wall in Ritter's office, expressing an intellectual tradition in which one can place the social historian. See also Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke: Akademischer Lehrer und emigrierte Schüler: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen 1910 – 1977* (München, 2006)

Federal Republic.¹⁶ Free from ambitions to establish a historiographical “school” and averse to polemics, Ritter trained a large number of social historians who to this date hold chairs in many German history departments.¹⁷ Member of countless academic advisory boards and chairman of the German Historians’ Association from 1976 to 1980, Ritter’s institutional influence within the historical profession can hardly be overestimated. Yet he was never a controversialist, and, as Jürgen Kocka remarked in the introduction to his Festschrift, also rejected the label of the “revisionist.”¹⁸ In the often-contentious atmosphere of the West German historical profession during the 1970s and 1980s, Ritter remained a universally respected figure.

In retrospect, the edition of Eckart Kehr’s collected essays, edited by Wehler in 1965 under the programmatic title *Der Primat der Innenpolitik* (The Primacy of Domestic Politics) marked a significant early step in the genesis of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*.¹⁹ Kehr had been an unusually productive historian: at the time of his untimely death at age 31, he left behind one book, an unpublished manuscript that was later lost, and more than a dozen articles. But more importantly, the Meinecke student Kehr had been a methodological and

¹⁶ His survey on social history in the Federal Republic still is the vantage point for anyone interested in the subject. Gerhard A. Ritter, “Die neuere Sozialgeschichte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.” In Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte im internationalen Überblick. Ergebnisse und Tendenzen der Forschung* (Darmstadt, 1989), 19-88.

¹⁷ See Ritter’s Festschrift, Jürgen Kocka et al. (eds.), *Von der Arbeiterbewegung zum modernen Sozialstaat. Festschrift für Gerhard A. Ritter zum 65. Geburtstag* (München, 1994). Ritter’s students include Kocka, Puhle, Klaus Tenfelde, Wilhelm Bleek, Karin Hausen, Clemens Wurm, Marie-Luise Recker, Rüdiger vom Bruch, Merith Niehuss, Peter Longerich, Margit Szöllösi-Janze, and Johannes Paulmann.

¹⁸ Jürgen Kocka, “Vorwort,” in Id. et. al (eds.) *Von der Arbeiterbewegung zum modernen Sozialstaat*, vi.

¹⁹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Der Primat der Innenpolitik: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur preussisch-deutschen Sozialgeschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1965).

interpretive outsider within the historical profession of the Weimar Republic.²⁰ His advocacy of a “primacy of domestic politics,” namely his insistence that German imperialist foreign policies resulted from the Empire’s domestic socioeconomic situation, did not sit well with his colleagues, who were convinced that diplomacy constituted a fairly autonomous sphere. By contrast, Kehr argued that the combined material interests of the heavy industrialists and Prussian agrarian elites (the *Junker*) led to the pursuit of an aggressive naval policy during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Moreover, in order to explain this primacy of domestic politics, Kehr drew not only on Max Weber but also Karl Marx, which led Gerhard Ritter to comment that Kehr should pursue his *Habilitation* in the Soviet Union.²¹ Interpretively, Kehr’s negative evaluation of the Empire’s naval policies as an important aspect of German imperialism set him at odds with an historical profession intent on rejecting the notorious War Guilt paragraph of the Versailles Treaty. Unsurprisingly, in this situation an indictment of main aspects of the German Empire’s prewar foreign policies was most unwelcome.²²

Ironically, the author of the preface to the Kehr volume was Hans Herzfeld, in the 1960s the chairman of the *Historische Kommission zu Berlin*, who edited the series in which the volume appeared. Forty years earlier, however, Herzfeld had been a rabid German

²⁰ For the most recent biographical sketch of Kehr, see Ritter (ed.), *Friedrich Meinecke: Akademischer Lehrer und emigrierte Schüler*, 92-97.

²¹ Gerhard Ritter to Hermann Oncken, September 24, 1931, in Schwabe/Reichardt (eds.), *Gerhard Ritter: Ein politischer Historiker in seinen Briefen*, 237: “It seems to me that this gentleman should complete his Habilitation in Russia rather than Königsberg. For this is where he belongs: an *Edelbolschewist* [Marxist of the heart], so very dangerous for our historical profession.”

²² See Wolfgang Jäger, *Historische Forschung und politische Kultur in Deutschland. Die Debatte 1914-1980 über den Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Göttingen, 1984), which focuses more on the academic discourse; Ulrich Heinemann, *Die verdrängte Niederlage. Politische Öffentlichkeit und Kriegsschuldfrage in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen, 1983), which places more emphasis on the political context of coming to terms with defeat.

nationalist, as well as the author of a study that had accused the Social Democrats of betraying the German Empire during World War I by slowly abandoning their unconditional support for the government's war aims—views that pitted him strongly against Kehr.²³ To be sure, Herzfeld belonged to those “de-radicalized” German conservatives, to follow Jerry Muller's term, who adapted to the new conditions of the Federal Republic and played a generally constructive role in the postwar historical profession.²⁴ Thus he now acknowledged Kehr as “one of the most significant figures among the non-conformists of the Weimar Republic's historiography.”²⁵

The rehabilitation of an original and controversial historian by republishing his important writings in itself constituted a worthy enterprise. Yet one can also read Wehler's introductory analysis of Kehr as an early articulation of his own ideas regarding the renewal of the West German historical profession and the role he was to play in this undertaking. Describing the Weimar iconoclast's reception by his German contemporaries, Wehler remarked that Kehr “had to recognize that his provocative methodology and style, which due to its candor refrained from any consideration, had to meet with stiff resistance.”²⁶ Judgments of Wehler's own role in the West German historical profession during the 1970s would take a very similar form. As we will see, some of his colleagues objected to both Wehler the methodological reformer and Wehler the polemicist. Methodologically, Wehler characterized

²³ Hans Herzfeld, *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und die Auflösung der Einheitsfront im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Leipzig, 1928). In a letter to Alfred Vagts, George Hallgarten, a friend of Kehr's, pointed out the irony of Herzfeld's involvement in the edition and emphasized the antagonism between Herzfeld and Kehr during the 1920s. George W. F. Hallgarten to Alfred Vagts, March 3, 1966, BAK, NL Alfred Vagts, Box 9.

²⁴ Jerry Z. Muller, *The Other God That Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ, 1987).

²⁵ Hans Herzfeld, “Vorwort,” in Wehler (ed.), *Der Primat der Innenpolitik*, v.

²⁶ Wehler, “Vorwort,” in Id. (ed.), *Der Primat der Innenpolitik*, 8.

Kehr as influenced by Marx, but insisted that his prime role model was Max Weber—as was the case for Wehler himself. Again, when Wehler commented that Kehr’s approach led him “occasionally to premature conclusions,” yet “enabled him to gain much more important insights,” it corresponded not only with the perception of some of Wehler’s contemporaries, but also with Wehler’s self-perception—at least with the self-perception he gained in retrospect.²⁷ After all, he recently acknowledged his surprise about the self-confidence with which he had fought for his historiographical positions.²⁸ Interpretively, Wehler emphasized Kehr’s conviction regarding the “oftentimes fatal persistence of certain historical continuities in Germany,” a belief both historians shared as well, and which Wehler would articulate forcefully in a number of his later writings.²⁹

A year later, in 1966, Wehler edited the volume *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, which already indicated a rejection of the West German historiographical status quo and the invention of a progressive tradition.³⁰ Yet since at the time Wehler had not reached professorial status and taught as Schieder’s *Assistent* at the University of Cologne, his iconoclasm had to remain within certain limits. Consequentially, the collection included contributions of a few older historians who counted at least methodologically as progressive. Paying respect to the historiographical establishment, the volume contained a programmatic essay on social history by Werner Conze, whose specific conception of this historical subfield the Bielefelder would later reject. Moreover, Conze’s seminal article on the “social

²⁷ Wehler, “Vorwort,” in Id. (ed.), *Der Primat der Innenpolitik*, 27.

²⁸ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation. Ein Gespräch mit Manfred Hettling und Cornelius Torp* (München, 2007), 84: “If I have to look up something in my own texts, because someone has asked me for a quote, I’m always surprised about the certainty with which we argued for something.”

²⁹ Wehler, “Vorwort,” in Id. (ed.), *Der Primat der Innenpolitik*, 27.

³⁰ Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte* (Köln, 1966).

preconditions of socialism in Germany” also made its way into the volume. Next to Conze, Eckart Kehr and Rudolf Stadelmann represented an even older German strand of social history. In addition, Hajo Holborn’s article on social aspects of German idealism and Hans Rosenberg’s famous analysis of the “pseudo-democratization” of the Prussian *Junker* stood for the progressive German historiographical tradition that had been forced into emigration. Excerpts from Jürgen Habermas’ seminal study *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* not only signaled the interdisciplinary character of the new enterprise, but had also a broader political implication. Habermas, whom Wehler had known since the 1940s, had already gained the status of a public intellectual, and the “critical” political role that Wehler defined for a future, modern social history was one that Habermas already practiced. Wehler invoked Theodor Mommsen’s famous phrase of the “duty to political pedagogy” and declared that social history would have to develop a “critical relationship” vis-à-vis contemporary society.³¹

The one other sociologist represented in the volume was Guenther Roth, a young German who had come to the United States as a student in 1953 and had taken his PhD at Berkeley under the supervision of émigré sociologist and Max Weber expert Reinhard Bendix.³² Roth’s dissertation on Social Democracy in Imperial Germany had appeared three years earlier and had first coined the phrase “negative integration” in reference to the Social Democrats’ precarious role in the German Empire, but was never translated into German.³³

³¹ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Einleitung,” in Id. (ed.), *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, 15.

³² See Guenther Roth, “Partisanship and Scholarship,” in Bennett M. Berger (ed.), *Authors of Their Own Lives: Intellectual Autobiographies by Twenty American Sociologists* (Berkeley, 1990), 383-409.

³³ Guenther Roth, *Social Democrats in Imperial Germany: A Study in Working Class Isolation and National Integration* (Totowa, NJ, 1963).

Finally, the volume offered a number of articles by younger historians who did not become partisans of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, but nevertheless represented a new historiographical beginning. Historians such as Thomas Nipperdey, Wolfgang Sauer, Reinhart Koselleck, and Hans Mommsen constituted a rather heterogeneous group and pursued different research interests but had already made a name for themselves in their respective areas. In sum, the contributors of the volume illustrate the stage of the historiographical project *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* in the late 1960s—a few nods toward the “establishment,” references to older progressive outsiders within the profession, to émigrés as well as scholars from other disciplines, and finally to various historians of roughly the same generation (born around 1930), who constituted the profession’s cutting edge without forming a distinct “camp.”

The volume *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte* was part of the so-called “Yellow Series” (*Gelbe Reihe*), started in 1965 by the publisher Kiepenheuer & Witsch. This was an academic series that appealed to university students in five disciplines (economics, psychology, sociology, literature, and history), introducing them to fresh approaches and topics. Wehler and Habermas served as editors for the historical and sociological series respectively. Already early in his career, Wehler thus gained editorial influence. As he acknowledged forty years later, he had recognized that in order to transform the West German historical profession, prolific writing and clear positions had to go hand in hand with access to publications: “You have to fight for your convictions, and this means in our profession: You have to somehow gain access to the media.”³⁴ The case of the “Yellow

³⁴ Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*, 76.

Series” also reminds us of the extent to which chance can play a role in the genesis of institutional influence. Dieter Wellershoff, editor of Kiepenheuer & Witsch, had initially asked Wehler to serve as editor, yet Wehler had not felt ready to fulfill that role, prior to the completion of his *Habilitation*. However, the three slightly older historians Wehler suggested instead (Reinhart Koselleck, Rudolf Vierhaus, and Thomas Nipperdey) declined, so that Wellershoff ultimately came back to Wehler, who accepted this time.³⁵

In 1967, another future Bielefeld historian, Hans-Jürgen Puhle published his dissertation on the Agrarian League (*Bund der Landwirte*) and the German Conservative Party in the German Empire. Advised by Gerhard A. Ritter, Puhle analyzed how agrarian conservatives in Wilhelmine Germany adapted their political strategies to the changing conditions of the parliamentary system. The study quite explicitly followed the *Sonderweg* paradigm, as Puhle argued that “the peculiar combination of agrarian and *altpreussisch* conservatism and nationalist ideology [had been] a characteristic of German history exclusively, and had only been able to develop under the political and societal conditions in Germany.”³⁶ In particular Puhle emphasized the extent to which the Agrarian League had integrated radical biological anti-Semitism into its propaganda and had thus significantly contributed to the acceptance and popularity of this type of rabid anti-Semitism within the German society. Even though Puhle focused on the two decades prior to the outbreak of World War I, he also conceived his study as a contribution to the search for the origins of German fascism. Not coincidentally he therefore concluded the analysis with the statement

³⁵ Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*, 75.

³⁶ Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893-1914): ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Nationalismus in Deutschland am Beispiel des Bundes der Landwirte und der Deutsch-Konservativen Partei* (Hannover, 1966), 9-10.

that “already in the German Empire has the German state received the birth defect from which, according to Ernst Fraenkel’s phrase, the Weimar Republic suffered, and of which it died.”³⁷

If Puhle conceived of his study as *Sonderwegian*, it was also received as such; the reviewer in *Central European History* claimed that it “contribute[d] very significantly to the growing debate on continuity in modern German history.”³⁸ And if historians did not accept all of Puhle’s conclusions—some argued that the search for the roots of National Socialism should be conducted in Southern Germany rather than in Prussia—or thought that he at times overstated his case, nobody objected to his continuity argument.³⁹

Having served as a mentor for younger German (as well as American) social historians for two decades, Hans Rosenberg through his *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit* strongly influenced the intellectual trajectory of what was to become the *Bielefelder Schule*.⁴⁰ On the one hand, Rosenberg’s interpretation of economic trends in late nineteenth century Central Europe—a preliminary sketch, as he emphasized in the preface—led to a large number of empirical studies in the next decade. Together with a number of important articles, the study offered a vantage point to scholars who analyzed the role of pre-industrial elites in

³⁷ Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893-1914)*, 289.

³⁸ John C. G. Röhl, “Review of Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893-1914)*,” *Central European History* 1 (1968), 182-186, quote on 184.

³⁹ Peter G. Thielen, “Review of Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893-1914)*,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 207 (1968), 494-495; Herman Lebovics, “Review of Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893-1914)*,” *Journal of Modern History* 41 (1969), 257-260; Theodor Hamerow, “Review of Hans-Jürgen Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich (1893-1914)*,” *American Historical Review* 73 (1968), 846.

⁴⁰ Hans Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit. Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa* (Berlin, 1967).

nineteenth and early twentieth century Germany.⁴¹ On the other hand, and maybe more importantly, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit* was methodologically pioneering. “What proved fascinating,” Heinrich August Winkler wrote in his obituary of Rosenberg, “was the daring attempt by a historian to open his profession to the theories offered by the systematic social sciences.”⁴² Lastly, even though Rosenberg did not explicitly use the term, the study together with his earlier writings also helped construct the *Sonderweg* concept.⁴³ Regardless of its tentative character, the study was very well received on both sides of the Atlantic, where historians recognized the vistas Rosenberg had opened.⁴⁴ Aptly, given his intellectual influence on them, Rosenberg dedicated *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit* to the students he had taught at Free University Berlin in 1949/50—a group that included Gerhard A. Ritter, Otto Büsch, Gerhard Schulz, Gilbert Ziebura and others, most of whom Rosenberg had stayed in close touch with ever since.

A work of intellectual rather than social or economic history, Georg G. Iggers’ seminal study on historical thinking in nineteenth and early-twentieth century Germany, published in 1968, also has to be counted among the important books preceding the establishment of the *Bielefelder Schule*. By articulating a comprehensive critique of the “German conception of history,” Iggers helped legitimize an alternative conception,

⁴¹ See also his “Die Pseudodemokratisierung der Rittergutsbesitzerklasse,” in Wehler (ed.), *Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, 289-308.

⁴² Heinrich August Winkler, “Hans Rosenberg: A Pioneer in the Historical Sciences,” *Central European History* 24 (1991), 1-23, quote 18.

⁴³ Hans, Rosenberg, *Bureaucracy, Aristocracy, and Autocracy: the Prussian Experience 1660-1815* (Cambridge, MA, 1958).

⁴⁴ Theodore S. Hamerow, “Review of Hans Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit. Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa*,” *Journal of Modern History* 40 (1968), 660-661; Werner Conze, “Review of Hans Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit. Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa*,” *Economic History Review* 21 (1968), 653-654.

ultimately manifesting itself in the *Kritische Geschichtswissenschaft* à la Bielefeld.⁴⁵ Shortly before the publication of this *magnum opus*, Iggers had already declared the “decline of the classical national tradition in German historiography” in the wake of the *Fischer-Kontroverse*.⁴⁶ Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Iggers remained a decidedly sympathetic observer of the West German social historians, and since he was the leading American authority on German historiography, his stance contributed significantly to the American perception of the Bielefelder as the vanguards of progressivism.⁴⁷

The following year, Jürgen Kocka articulated his methodological and interpretive ideas in his massive dissertation on white-collar workers and the managerial elite of the Siemens Company. Like Hans-Jürgen Puhle, Kocka was a student of Gerhard A. Ritter at the Free University Berlin. The study’s first sentence already revealed Kocka’s iconoclasm. Referring to Ranke’s famous dictum, Kocka conceded that “every historical work strives first above all to show ‘how it actually happened,’” but then contrasted this “undifferentiated curiosity” with an epistemological approach derived from Jürgen Habermas’ *Analytische Wissenschaftstheorie*.⁴⁸ Methodologically, Kocka conceived of his work as situated between history and sociology, and Max Weber’s theory of bureaucracy as an organizational system provided its basic conceptual framework. Even though he focused on the case of Siemens,

⁴⁵ Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, CT, 1968).

⁴⁶ Georg G. Iggers, “The Decline of the Classical National Tradition of German Historiography,” *History and Theory* 6 (1967), 382-412.

⁴⁷ These texts include Georg G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown, CT, 1975); Id., “Introduction”, in Id., *The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historical Writing Since 1945* (Middletown, CT, 1984), 1-45, as well as numerous book reviews.

⁴⁸ Jürgen Kocka, *Unternehmensverwaltung und Angestelltenschaft am Beispiel Siemens 1847-1914. Zum Verhältnis von Kapitalismus und Demokratie in der deutschen Industrialisierung* (Stuttgart, 1969).

Kocka attempted to articulate general hypotheses about industrial bureaucratization and its role in the modernization of the German economy. The significance of Kocka's study was therefore not lost on historians on both sides of the Atlantic.⁴⁹ After the completion of this study, Kocka, who had followed Gerhard A. Ritter as his *Assistent* to the University of Münster, began to work on a comparative study on German and American white collar workers, before taking up a position at Bielefeld in 1972.

In retrospect, Hans-Ulrich Wehler slim volume *Das deutsche Kaiserreich* often appears as the representative or even foundational publication of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. Yet it was Wehler's *Habilitation* on *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, an analysis of the German Empire's colonial policies during the 1880s, which set the historiographical tone for the 1970s and contained most of the views upon which Wehler would elaborate on during that decade.⁵⁰ The introduction of the study offered a clear articulation of what Wehler regarded to be the proper role of the historian—offering a “critical” rather than an “affirmative” historical perspective—and how the German historical profession previously had failed to fulfill this role. Following Eckart Kehr's *Primat der Innenpolitik*, Wehler emphasized the extent to which German imperialism was determined by domestic conditions, yet he also conceded the importance of global economic developments. Ultimately, the study sought to contribute to a “general theory of imperialism.” Like so many

⁴⁹ Hans Jaeger, “Review of Jürgen Kocka, *Unternehmensverwaltung und Angestelltenschaft am Beispiel Siemens 1847-1914*,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 218 (1974), 443-444; Gerald D. Feldman, “Jürgen Kocka, *Unternehmensverwaltung und Angestelltenschaft am Beispiel Siemens 1847-1914*,” *Journal of Social History* 5 (1971), 127-132; Peter N. Stearns, “Jürgen Kocka, *Unternehmensverwaltung und Angestelltenschaft am Beispiel Siemens 1847-1914*,” *Journal of Modern History* 44 (1972), 611-612. Stearns remarked, however, that there was “danger in writing of developments in this period with an eye even implicitly cocked to the rise of Nazism.”

⁵⁰ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Köln, 1969).

social historians of his generation working on the German Empire, Wehler was inspired by Hans Rosenberg, whose *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit* outlined the socioeconomic interpretation of the late nineteenth century.⁵¹ This “great depression” of the 1870s constituted for Wehler the basis of the colonial expansion of the German Empire, developing from informal to formal domination. With reference to Max Horkheimer and Jürgen Habermas, Wehler mentioned the “critical theory,” which he had developed in the course of his work on German imperialism, and which, “motivated by an interest in a reasonably organized future society” attempted to “critically approach the past and the present societies.”⁵² In *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, Wehler simultaneously fought two historiographical battles: he argued against interpretations casting Bismarck in the benign light of the wise and skillful statesman, and he attempted to correct what he considered the overly personalistic historiography on the German Empire in which the “great man” Bismarck was deemed responsible for the course of events.⁵³

Despite its later influence on the historiography of the German Empire, the study was almost rejected by the University of Cologne’s *Habilitation* Commission.⁵⁴ Three historians of the university’s history department provided written evaluations: Wehler’s mentor Theodor Schieder, Erich Angermann, a historian of the United States, and the medievalist Theodor Schieffer. Schieder found himself in the difficult position of having to comment on a study which not only offered a reinterpretation of a crucial period in modern German

⁵¹ Hans Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit. Wirtschaftsablauf, Gesellschaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa* (Berlin, 1967).

⁵² Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, 14.

⁵³ Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, 35-36.

⁵⁴ Wehler, *Eine lebhafte Kampfsituation*, 140-141.

history and of Chancellor Bismarck, but which also represented a critique of the historiographical status quo in West Germany, of which Schieder himself was a part. Realizing the extent to which Wehler's full-scale assault on the West German historical profession also constituted an attack on himself, Schieder repeatedly assured when discussing Wehler's call for a socioeconomic approach that he himself "had time and again advocated its use within the historical profession."⁵⁵ Having done this, Schieder also felt entitled to point out its limitations, and took issue with Wehler's labeling of reservations about such methods as "extremely provincial." Similarly, Schieder was not fully convinced by Wehler's model of "social imperialism," as he doubted the exclusively manipulative character, as well as the domestic origins, of Bismarck's colonial policies. Instead, Schieder claimed: "It remains true that in the age of Bismarck one can still speak of a 'primacy of foreign politics' in a limited sense, even if the Chancellor identified the reason of state quite unselfconsciously with the maintenance of its domestic power structure."⁵⁶ Unsurprisingly, Wehler's condemnatory sketch of previous German scholarship met with criticism: Schieder argued that Wehler depicted German historiography as a whole simply as a reflex to calamitous political developments, and that German historicism for him merely constituted a form of escapism—a view which Schieder believed ignored numerous and significant exceptions. Finally, Schieder criticized that Wehler's "polemics missed the mark by far on numerous occasions," and that "socioeconomic arguments often masked moralistic

⁵⁵ Theodor Schieder, "Gutachten über die Habilitationsschrift von Herrn Dr. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Bismarck und der Imperialismus. Die deutsche überseeische Expansion in ihrem sozialökonomischen Zusammenhang'" December 18, 1967, 2; BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 96.

⁵⁶ Schieder, "Gutachten über die Habilitationsschrift von Herrn Dr. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Bismarck und der Imperialismus,' 6.

judgments.” Despite his substantial criticism, Schieder recommended the acceptance of Wehler’s study “without reservations.” Regardless of how one evaluates Schieder’s and Wehler’s respective historiographical positions, the fact remains that Schieder’s report testifies to his impressive academic liberalism—a character trait Wehler deeply appreciated and emphasized when Schieder’s writings of the 1930s resurfaced after his death.⁵⁷

The evaluation by Erich Angermann took on a very similar form. It complimented Wehler on a “significant scholarly achievement” that had the potential to serve as the vantage point of a fruitful discussion, which West German historiography badly needed. Angermann praised Wehler’s deep knowledge of modern economic history’s theoretical foundations, as well as his familiarity with American imperialism, which enabled Wehler to maintain a truly comparative perspective throughout much of the study. Yet Angermann had reservations in three different areas: he criticized what he perceived as Wehler’s narrow focus on socioeconomic processes—for Angermann an equally unsatisfying approach as one privileging “high politics” or ideology. Moreover, the reviewer complained about Wehler’s “unnecessarily aggressive and polemical attitude,” which in his opinion often missed the target. Finally, Angermann criticized Wehler’s at times incomprehensible jargon, which he

⁵⁷ For the debate about German historians’ concessions to and work for the Nazi regime, see Winfried Schulze/Otto Gerhard Oexle (eds.), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999); for Wehler’s portrayal of Schieder, see his “Nationalsozialismus und Historiker,” in the same volume, 306-339; as well as the interview “Historiker sollten auch politisch zu den Positionen stehen, die sie in der Wissenschaft vertreten,” in Rüdiger Hohls/Konrad H. Jarausch (eds.), *Versäumte Fragen: Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart, 2000), 244-248, and Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*, 47-52 and 58-60.

blamed on the author's embeddedness in social science literature. Nevertheless, Angermann also recommended the acceptance of Wehler's *Habilitation* "without reservation."⁵⁸

Whereas Schieder's and Angermann's assessment of the study's problems remained within the norm, Theodor Schieffer offered a devastating evaluation of both content and form. Moreover, the medievalist's reservations mirrored those of many of Wehler's later critics. Schieffer conceded that Wehler's study constituted a "respectable and interesting, yet also unbalanced achievement." Yet he remarked that he had "never been confronted before by such a *rudis indigestaque moles* [a raw and confused mass] ... The author has simply poured the whole material that he has collected in front of his reader and in particular in the second chapter gets on the reader's nerves with a flood of quotations, in which the same is repeated a hundred times." Moreover, Schieffer castigated Wehler for "burying the already exhausted reader under an avalanche of references"—something Wehler would carry on through his multivolume *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. But this was not all:

"The naïve self-confidence that reveals itself is somewhat disarming. Apparently it has not occurred to him at all that Bismarck's marginal comment on the 'ink diarrhea,' which he quotes on page 467, actually applies to himself ... Instead of at least striving toward an objective understanding of an epoch that has veered away from us, he gives way to his affects, mixes pretentious style with derisive, sweeping judgments and scolds other historians with an arrogance that *mutatis mutandis* would have done credit to Walter Frank."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Erich Angermann, "Gutachten über die Habilitationsschrift von Herrn Dr. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Bismarck und der Imperialismus. Die deutsche überseeische Expansion in ihrem sozialökonomischen Zusammenhang'" March 8, 1968, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 96.

⁵⁹ Walter Frank (1905-1945) had been one of the leading Nazi historians and head of the *Reichsinstitut für die Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands*, the main Nazi historical institution. Once he had reached a position of influence, he viciously attacked his academic teachers who kept a distance to the regime.

Schieffer concluded that “it goes without saying that this shapeless mass, as which the study presents itself today, has to be molded into a manageable and enjoyable text of about 300 pages, and that it has to be freed from its polemical and theorizing style, so that it can actually be published.”⁶⁰

Responding to this philippic, Schieder assured Schieffer that he had had “a serious conversation with Mr. Wehler and had gained the impression that he was willing to engage in some soul-searching.” Schieder therefore asked Schieffer to moderate his demands somewhat so that Wehler would have a chance of fulfilling them prior to the *Habilitation* colloquium. Schieder emphasized that he, too, had “felt irritation and anger” while reading the study, but that he believed it to be “a scholarly achievement that can be accepted.” Schieder, who was at the time a visiting fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study Princeton, added that “in this country—I mean the United States—this jargon is not such a forgone conclusion, either, as Mr. Wehler would like to make us believe. I have already met a fair number of impressive historians of a very different kind.”⁶¹

Despite the critical (yet ultimately positive) evaluations, the *Habilitation* procedure was far from over. A majority of the commission, consisting of several faculty members of the arts and sciences, at first opposed the study. When Schieder stressed Wehler’s other publications and his editorial achievements (the Yellow Series), the commission agreed to admit him to the *Habilitation* colloquium. Wehler’s talk before faculty members of the entire arts and sciences, discussing “Conceptions of war from Clausewitz to Ludendorff,”

⁶⁰ Theodor Schieffer, “Korreferat zur Habilitation ‘Bismarck und der Imperialismus. Die deutsche überseeische Expansion in ihrem sozialökonomischen Zusammenhang’ von Dr. Hans-Ulrich Wehler” March 5, 1968, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 112.

⁶¹ Theodor Schieder to Theodor Schieffer, March 8, 1968, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 112.

culminated in a dramatic showdown, in which a professor of Byzantine history claimed that “only the Jew Albert Einstein” and the atomic bomb had been responsible for the radicalization of warfare.⁶² Ultimately, the faculty approved Wehler’s *Habilitation* by a narrow vote. If this analysis has traced the various stages of Wehler’s *Habilitation* in such a detailed way, it was to shed some light on the contingencies surrounding even the most successful academic careers. The episode also illustrates the irony that Theodor Schieder, whom many younger historians viewed as representing the old methodological and political guard, must be credited with saving Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s career.⁶³

When the study was published, several historians on both sides of the Atlantic recognized its importance, but the response did not just contain praise. Hans Herzfeld’s comprehensive review in *Historische Zeitschrift* acknowledged the study’s significance, and he added—somewhat oddly—that the fact that Wehler had recognized Bismarck as the “centrally predominating figure of the German development speaks for Wehler as a historian,” as if this recognition was the litmus test a historian working on the German Empire had to pass.⁶⁴ Yet at the same time Herzfeld formulated a number of reservations. He criticized that Wehler had simply replaced the outdated “primacy of foreign politics” with the equally dogmatic “primacy of domestic politics.” As a result, history “disintegrated into

⁶² Wehler, “Historiker sollten auch politisch zu den Positionen stehen, die sie in der Wissenschaft vertreten,” in Hohls/Jaraus (eds.), *Versäumte Fragen*, 247-248; Id., *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*, 140-143.

⁶³ It had not been the first time, either: in 1962, Wehler had been in danger of losing the prestigious ACLS fellowship, which enabled him to pursue research in the United States for his second book, because the dissertation had not yet been published. The right-leaning publisher had learned about Wehler’s support for the recognition of the Oder-Neisse border and had threatened to halt the printing. Schieder, who disagreed with Wehler on the issue, intervened successfully. Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*, 50-51.

⁶⁴ Hans Herzfeld, “Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 210 (1970), 725-728, quote on 725.

economic history, which then dominated the history of society.”⁶⁵ Interestingly, Herzfeld had more serious reservations regarding Wehler’s methodology than his interpretations. In a move remarkable for someone with Herzfeld’s scholarly biography, he conceded that Wehler’s critique of Germany’s “special development”—deviating from the Western democracies—was largely justified. On the other hand, he declared Wehler’s theory of imperialism, stressing the domestic sphere and economic aspects, was “ultimately unacceptable” for a historian convinced of “a real—that is equal—interdependence of the big historical factors.”⁶⁶ Proving his familiarity with American scholarship on the matter, Herzfeld asked whether one should not prefer William L. Langer’s narrower definition of imperialism over William A. Williams’, who in his studies on American imperialism—like Wehler—emphasized socioeconomic interests over diplomatic factors.⁶⁷ Herzfeld’s preference was clear, as he added that recently published U.S. State Department documents had clearly disproven Williams. Ultimately Herzfeld wondered whether historiography based on such a “strict theory” could really “do justice to the manifold facets of a period a hundred years past.”⁶⁸

While Herzfeld represented the old historiographical guard—albeit one that had made a number of important interpretive and methodological concessions—reviewers of a younger generation welcomed the study more warmly. Wolfgang J. Mommsen proved to be impressed by the “almost frightening profusion of the material” and praised Wehler for

⁶⁵ Herzfeld, “Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*,” 726.

⁶⁶ Herzfeld, “Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*,” 727.

⁶⁷ Williams’ best known work remains *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland, OH, 1959). At the time of the review, Carl Schorske had just edited selected writings by Langer, *Explorations in Crisis: Selected Papers in International History* (Cambridge, MA, 1969).

⁶⁸ Herzfeld, “Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*,” 728.

having “approached the subject with a far more thorough theoretical framework and a much broader definition of the problem than his predecessors.”⁶⁹ Mommsen found Wehler’s argument regarding the domestic motivations of the German Empire’s colonial undertaking—the notorious “social imperialism”—convincing, even though he thought Wehler tended to overrate the overall significance of colonialism, which Mommsen believed to have been merely a marginal element for the Empire. More generally, his criticism focused on the wealth of material, including overly long footnotes, whose organization was insufficient and often made the reader miss the forest for the trees. Similarly, Mommsen complained about “a multiplicity of explanatory models which have not been combined with final clarity and which tend to confuse rather than to enlighten.”⁷⁰ Despite these reservations, Mommsen clearly believed that Wehler had made a significant contribution not only to the historiography of the German Empire, but also to the methodological modernization of the West German historical profession.

Hans Medick, a later proponent of *Alltagsgeschichte*, whose emergence in the early 1980s would trigger a hostile response from the *Bielefelder Schule*, provided the most comprehensive and appreciative assessment of the study. Placing the study into its recent historiographical context, Medick was even more dismissive of the works of Fritz Fischer and the Fischer Controversy than Wehler would later be, criticizing not only the methodological traditionalism of Fischer and his opponents, but also questioning the

⁶⁹ Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*,” *Central European History* 2 (1969), 366-372, quotes on 367.

⁷⁰ Mommsen, “Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*,” 372.

interpretive progress in the controversy's wake.⁷¹ In complete agreement with Wehler regarding the methodological deficiencies of the West German historical profession, Medick only pointed out that the study could have drawn even more on the social sciences, and that for example Wehler had not utilized the possibilities provided by Critical Theory enough. But he also sided with Wehler regarding the interpretive tendency of the study. Medick concluded his generally enthusiastic review by emphasizing that Wehler's work "not only signifies a breakthrough to new departures in West German historiography but strikes yet another blow for the conquest of methodological, theoretical, and practical parochialism in history as well as in the other social sciences."⁷²

Compared to these responses, the American reception of Wehler's study was less enthusiastic. Otto Pflanze thought that Wehler's revisionism clearly overshot his mark, that *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* signaled the replacement of Hegel within German historiography by Marx, and that historians now "faced the prospect of an all-out economic determinism."⁷³ Thus he took consolation from Hegel's recognition that thesis and antithesis—the latter provided by Wehler—were ultimately, and inevitably, superseded by synthesis.⁷⁴ More specifically, some American diplomatic historians were as horrified as their German counterparts by Wehler's attack on their cherished *Primat der Aussenpolitik*

⁷¹ Hans Medick, "Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*," *History and Theory* 10 (1971) 228-240. Medick claimed that the "failure on the part of the participants in the [Fischer] controversy to reflect their own political standpoint, the absence of comprehensive theoretical perspectives, and the traditionalism of the methods employed led in the end only to a stalemate without shedding much new light on German history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Judged by the Fischer controversy, West German historical studies turned out to be the residuary legatee of Bismarck's vanished Reich in the realm of ideas, just as the Federal Republic was in the realm of power politic." 228.

⁷² Medick, "Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*," 240.

⁷³ Otto Pflanze, "Review of *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*," *American Historical Review* 75 (1970), 1146.

⁷⁴ Otto Pflanze, "Review of *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*," *American Historical Review* 75 (1970), 1147.

and were thus quick to disqualify the German iconoclast as “neo-Marxist.”⁷⁵ While this characterization of Wehler was unfounded, it demonstrates the reservations of several American historians toward the emerging *kritische Geschichtswissenschaft*. It also reveals that during the late 1960s and 1970s, the specter of Marxism, or neo-Marxism, haunted American and German diplomatic historians alike.⁷⁶

In retrospect, these publications outlined the contours of a future *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* fairly accurately. Already prior to his first professorial appointment, Wehler had been not only a prolific author, but also an extraordinarily productive editor. The opportunities provided by a professorial position as well as by the University of Bielefeld would allow for an even further increase of publications. These projects will be discussed below.

The Institutional Context

The 1960s and early 1970s saw an unprecedented expansion of higher education in West Germany. This was a result of a number of reasons: existing universities proved less and less able to provide adequate learning conditions for the rising number of incoming students; cities and sometimes even larger towns recognized the economic value of an institution of higher education; the West German state governments perceived educational policy as a central area in which to develop a distinct profile; and the foundation of new

⁷⁵ Norman Rich, “Review of *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*,” *Journal of Modern History* 42 (1970), 421-423.

⁷⁶ Andreas Hillgruber, “Politische Geschichte in moderner Sicht,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 216 (1973), 529-552; and Klaus Hildebrand, “Geschichte oder ‘Gesellschaftsgeschichte’? Die Notwendigkeit einer politischen Geschichtsschreibung von den internationalen Beziehungen,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 223 (1976), 328-357, later voiced similar concerns.

universities promised to facilitate the implementation of educational reforms.⁷⁷ In addition, the federal government was concerned that the country had fallen behind in educational matters, and that in the context of the Cold War this “education deficit” (*Bildungsrückstand* was the contemporary catchphrase) also threatened the country’s security.⁷⁸

To counter this deficit, German states expanded existing universities and founded new ones. The idea was to not only enable more young people to attend a university, but also to allow those who lived in remote and rural areas to do so by way of commuting. Accordingly, the federal and the state governments often chose to establish universities in smaller towns such as Osnabrück, Lüneburg, Konstanz, Bayreuth, Trier, and Bielefeld. Almost all of these institutions emerged on the outskirts of the respective towns. Not only was it easier to find the necessary construction space, but the new “campus universities” were supposed “to reestablish the intellectual community of faculty and students.”⁷⁹ In reality, it proved difficult to realize these lofty goals, as the explosion of student numbers turned universities by the 1970s into more rather than less anonymous institutions. The overall number of students in West Germany almost tripled between 1960 (291,000) and 1975 (841,000).⁸⁰ The faculty-student ratio declined: in the humanities, the number of professorships rose from 801 (1966) to 1375 (1975), whereas the number of students increased from 48,000 (1966) to 141,000 (1975).⁸¹

⁷⁷ Christoph Oehler, “Die Hochschulentwicklung nach 1945,” in Christoph Führ/Carl-Ludwig Furck (eds.), *Handbuch der deutschen Bildungsgeschichte. Band VI: 1945 bis zur Gegenwart. Erster Teilband Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (München, 1988), 412-446.

⁷⁸ Jan Eckel, *Geist der Zeit: Deutsche Geisteswissenschaften seit 1870* (Göttingen 2008), 113.

⁷⁹ Oehler, “Die Hochschulentwicklung nach 1945,” 434.

⁸⁰ Oehler, “Die Hochschulentwicklung nach 1945,” 417.

⁸¹ Eckel, *Geist der Zeit: Deutsche Geisteswissenschaften seit 1870*, 113.

Still, throughout the 1960s educational planners often conceptualized the new institutions as “reform universities”—places where faculty and students were supposed to interact more closely, and where the separation of research and teaching should no longer exist.⁸² These reform universities, many of which were founded in North Rhine-Westphalia, included the ones in Bochum, Düsseldorf, Bremen, and Bielefeld. For Bielefeld, the North Rhine-Westphalian minister of education Paul Mikat asked Helmut Schelsky, arguably the most influential postwar sociologist, to develop the concept for a new university.⁸³ As much an academic as a public intellectual, Schelsky had coined the catchphrase *skeptische Generation* (“skeptical generation,” referring to the German youth of the 1950s, who according to Schelsky rejected utopian ideals, focused on pragmatism and thus ultimately lead to a normalization of German society). Schelsky had caught Mikat’s attention with the inaugural lecture he had delivered at the University of Münster, in which he discussed the extent to which the Humboldt’s educational ideas could be realized under the social conditions of the Federal Republic.⁸⁴

Schelsky envisioned an institution focusing on excellence in specific fields, rather than covering as many academic disciplines as possible. Second, he proposed to organize research in a collaborative and interdisciplinary fashion. Bielefeld’s Institute for Interdisciplinary Research (*Institut für Interdisziplinäre Forschung*), founded to that end, was

⁸² Eckel, *Geist der Zeit: Deutsche Geisteswissenschaften seit 1870*, 115.

⁸³ On Schelsky, see A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 58-61; and Jens Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit. Die liberalkonservative Begründung der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen, 2006), 31-35. Schelsky also coined the term *nivellierte Mittelstandsgesellschaft* (“leveled middle class society”), his description of postwar West German society, in which the middle class grew substantially and the citizens gradually lost their class consciousness.

⁸⁴ Clemens Albrecht, “Gefundene Wirklichkeit: Helmut Schelsky und die geistige Physiognomie politischer Konversion,” in Sonja Asal/Stefan Schlak (eds.), *Was war Bielefeld? Eine ideengeschichtliche Nachfrage* (Göttingen, 2009), 67-69.

the first of its kind in West Germany. Third, the university was to aim at excellence in both research and teaching. To realize the former, the faculty would alternate between a year of teaching and a year of research. For the latter goal, Schelsky's concept set forth a strict faculty-student ratio of 1:30.⁸⁵ Not all of these ambitious goals proved attainable; in particular the maximum enrollment had already changed in the planning stages from 3500 to 10,000, preventing the realization of the desired close faculty-student interaction. The politicization of universities after 1968, which affected the situation in Bielefeld as well, further contributed to Schelsky's disillusionment and led to his return to the University of Münster.⁸⁶

These far-reaching structural changes affected the field of history quantitatively. The number of professorships (in all subfields, from ancient to modern history) increased from 80 in 1960 to 210 in 1975, and the number of untenured lecturers rose from 90 to 230. In 1973, 43% of all full professors were born between 1929 and 1941—a statistic that underscores yet another generational shift emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁸⁷ In modern history alone, the number of professorships rose from 33 (1960) to 71 (1970).⁸⁸ Subsequently, this

⁸⁵ Albrecht, "Gefundene Wirklichkeit: Helmut Schlesky und die geistige Physiognomie politischer Konversion," 71-73.

⁸⁶ Hermann Lübke, "Die Idee einer Elite-Universität. Der Fall der Universität Bielefeld," in Asal/Schlak (eds.), *Was war Bielefeld? Eine ideengeschichtliche Nachfrage*, 34-35. Yet Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, a sociologist involved in the university's establishment who also taught there and later served as director of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research, argued that "Schelsky's original inspirations have shaped Bielefeld University to a significant extent, despite all political conjunctures of higher education." See Kaufmann, "Die Universität Bielefeld – ihr Konzept und dessen Schicksal," in Andreas Dress et al. (eds.), *Die humane Universität. Bielefeld 1969-1992. Festschrift für Karl Peter Grottemeyer* (Bielefeld, 1992), 43.

⁸⁷ Werner Conze, "Die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft seit 1945: Bedingungen und Ergebnisse," *Historische Zeitschrift* 225 (1977), 18-20.

⁸⁸ Wolfgang Weber, *Priester der Klio. Historisch-sozialwissenschaftliche Studien zur Herkunft und Karriere deutscher Historiker und zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft 1800-1970* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 53. These numbers do not include professorships for regional history (Landesgeschichte) or the subfield social and economic history (Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte).

enormous expansion of the historical profession helped create the precondition for methodological reorientations.

Between Crisis and Reform: *Wozu noch Geschichte?*

Given these institutional conditions, one might have expected West German historians to abound in optimism. Yet the early 1970s saw a number of very different statements regarding the state and future of historiography. History as a discipline seemed to lose much of its public relevance as a *Leitwissenschaft*, i.e. an academic field that provided the public—or at least the educated public—with intellectual guidance. Instead, during the 1960s the social sciences, above all sociology and political science, threatened to take over this role, as representatives of these disciplines became more and more visible in the media. Even worse, educational reformers in some German states attempted to abolish history as a subject in secondary education; the goal was its integration into a broader, new subject “society studies” (*Gesellschaftslehre*).⁸⁹

Moreover, the relationship between the “1968ers” and the historical profession was at best ambivalent. Historians tended to respond as negatively to the questionable methods—interrupting lectures, etc.—of some of the 1968ers as their colleagues in other disciplines. In response to the radicalization of many West German universities during that time, some historians switched political allegiances. Thomas Nipperdey, in the early 1960s a reform-oriented Social Democrat, in 1970 helped establish the Association for Academic Freedom (*Bund Freiheit der Wissenschaft*), which fought above all against the “democratization” of West German universities favored by many on the Left, but also offered space to academics

⁸⁹ Grosse Kracht, *Die zankende Zunft*, 81-83,

as far on the right as their opponents were on the left.⁹⁰ One of the key issues of contention was the full professors' (*Ordinarien*) far-reaching influence in administrative matters, which left-leaning reformers wanted to curtail. They suggested the establishment of governing bodies consisting of one-third professors, untenured faculty, and students respectively.⁹¹ Their opponents claimed that the privileged position of full professors within the university administration constituted an institutional necessity.⁹²

Yet historians objected to far more than just the questionable classroom behavior and demands of student co-determination by the 1968ers. The popularity of (Neo-)Marxism in all its shades also proved anathema to almost every single professor of history in West Germany. Since decisions about professorial appointments were still heavily influenced by a small number of historians, it came as no surprise that by the mid-1970s, only one "openly Marxist" West German historian had become a full professor, Reinhard Kühnl at the University of Marburg. In fact, his appointment had caused a veritable scandal. Ernst Nolte, then a professor at Marburg's history department, publicly denounced Kühnl as a political pamphleteer unworthy of a professorship. Nolte's opposition to Kühnl's *Habilitation* led to a prolonged tug-of-war that was carried out not only in the respective university committees but also through numerous letters-to-the-editor in daily papers.⁹³ When Nolte's initiative failed to prevent Kühnl's appointment, he left Marburg for the Free University Berlin. Still,

⁹⁰ Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*. 102-104. According to Hacke, the left-wing radicalization of the early 1970s led to the formation of "liberal conservatism" as an intellectual movement.

⁹¹ Oehler, "Die Hochschulentwicklung nach 1945," 416.

⁹² Hermann Lübke, *Hochschulreform und Gegenauflklärung. Analysen, Postulate, Polemik zur aktuellen Hochschul- und Wissenschaftspolitik* (Freiburg, 1972), 93-107.

⁹³ Ernst Nolte, *Universitätsinstitut oder Parteihochschule? Dokumentation zum Habilitationsverfahren Kühnl* (Köln, 1971).

Kühnl remained outside of the mainstream historical profession, publishing his books at small left-wing presses instead of prestigious publishing houses.⁹⁴ Rejecting particularly neo-Marxist theories of fascism, Heinrich August Winkler, then a younger historian in his late thirties, represented what even scholars considered to be methodological and political progressives thought about the reliance on Marxism in historiography.⁹⁵ It may be tempting to attribute the near-absence of Marxist historians in West Germany exclusively to the still prevailing political conservatism, as well as to the near-absence of a Marxist tradition within twentieth century German historiography. Apart from the—certainly important—history of the profession, the polarization caused by Cold War and the ideological confrontation with East German historians in particular made the reception of Marxism among the Western colleagues rather unlikely. However, one should also point out that even foreign historians with neo-Marxist leanings did not take notice of the German variant, which may indicate something about the latter's quality.⁹⁶

Yet West German historians, especially those with conservative political views, found themselves beleaguered by much more than just unruly students and the occasional Marxist colleague. More significantly, the political shift in the Federal Republic, which placed a Social Democrat in the offices of the Federal President and the Chancellor for the first time,

⁹⁴ While the prestigious Suhrkamp Verlag published Kühnl's *Habilitation* on the West German far right-wing party NPD, almost all of his subsequent books appeared with Pahl Rugenstein, a Cologne-based publishing house of largely Communist literature, subsidized by the GDR, which consequentially did not survive the collapse of Communism.

⁹⁵ Heinrich August Winkler, *Revolution, Staat, Faschismus. Zur Revision des Historischen Materialismus* (Göttingen, 1978).

⁹⁶ It is noteworthy that Geoff Eley discusses the West German social historians' aversion to Marxism and their equation of Marxism with dogmatic GDR-historiography without even mentioning the few avowed Marxist historians in West Germany. See Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, 2005), 73-74.

severely worried many of them. In 1971, when President Gustav Heinemann called for corrections of high school history textbooks, which he thought had previously paid too little attention to the “losers” of German history who had unsuccessfully fought for more political freedom, conservative historians were outraged.⁹⁷ In a letter to the German Historians’ Association executive board, naval historian Walther Hubatsch took offense at the “preposterousness” of Heinemann’s request, demanded an official response from the Association, and enclosed a self-addressed reply envelope with a stamp featuring—very appropriately—Leopold von Ranke.⁹⁸ In his response to Hubatsch, Chairman Schieder argued that it was not the Association’s function to act as a corrective of politicians’ statements, but that historians should express their concerns as individuals. And that was precisely what the Chairman did himself. In an article for the conservative Protestant weekly *Christ und Welt* Schieder warned that “the invocation of revolutionary traditions, if done at the wrong time, might easily endanger the democratic state. What in the past has been an uprising for freedom and justice may in the present be turned into an appeal for an anarchist uprising against the very same free state, which a liberal state sees itself doomed to powerlessness against its illiberal enemies.”⁹⁹ While Schieder’s stance against political

⁹⁷ Quoted by Thomas Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte. Werner Conze und die Neuorientierung der westdeutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945* (München, 2001), 289. One of Heinemann’s examples was “revolting peasants” (he might have been thinking of the Peasants’ Wars). The President believed historians described the peasants only from the perspective of a threat to the social order, not as individuals with legitimate grievances and goals. In 1974, the President reiterated his perspective in “Die Freiheitsbewegungen in der deutschen Geschichte,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 25 (1974), 601-610.

⁹⁸ Walther Hubatsch to VHD Executive Board/Theodor Schieder, January 19, 1971, VHD Files, Universität Trier.

⁹⁹ Theodor Schieder, “Hat Heinemann Recht? Zu einer Rede über unser mangelhaftes Geschichtsbewusstsein” *Christ und Welt*, February 27, 1970, 11; quoted by Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte*, 289-290.

demands on historiography appears laudable, one might add that he was less principled than it seemed. His role during the Fischer-Kontroverse just a few years earlier revealed his awareness of historiography's political implications and his willingness to battle historiographical interpretations that he thought might damage West Germany's reputation "abroad" and affect German national identity negatively.¹⁰⁰ Historians on both sides of the political spectrum rejected a conflation of historiography and politics if the respective political bent ran counter to their own beliefs. During the early 1970s, conservative historians generally objected to liberal and leftist demands, just as in the 1980s left-liberal historians would denounce conservative politicians calls for a national identity bolstered by identifiable historiographies, as we will see in chapter 5.

In a lecture given at the biannual convention of the German Historians' Association, Reinhart Koselleck, an intellectual historian at the University of Bielefeld (but not associated with scholars belonging to the Bielefeld School), expressed his concerns regarding a "crisis of history as a distinct discipline."¹⁰¹ Koselleck argued that the neglect of the respective historical dimensions by other disciplines—economics, philology, and sociology—had isolated the field of history from these neighboring disciplines. Similar to the slightly younger social historians, Koselleck (born in 1923) urged his colleagues to draw upon theories prevalent in neighboring disciplines. He deemed it indispensable to reintegrate economics into social history, to draw upon the insights of modern linguistics, and even to

¹⁰⁰ See Schieder's discussion with Karl Dietrich Erdmann regarding the publications of anti-Fritz Fischer articles, earlier in this chapter. Schieder had written to Erdmann that reading Fischer's book made him "completely sick." He added "I find all that really saddening, apart from the political effects which Fischer provokes by talking about a 'contribution to the problem of continuities between World War I and World War II.'" Theodor Schieder to Karl Dietrich Erdmann, December 2, 1961, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 234.

¹⁰¹ Reinhart Koselleck, "Wozu noch Historie?," *Historische Zeitschrift* 212 (1971), 1.

develop a historically informed anthropology, as Michel Foucault had done.¹⁰² Yet he expressed severe skepticism regarding the ability of history as a discipline to provide people with “immediate instructions on how to act in the future” (*unmittelbare Handlungsanweisungen für morgen*).¹⁰³ This skepticism set Koselleck apart from the social historians, and may also account for the fact that, in contrast to them, he never sought the spotlight as a public intellectual.¹⁰⁴

Five years later his colleague Thomas Nipperdey posed the same question. In contrast to Koselleck, Nipperdey not only offered a forceful plea for the educational necessity of history, but also objected strongly to the political use of historiography. He decried the “fashionable inversion” of this political use. Nipperdey argued that while historians had often written on behalf of the nation, current historiography tended toward “inverted nationalism.” Against historians who, according to Nipperdey, adopted “the gesture of a prosecutor” in their writings, he declared: “Scholarship insists, against all partisanship, on its claim for objectivity.”¹⁰⁵ Yet for Nipperdey this objectivity did not rule out a “social function” of history in the sense that it could—and even should—provide citizens with a sense of identity: “This identity can only correspond to a pluralistic and tolerant basic consensus of our society, to freedom and democracy, not in the sense of a presentist belief in progress, but in that sense that democracy is, under present conditions, the most humane and improvable political

¹⁰² Koselleck, “Wozu noch Historie?,” 14-15.

¹⁰³ Koselleck, “Wozu noch Historie?,” 11.

¹⁰⁴ For a comprehensive portrait of Koselleck by one of his students, see Willibald Steinmetz, “Nachruf auf Reinhart Koselleck, 1923-2006,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 32 (2006), 412-432.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Nipperdey, “Wozu noch Geschichte,” in Klaus-Gerd Kaltenbrunner (ed.), *Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit. Lebendige Geschichte – klagende Historiker* (München, 1975), 34-57; all quotes on 56.

state.”¹⁰⁶ Regardless of the plausibility of this statement, which cannot be discussed in this context, it was obvious that Nipperdey’s relativizing position ran counter to the social historians’ ambitions.

Yet at the same time a number of historians adopted a less pessimistic tone and advocated a new, reformed historiography. While the precise contours of the favored historiographical project differed, all of these proponents shared a highly critical attitude toward the historiographical practice of the previous decades. In 1971, Wolfgang J. Mommsen (born in 1930) delivered his inaugural lecture at Düsseldorf University with the programmatic title *Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus* (The Historical Profession beyond Historicism). By launching this fairly strong critique of the West German historical profession’s current state, Mommsen, a student of Theodor Schieder, found himself in a difficult position. After all, his claim that “German historiography until very recently had been stuck in the consciousness of the 1920s” could be perceived as a criticism of Schieder, who had helped shape the postwar West German historical profession.¹⁰⁷ He thus explicitly credited Schieder as one of the few West German historians who had recognized the necessary epistemological and methodological renewal of the discipline. While Mommsen in general adopted a moderate tone, he clearly distinguished between a historiography that affirmed existing conditions and an alternative that sought to achieve societal change. It was obvious that Mommsen’s sympathies lay with the second alternative. Therefore he conceived of history as a “critical social science” (*kritische Sozialwissenschaft*). “Critical” was a recurring term in this text, and for Mommsen the “critical function” of historiography was to

¹⁰⁶ Nipperdey, “Wozu noch Geschichte,” 57.

¹⁰⁷ Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus* (Düsseldorf, 1971), 22-23.

provide an “indirect, yet medium- or long-term more effective critique of the respective ruling, or only prevailing values, ideologies, and historical conceptions.”¹⁰⁸ As an example, Mommsen referred to the enormous influence that the idea of the nation had exerted and was still exerting on societies.

By no means did Mommsen envision a wholesale embrace of all prevailing trends within the social sciences; he sharply dismissed what he perceived as ahistorical tendencies within certain areas of sociology, in particular empirical social research. However, commenting on the debates among German (Jürgen Habermas, Ralf Dahrendorf) and American (C. Wright Mills, Seymour Martin Lipset) sociologists, Mommsen found a reason for optimism, since the social scientists increasingly rediscovered the importance of a historical scope. Therefore he claimed that “in the reconstruction of historical formations from a perspective of today’s societal situation it [historiography] can offer a valuable corrective for primarily system-related social research.”¹⁰⁹ Yet in order to enter a mutually beneficial partnership with the social sciences, historiography could no longer afford to neglect the heuristic tools of the social sciences. With this position—which he did not concretize—Mommsen echoed simultaneous efforts by American historians to redefine the relationship between their discipline and the social sciences.

In the United States scholars of diverse methodological backgrounds such as Richard Hofstadter and David Landes explored the degree to which historiography should be

¹⁰⁸ Mommsen, *Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus*, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Mommsen, *Die Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Historismus*, 41.

conceived as a social science.¹¹⁰ As was the case in West Germany, the answers to this question differed significantly. Landes and Tilly, who conducted a survey of ca. 600 historians, sent out a questionnaire whose first question asked the respondents whether they considered themselves “a social scientist, a humanist, or something of both?” Younger historians often identified themselves as “social scientists,” whereas their older colleagues tended to gravitate toward the “humanists.” The irritated response by a senior historian revealed that some of this group considered the question itself reprehensible: “I do not consider myself as a ‘social scientist’ because (1) I think it is a vile term, (2) some of the most fatuous academics I know so proclaim themselves; nor do I think of myself as a ‘humanist’—although I certainly cherish humanistic values. I am a historian. That is enough of a ‘little box’ for me.”¹¹¹ As will become apparent below, many German historians held similarly negative views on this issue.

In 1974, three years after his inaugural lecture, Mommsen outlined the contours of “the historical profession in an industrial society.” Mommsen argued along the lines of his earlier text regarding historiography’s necessary interdisciplinary orientation, and took a clear position in the curricular battles raging in the 1970s. Defending the value of history within the West German educational system—which some educational reformers

¹¹⁰ C. Wright Mills/Richard Hofstadter (eds.), *Sociology and History: Methods* (New York, 1968); David S. Landes/Charles Tilly, *History as a Social Science* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971). Commenting on Adorno’s influence on the American historian, Hofstadter’s biographer David S. Brown observed: “Aside from developing a theoretical framework to measure mass behavior, the Frankfurt School provided Hofstadter with an exotic scientific vocabulary that stood as an intimidating barrier to his critics.” Brown, *Richard Hofstadter: an Intellectual Biography* (Chicago, 2006), 90. Brown also notes that “Hofstadter himself avoided the techniques used in social scientific research. He remained committed to history as a literary art.” However, he “assimilated the analytic vocabulary and interpretive structure of social theory into his scholarship.” Brown, *Richard Hofstadter*, 73. These are important insights; the difference between the call for more interdisciplinary research and its realization has long concerned historiographical observers.

¹¹¹ Landes/Tilly, *History as a Social Science*, 30-32, quote on 31.

questioned—he argued that since the historical profession was undergoing a profound methodological renewal, the replacement of history as a school subject was even less justified than it had been before.¹¹² Like his lecture, the essay included a bow to Mommsen’s academic teacher Theodor Schieder, who had warned against historiography’s “premature ideologization” and suggested instead a “sober analysis of societal structures.”¹¹³ On the other hand, Mommsen’s emphasis on historiography’s “emancipatory function” clearly set him apart from Schieder. That a historian like Mommsen, neither methodologically nor by temperament a radical, adopted these positions illustrates the degree to which many historians of his generation believed in the ineptitude of traditional historiography to grapple with the complexities of modern societies.

The historiographical direction Dieter Groh (born in 1932) outlined in his volume *Kritische Geschichtswissenschaft in emanzipatorischer Absicht* was similar to Mommsen’s. Groh had been a student and later *Assistent* of Werner Conze, but had moved away from his mentor methodologically and interpretively. In many ways, his text constituted a sketch rather than an elaborate program, but Groh articulated several characteristics of a future historiography. Groh rejected a “superficial eclecticism” among historians whom he saw as arbitrarily relying on social science theories to counter the “theory deficit.”¹¹⁴ However, when Groh dismissed mid-range theories (*Theorien mittlerer Reichweite*) in favor of an “anticipation of future possibilities,” these possibilities remained too vague to enter the

¹¹² Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Die Geschichtswissenschaft in der modernen Industriegesellschaft,” *Vierteljahrshfte für Zeitgeschichte* 22 (1974), 1-17.

¹¹³ Mommsen, “Die Geschichtswissenschaft in der modernen Industriegesellschaft,” 14-15, referring to Theodor Schieder, *Geschichte als Wissenschaft. Eine Einführung* (München, 1959), 20.

¹¹⁴ Dieter Groh, *Kritische Geschichtswissenschaft in emanzipatorischer Absicht. Überlegungen zur Geschichte als Sozialwissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1973), 16-17.

mainstream discussion among historians interested in such questions. On the other hand, Groh's recommendation of "critical distance to the status quo" echoed similar statements of Mommsen and the Bielefelders.¹¹⁵ Throughout the next decades, Groh remained a sympathetic yet slightly distant observer of the *Bielefelder Schule*, more associated with French than American historiography, and closer to unorthodox British Marxists such as Eric Hobsbawm. His influential article on the *Sonderweg* testifies to Groh's position.¹¹⁶

Castigating the state of the West German historical profession and suggesting an interpretive rather than methodological renewal of the profession, a 1972 collection of essays by Fritz Fischer student Imanuel Geiss was very different in tone.¹¹⁷ In the preface, Geiss illustrated the historical profession's supposed illiberalism with a personal example: having initially planned to write his *Habilitation* on Prussian-German historiography from Ranke to Ritter, Geiss was discouraged by sympathetic American and German colleagues who predicted that he would severely hurt his career prospects by launching an attack on main figures of the profession. He therefore decided to switch to a less risky area and completed a widely acknowledged study on decolonization in Africa.¹¹⁸ These reservations appear

¹¹⁵ Groh, *Kritische Geschichtswissenschaft in emanzipatorischer Absicht*, 52.

¹¹⁶ Dieter Groh, "Der 'Sonderweg' in der deutschen Geschichte zwischen 1848 und 1945: Mythos oder Realität?", in Id., *Emanzipation und Integration: Beiträge zur Sozial- und Politikgeschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung und des 2. Reiches* (Konstanz, 1999). The article was first published in French in 1983 in the journal *Annales E.S.C.*

¹¹⁷ Imanuel Geiss, *Studien über Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1972). Simultaneously, another Fischer student, Arnold Sywottek diagnosed a "legitimization crisis" of historiography, which he thought historians could overcome by regaining the intellectual ground that had been lost to the social sciences. See Arnold Sywottek, *Geschichtswissenschaft in der Legitimationskrise: ein Überblick über die Diskussion um Theorie und Didaktik der Geschichte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1969-1973* (Bonn, 1974).

¹¹⁸ Imanuel Geiss, *Panafrikanismus. Zur Geschichte der Dekolonisation* (Frankfurt am Main, 1968); English as *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa* (New York, 1974).

plausible; not coincidentally it was an American historian who in the late 1960s published a comprehensive study on German historiography.¹¹⁹

Two years later Geiss (born in 1931) edited a number of articles by a group of mostly even younger historians at the University of Hamburg, under the programmatic title *Ansichten einer künftigen Geschichtswissenschaft* (Perspectives of a Future Historical Profession). Already the volume's introduction revealed—compared to Mommsen—a less conciliatory stance, decrying the “orthodoxy of German historians as heralds and apologists of the Third Reich.”¹²⁰ Similar to other programmatic publications, the authors of this volume diagnosed the West German historical profession with a “theory deficit.” They then proceeded to outline tasks and methods of a critical historiography, which they recommended to rely on Freud, Marx, and the French *Annales* School.¹²¹

Maybe the aggressive tone that Geiss adopted throughout the text was responsible, but it is noteworthy that neither of the two volumes were reviewed in *Historische Zeitschrift*, which otherwise considered contributions of various authors to the historiographical modernization debate. Whatever the reason, the non-response of the profession's establishment to Geiss's provocations constituted a marked difference to how it reacted to Wehler's challenges. Historians critical of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* realized during the 1970s that the Bielefeld historian at least had to be reckoned with—ignoring him would not have worked.

¹¹⁹ Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, CT, 1968).

¹²⁰ Imanuel Geiss/Rainer Tamchina, “Einleitung der Herausgeber,” in Id. (eds.), *Ansichten einer künftigen Geschichtswissenschaft. Kritik – Theorie – Methode* (München, 1974), 7.

¹²¹ See the contributions by Jürgen Oelkers/Holger-Jens Riemer, Karin Rittner, and Joachim Radkau respectively, in Geiss/Tamchina (eds.), *Ansichten einer künftigen Geschichtswissenschaft*, 140-152.

Considering the power structures of the West German historical profession, Geiss significantly weakened his career chances by denouncing historians whom the overwhelming majority of scholars still deemed to embody the positive tradition of German historiography. Unfortunately, his adviser Fritz Fischer's influence on job appointments never matched that of Fischer's colleagues Schieder, Conze, and Erdmann. As a result, Geiss only received a professorship at the University of Bremen, where the atmosphere was, even by the standards of the early 1970s, extremely politicized, and where he clashed with radical leftist student groups. After having been attacked by conservatives throughout the 1960s, Geiss now found himself harshly criticized by the Left, a circumstance that by the 1980s had turned him into an ardent conservative himself, deploring the "new orthodoxy" of left-liberal historians.¹²²

It should be mentioned that most, but not all historians reflecting on the relationship of history and the social sciences specialized in nineteenth and twentieth century German history. Winfried Schulze's (born in 1942) introductory text *Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft* constituted an early modernist's contribution, proposing the integration of sociology and history under the umbrella historical social science, yet without abandoning all distinctions between both.¹²³ Moreover, some scholars of ancient and medieval history simply practiced an interdisciplinary form of historiography, without necessarily publishing programmatic statements announcing a "paradigm shift." It seems that for historians working on modern Germany, especially periods and topics that were

¹²² Imanuel Geiss, "Unsere 'Neue Orthodoxie' ist heute viel illiberaler als ihre akademischen Väter nach 1945," in Rüdiger Hohls/Konrad H. Jarausch (eds.), *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart 2000), 218-239.

¹²³ Winfried Schulze, *Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft. Einführung in die Probleme der Kooperation beider Wissenschaften* (München, 1974).

politically charged, methodological battles often became linked to arguments about the political dimension of historiography. This was a dimension ancient and medieval historians tended to be less interested in.¹²⁴

These various examples illustrate that calls for interdisciplinary work could be heard throughout the West German historical profession. The proposed methodological reorientation at the time appeared to be a generational project, for almost all of historians demanding a closer cooperation with the social sciences had been born between 1930 and 1940. While by no means all scholars of that generation endorsed these views, and while not everyone arguing for interdisciplinary historiography would later heed his own call, historians of a more traditional methodological orientation began to worry about the future of their discipline. The protagonists of the *Bielefelder Schule* in particular would draw their ire, as they appeared to be among the most outspoken proponents of the methodological reorientation and soon followed with studies that realized what they had demanded in their programmatic statements.

Establishing the *Bielefelder Schule*

The actual establishment of the *Bielefelder Schule* unfolded after 1971. That year, Hans-Ulrich Wehler left the Free University of Berlin, where he had held a professorship in American history since the previous year, and moved to Bielefeld. The financial situation at the university in the early 1970s was excellent, thus it was possible to assemble a team of

¹²⁴ Among the methodological innovators in ancient history were Geza Alföldy and Fritz Gschnitzer at the University of Heidelberg, whose studies were significantly informed by anthropological models. See Alföldy, *Römische Sozialgeschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1975); Gschnitzer, *Griechische Sozialgeschichte: Von der mykenischen bis zum Ausgang der klassischen Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1981).

people who were either politically progressive or at least methodologically interesting. In September 1971, Wehler himself expressed the pioneering spirit of the time in a letter to Theodor Schieder, in which he outlined the plans for the history department. Reporting that “Koselleck has just accepted our offer, and we are all extremely relieved,” Wehler listed the various scholars the department attempted to lure to Bielefeld. Therefore he was confident that by 1973, it would have assembled “a good team.” And since Wehler had negotiated an extremely favorable deal with the university—he would alternate between a year of teaching and a year of research—and there were also “abundant financial resources for books,” Wehler expressed contentment and optimism regarding his future.¹²⁵

Jürgen Kocka joined the departing the following year. After the completion of his dissertation in 1968, he had returned to the United States to conduct research for his *Habilitation*. Kocka had spent a year at Harvard University’s Charles Warren Center and at the School for Business Administration, where he worked on a comparative study of white-collar workers (*Angestellte*) in the United States and Germany between 1890 and 1940.¹²⁶ Already an impressively productive historian, Kocka published a short book on German society during World War I.¹²⁷ Thus, at age 32, Kocka was a full professor and author of three monographs. Throughout the 1970s, he continued to work on white-collar worker and entrepreneurs during the phase of industrialization in Germany.¹²⁸ Moreover, and at least as importantly, Kocka remained involved in the methodological debates within the West

¹²⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler to Theodor Schieder, September 17 [1971], BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 286.

¹²⁶ Jürgen Kocka, *Angestellte zwischen Faschismus und Demokratie: Zur politischen Sozialgeschichte der Angestellten: USA 1890 bis 1940 im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1977).

¹²⁷ Jürgen Kocka, *Klassengesellschaft im Krieg. Deutsche Sozialgeschichte 1914-1918*. (Göttingen, 1972).

¹²⁸ Jürgen Kocka, *Unternehmer in der deutschen Industrialisierung* (Göttingen, 1975); Id., *Die Angestellten in der deutschen Geschichte, 1850-1980: vom Privatbeamten zum angestellten Arbeitnehmer* (Göttingen, 1981).

German historical profession, advocating theoretical sophistication and interdisciplinary orientation.¹²⁹

Indeed, not every historian at Bielefeld's history department shared Wehler's and Kocka's interests. Reinhart Koselleck, who joined the department in 1972, pursued epistemological studies and launched the multi-volume encyclopedia *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.¹³⁰ Without a doubt an innovative historian who had a large circle of followers, he simply did not have much in common with Wehler and Kocka. One of the legendary anecdotes surrounding Bielefeld's history department was of Wehler and Koselleck never sharing an elevator together—they would not have known what to talk about.¹³¹ Barely 31 years old, Klaus Hildebrand, a specialist in German foreign relations in the twentieth century and the author of a widely acclaimed study on colonial enterprises of Nazi Germany, was hired in 1972 for the chair in contemporary history.¹³² While in Bielefeld, Hildebrand published a brief survey of Nazi Germany's foreign policies, which placed the Nazi period in the broader context of German history since 1871 and also emphasized the domestic developments as significantly influencing foreign policies. In his analysis, Hildebrand did not fully embrace a *Primat der Innenpolitik*—which he conceded to be heuristically fruitful for Wehler's study on late nineteenth century imperialism—but he

¹²⁹ Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte. Begriff – Entwicklung – Probleme* (Göttingen, 1977); Id. (ed.), *Theorien in der Praxis des Historikers. Forschungsbeispiele und ihre Diskussion* (Göttingen, 1977). See also Thomas Welskopp, "Geschichte in der Versuchsanordnung Die westdeutsche Sozialgeschichte diskutiert über 'Theorien in der Praxis des Historikers'," in *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 3 (2006), no. 3, online edition, <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Welskopp-3-2006>.

¹³⁰ For a discussion of the encyclopedia project, see Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte*, 171-176.

¹³¹ Frank Becker, "Mit dem Fahrstuhl in die Sattelzeit? Koselleck und Wehler in Bielefeld," in Asal/Schlak (eds.), *Was war Bielefeld?*, 89-90.

¹³² Klaus Hildebrand, *Vom Reich zum Weltreich. Hitler, NDSAP und koloniale Frage, 1919-1945* (München, 1969).

emphasized the degree to which diplomatic historians had previously neglected these factors. Now, he argued, “we know how functionally dependent, sometimes even directly and intentionally, diplomatic actions have been put to service for domestic considerations.”¹³³ Despite this short-lived proximity to some of the Bielefelder’s positions, Hildebrand had very little in common methodologically with Wehler and Kocka. He became later one of the most outspoken defenders of diplomatic history as an autonomous field.¹³⁴ In addition, their personalities proved incompatible; the outspoken Wehler and the reserved Hildebrand did not get along socially.¹³⁵ Ultimately, Hildebrand left Bielefeld in 1974 for a chair at the University of Frankfurt. He later clashed with Wehler in a number of historiographical debates with strong political undertones, culminating in Wehler’s extremely unflattering portrayal of Hildebrand in his long essay on the 1980s *Historikerstreit*.¹³⁶

Christoph Klessmann, Hildebrand’s successor at Bielefeld, was much less of a methodological traditionalist and developed a strong interest in social history, yet he did not “officially” participate in the enterprise *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. Klessmann had received his PhD at the University of Bochum with a study on Nazi cultural policies and Polish resistance in the *Generalgouvernement*. He continued his interest in the relations between Poles and Germans in his *Habilitation* on Polish miners in the Ruhr region between

¹³³ Klaus Hildebrand, *Deutsche Aussenpolitik 1933-1945. Kalkül oder Dogma?* (Stuttgart, 1973), 10.

¹³⁴ Klaus Hildebrand, “Geschichte oder ‘Gesellschaftsgeschichte’? Die Notwendigkeit einer politischen Geschichtsschreibung von den internationalen Beziehungen,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 223 (1976), 328-357.

¹³⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler describes the problems during Hildebrand’s three years at Bielefeld’s history department in a letter to Theodor Schieder, December 1, 1980, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 386.

¹³⁶ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum “Historikerstreit”* (München, 1988), 24-28.

the 1870s and World War II.¹³⁷ At a time when West German historians focused either on the Federal Republic or on its Eastern counterpart, Klessmann wrote the first integrated account of postwar Germany, the first volume covering the postwar decade, the second continuing until 1970.¹³⁸

In this context, a few terminological comments are in order: how and when did the *Bielefelder Schule* acquire its name? Hans-Ulrich Wehler has repeatedly emphasized that the term “Bielefeld School” had indeed been an American invention, not a brand name used by the school’s protagonists themselves.¹³⁹ It appears that the American historian Alan Mitchell first used a similar label in the early 1980s, in a review of David Blackbourn’s and Geoff Eley’s *Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung*, a study later published in expanded form as *The Peculiarities of German History*. In this review, Mitchell referred to Bielefeld as “the Vatican City of the so-called ‘Kehrite’ or ‘critical’ school.”¹⁴⁰ A few years earlier James J. Sheehan had characterized German historians concerned with structural flaws of the German Empire’s political and social system as the “new orthodoxy”—an implicit yet obvious

¹³⁷ Christoph Klessmann, *Die Selbstbehauptung einer Nation. Nationalsozialistische Kulturpolitik und polnische Widerstandsbewegung im Generalgouvernement 1939-1945* (Düsseldorf, 1971); Id., *Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet 1870-1945. Soziale Integration und nationale Subkultur einer Minderheit in der deutschen Industriegesellschaft* (Göttingen 1978).

¹³⁸ Christoph Klessmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung. Deutsche Geschichte 1945-1955* (Göttingen, 1982); Id., *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation. Deutsche Geschichte 1955-1970* (Göttingen, 1988).

¹³⁹ Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*, 89-90.

¹⁴⁰ Alan Mitchell, “Review of Geoff Eley/David Blackbourn, *Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung: Die gescheiterte bürgerliche Revolution von 1848*,” *American Historical Review* 87 (1982), 1115.

reference to Wehler and other like-minded historians.¹⁴¹ In a similar vein, Konrad H. Jarausch had warned of the danger of replacing “the old orthodoxy with this new one.”¹⁴²

These pronouncements seem to corroborate Wehler’s statement that “internally [i.e. at the University of Bielefeld], we did not have the sense of building a school. Rather, we felt we had to seize the opportunity and try to reach the media.”¹⁴³ Yet whoever must be credited with coining the label *Bielefelder Schule*, the second sentence of Wehler’s statement clearly betrays awareness of the possibilities that the conditions of the early 1970s offered. Once Wehler and Kocka were settled at Bielefeld, they were able to use the institutional platform to advance their historiographical project, and as they had recognized the importance of gaining access to the media, they started a number of enterprises in this area. This is why they established the journal *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* and the monograph series *Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft*. Today, the web address www.bielefelder-schule.de links to Bielefeld’s history department.

The Politics of Publishing

A project not directly associated with *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, but decidedly a contribution to the historiographical “invention of tradition,” was the series *Deutsche Historiker*, which Hans-Ulrich Wehler edited. The first five volumes were published in 1971 and 1972; four additional volumes appeared in 1980 and 1982. Each volume contained

¹⁴¹ James J. Sheehan, “Review of Gerhard A. Ritter (ed.), *Gesellschaft, Parlament und Regierung: Zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus in Deutschland*; and Michael Stürmer, *Regierung und Reichstag im Bismarckstaat, 1871-1880: Cäsarismus oder Parlamentarismus*,” *Journal of Modern History* 48 (1976), 567.

¹⁴² Konrad H. Jarausch, “Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918*,” *Journal of Modern History* 48 (1976), 730-731.

¹⁴³ Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*, 90.

biographical portraits of seven to eight individuals. The series focused on three groups of scholars: the traditional “big names” of the German historical profession in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; scholarly outsiders, who now received the recognition that a traditionalist historical profession had been unwilling to grant them; and finally, scholars of other disciplines who were thought to have exerted noticeable influence on German historiography. Only the leading Nazi historian Walter Frank fit in none of these categories, but served as the example for a completely politicized profession. As always, Wehler quite explicitly stated the project’s goal: the series was supposed to offer brief and reliable introductions to important German historians, to broaden the disciplinary horizon by including important outsiders, and to contribute to the ongoing discussion about historiography’s societal role. Ultimately Wehler argued that it was crucial to acquire familiarity with the disciplinary past, before one could ultimately achieve a break, begin a reorientation, and implement a “paradigm change.” All of this was necessary, as “not few of us believe[d] new knowledge-guiding interests, research emphases, and methods to be essential.”¹⁴⁴

The choice of scholars covered in the series was programmatic, as were the authors writing about them. With few exceptions, Wehler 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. Instead of asking a former student of Gerhard Ritter’s to provide an essay about

¹⁴⁴ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Vorwort,” in Id. (ed.), *Deutsche Historiker. Volume I* (Göttingen, 1971), 6.

the *Doktorvater*, Wehler turned to Andreas Dorpalen, who had already published widely on German historiography, including Heinrich von Treitschke and Gerhard Ritter.¹⁴⁵

As was to be expected, the portraits of the historical profession's "great men" tended to be critical reassessments. Georg Iggers' essay on Heinrich von Treitschke emphasized the degree to which the Prussian historian, as a public intellectual, had influenced the German Empire's educated elites with his anti-British sentiments and his support for the Empire's naval policies. Ernst Schulin's portrait of Friedrich Meinecke argued that his work might have had greater innovative potential had Meinecke been inclined to more highly appreciate Enlightenment values, and Jürgen Kocka's evaluation of Otto Hintze distinguished between the reactionary citizen and the progressive historian.¹⁴⁶

By contrast, while the essays on scholarly outsiders by no means were simply hagiographic, the emphasis clearly lay on the historians' innovative potential, which a narrow-minded profession had previously been unwilling or unable to acknowledge. One example was Wehler's essay on Eckart Kehr. The unorthodox Marxist Arthur Rosenberg, who began his career as an ancient historian before moving to contemporary history, and whose study on the early Weimar Republic was rediscovered in the 1960s, also received

¹⁴⁵ Andreas Dorpalen, *Heinrich von Treitschke* (New Haven, Conn., 1957); Id., "Historiography as History: the Work of Gerhard Ritter," *Journal of Modern History* 34 (1962), 1-18. Dorpalen later published the first comprehensive account of East German historiography, *German History in Marxist Perspective: the East German Approach* (Detroit, MI, 1985).

¹⁴⁶ See Georg G. Iggers, "Heinrich von Treitschke," in Wehler (ed.), *Deutsche Historiker. Volume II*, (Göttingen, 1971), 66-80; Ernst Schulin, "Friedrich Meinecke," in Wehler (ed.), *Deutsche Historiker. Volume I* (Göttingen, 1971), 39-57; and Jürgen Kocka, "Otto Hintze," in Wehler (ed.), *Deutsche Historiker. Volume III* (Göttingen, 1972), 41-64.

acknowledgement, as did the historian of imperialism and Rosenberg's fellow émigré George W. F. Hallgarten.¹⁴⁷

The purpose of the series was not lost on the older generation of historians who still held the institutional command of the profession. Volker R. Berghahn's essay on Ludwig Dehio, depicting him as somewhat of a mandarin and *bon vivant*, aroused the ire of Theodor Schieder, who sent Berghahn a personal letter expressing his irritation.¹⁴⁸ However, the debate regarding this historiographical invention of tradition cannot be reduced to a generational issue. In a review of several volumes of the series, Detlef Junker (born in 1939) dismissed the alleged correlation between political conservatism and methodological orientation—toward historicism—and insistence on historiographical “objectivity.” The development of the German historical profession, Junker claimed, revealed that “conservative” and “liberal” historians often held similar views about the possibility and desirability of strict objectivity.¹⁴⁹

The monograph series *Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft* also underscored the swift arrival of the Bielefelder within the West German historical profession. Started in 1972, the series offered young historians the opportunity to publish their dissertations, which

¹⁴⁷ Helmut Berding, “Arthur Rosenberg,” in Wehler (ed.) *Deutsche Historiker. Volume IV* (Göttingen, 1972), 81-96. See also Mario Kessler, *Arthur Rosenberg. Ein Historiker im Zeitalter der Katastrophen, 1889-1943* (Köln, 2003); Joachim Radkau, “George W. F. Hallgarten,” in Wehler (ed.) *Deutsche Historiker. Volume VI* (Göttingen, 1980), 103-118.

¹⁴⁸ Volker R. Berghahn, “Ludwig Dehio,” in Wehler (ed.), *Deutsche Historiker. Volume IV*, (Göttingen, 1972), 97-116. As Schieder told Hans Rothfels, “a Dr. Volker R. Berghahn, who teaches at the University of East Anglia, just sent me an offprint of an appraisal of Ludwig Dehio, which appeared in the series ‘Deutsche Historiker’ edited by Hans-Ulrich Wehler. Page 109 of this essay contains sentences which I found so outrageous that I replied with a letter that I enclose in carbon-copy to you.” Theodor Schieder to Hans Rothfels, November 8, 1972, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 1246. See also the Schieder's letter to Berghahn, December 22, 1972, in possession of Volker R. Berghahn, who kindly provided a copy.

¹⁴⁹ Detlef Junker, “Review of Wehler, *Deutsche Historiker, Volumes I-III*,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 217 (1973), 102-105.

Wehler believed would not have appeared in traditional historical monograph series.¹⁵⁰ Yet *Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft* did more than that: older scholars, such as the economic historian Wolfram Fischer, whose studies on industrialization became the series' first volume, were able to publish selected articles. Hans Rosenberg's early studies on nineteenth century liberalism appeared in the series, as well as the Festschrift on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, and Wehler's rejected first *Habilitation* on the rise of American imperialism.¹⁵¹ The majority of authors were methodologically and politically close to the series editors. Yet Wehler's main counterpart Thomas Nipperdey was able to publish collected essays, which, as one reviewer noted, attempted to "move German historiography beyond the sterile extremes of moralizing critique versus apologetics" and constituted a sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit critique of the *Bielefelder Schule*.¹⁵² This suggests that one did not have to be a partisan of the Bielefelder to gain access to their publication venues, even though a certain proximity did not hurt, either.

The foundation of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (*GuG*) was arguably the most significant project accompanying the rise of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. It took place during the second *Gründerzeit* of the post-World War II West German historical profession in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁵³ The establishment of a number of new journals was

¹⁵⁰ Wehler, *Eine lebhafte Kampfsituation*, 90-91.

¹⁵¹ Wolfram Fischer, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft im Zeitalter der Industrialisierung. Aufsätze – Studien – Vorträge* (Göttingen, 1972); Hans Rosenberg, *Politische Denkströmungen im deutschen Vormärz*, Göttingen 1972; Hans-Ulrich Wehler (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte Heute. Festschrift für Hans Rosenberg zum 70. Geburtstag*, Göttingen 1974; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Der Aufstieg des amerikanischen Imperialismus. Studien zur Entwicklung des Imperium Americanum 1865-1900*, Göttingen 1974.

¹⁵² H. Michael Ermath, "Review of Thomas Nipperdey, *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur neueren Geschichte*," *American Historical Review* 82 (1977), 665.

¹⁵³ Winfried Schulze has termed the early 1950s a *Gründerzeit*, since these years marked the foundation of a number of historical institutes and working groups, including the *Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte*, the

partly the consequence of a relative abundance of resources. As a result, some historical epochs now received their own publications: the early modern period, for example, the *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*. More importantly, however, the increase in journals reflected the desire of some historians to broaden the scholarly landscape.¹⁵⁴

The project of founding *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, in order to advance “history as a social science,” however, differed from the other efforts unfolding around the same time. Whether their proponents admitted it or not, *GuG* possessed a clear anti-establishment bent. Almost immediately upon its inception, it became the publication its founders had wanted to create—a place where leading scholars not only presented innovative research but also argued about the methodological contours of the profession. In 1976, Thomas Nipperdey published his influential critique of Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, and in the early 1980s, Hans Medick, by then a proponent of the emerging *Alltagsgeschichte*, launched his call for a reorientation of historical scholarship. Later in the same decade, *GuG* was the only scholarly journal offering a forum to the protagonists of the notorious *Historikerstreit*.

Moreover, while the emerging *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* managed to establish other publication outlets as well, *GuG* was certainly its “flagship.” Enterprises such as the monograph series *Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft* also became success stories; as of March 2010, 194 volumes had appeared. Yet only the journal symbolized the project to redefine the disciplinary boundaries. As we have seen, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, the driving

Institut für Zeitgeschichte, the *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte*, and the *Kommission für die Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien*. See Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, 228-265.

¹⁵⁴ For the context of the institutional expansion of German universities, see Eckel, *Geist der Zeit*, 112-132.

forced behind the ambitious undertaking, had already gained editorial experience while at the University of Cologne during the 1960s, when he had been responsible for the historical subseries of Kiepenheuer & Witsch's so-called "yellow series" (*Gelbe Reihe*), which aimed at introducing students to key problems in modern history as well as methodology.

The events surrounding the foundation of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* illustrate the contemporary mechanisms of the German historical profession very well. In July 1974 Wehler submitted his proposal to the *Stiftung Volkswagenwerk*, asking for financial support. Arguing for the necessity of the new publication, Wehler explained how *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. Moreover, the "quasi monopoly" of *Historische Zeitschrift (HZ)* in the area of general history had led to a long-lasting "publication jam."¹⁵⁵ The foundation turned to Theodor Schieder, who at that time had been the editor of *HZ* for fifteen years, for an evaluation of Wehler's proposal. In other words, the foundation asked Schieder to comment on a project possibly leading to unwelcome competition for his own journal. In a comprehensive response Schieder defended *HZ* against the explicit and implicit criticism raised by Wehler. He denied that *HZ* had neglected social history, he pointed out that several of the younger German historians involved in the establishment of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* had been able to publish in *HZ*, and he emphasized that his journal was of course in close contact with numerous foreign scholars, even though it did not have a

¹⁵⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler to Stiftung Volkswagenwerk, 25 July 1974, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 1301.

formalized committee as *GuG* did. Ultimately, Schieder voiced some doubts regarding *GuG*'s economic prospects, but nevertheless admitted that the foundation of such a journal might serve a good purpose.¹⁵⁶ It is unclear whether or not the foundation's decision was based on Schieder's evaluation, but a few months later, *Stiftung Volkswagenwerk* notified Wehler that it was unable to provide financial assistance.¹⁵⁷

Nevertheless, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* soon established itself as one of the leading German historical journals. Since Hans-Ulrich Wehler in the 1980s discarded the editorial correspondence—an incredible move for a historian, yet understandable if one considers Wehler's eagerness to control his own historicization—we cannot properly reconstruct the journal's early years.¹⁵⁸ Discussions among the three managing editors, initially Wehler, Hans-Jürgen Puhle, and Wolfgang J. Mommsen, will therefore remain unknown. Still, one can easily recognize the appeal the new journal had for its readers. It featured a “discussion forum,” in which historiographical trends were discussed or important new publications were reviewed, and it had a modern, simple layout. These aspects distinguished the journal from the old-fashioned *Historische Zeitschrift*, whose pages at the time had still to be cut open with scissors.

These examples suggest that the proponents of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* realized early on that in order to achieve their goal, the production of innovative scholarship

¹⁵⁶ Theodor Schieder to D. Klose (Stiftung Volkswagenwerk), 3 September 1974, BAK, NL Schieder, Box 1301.

¹⁵⁷ G. Gambke (Stiftung Volkswagenwerk) to Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 6 December 1974, BAK, NL Schieder, Box 1301.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Welskopp, today a professor at the University of Bielefeld, and a student and research assistant at Bielefeld in the mid-1980s, remembers being enlisted by Wehler to discard the files, which he now regrets not having saved. Note to the author, May 5, 2007.

would not suffice. The successful promotion of their work through a number of different strategies would prove to be similarly important. As Hans-Ulrich Wehler put it in 2007, he had realized that “one had to fight for one’s convictions, and in our professions this means: one has to somehow gain access to the means of publication.”¹⁵⁹ Subsequently, these historians not only attempted to disseminate their views through academic publications but also addressed a broader public through contributions in quality newspapers.

Das Deutsche Kaiserreich

While it was obviously not an editorial product, Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s *Das deutsche Kaiserreich* often appears to have been the foundational cornerstone of the *Bielefelder Schule*. This was not the case, as we have seen, but the book nevertheless became for many observers the emblematic product of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. Therefore it elicited numerous responses in the form of comprehensive review essays. Last but not least, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich* was a commercial success; by 1975, 25,000 copies were sold, and by 1994, seven editions had been published.

Wehler himself stated in the book’s introduction that he attempted in this “problem-oriented historical structural analysis” to contribute to the “explanation of this disastrous German *Sonderweg*” between 1871 and 1945.¹⁶⁰ At the same time Wehler understood historiography as having an “emancipatory function,” sharpening the critical consciousness of citizens in a democracy.¹⁶¹ *Das deutsche Kaiserreich* was less a coherent narrative than a

¹⁵⁹ Wehler, *Eine lebhafte Kampfsituation*, 76.

¹⁶⁰ Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 11.

¹⁶¹ See Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 12.

programmatic sketch for further research, but it also provided a summary of recent historiography, accomplished by younger historians since the mid-1960s. At the same time, Wehler's study was a scathing polemic against "traditionalists," "neo-traditionalists," and "neo-historicists," labels he attributed to what he considered old-school political and diplomatic historians.

According to Wehler, the fundamental problem of the German Empire was Bismarck's and the old elite's victory against the liberal bourgeoisie in the Prussian constitutional conflict of the 1860s. After the war of unification in 1870/1871, which Wehler interpreted as a "preventive war of domestic political integration," Bismarck succeeded in establishing an "autocratic, half-absolutist, pseudo-constitutionalism" which developed after his resignation into an authoritarian polycracy.¹⁶² What proved fatal in the long run for German history was that, according to Wehler, a personal continuity persisted in many areas even after the revolution of 1918, and the "traditional elites" thus were able to serve as *Steigbügelhalter* ("holders of the stirrup") for Adolf Hitler in 1933.

To be sure, Wehler did not propose a linear development of German history towards the National Socialist abyss; he did not speak of any sort of "inevitability." But he provided a fairly schematic view of the German empire, and his employment of numerous heuristic concepts certainly increased this impression: Wehler interpreted Bismarck's rule as a "Bonapartist regime," and his government pursued a *Sammlungspolitik* (a "policy of collection" of all bourgeois counterrevolutionary forces) in order to fend off the democratic forces. Moreover, the government reacted to the "Great Depression"—Hans Rosenberg's

¹⁶² Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, 37 and 63.

term—which lasted from the mid-1870s through the mid-1890s, with economic policies labeled “organized capitalism.” Finally, Wehler explained the German Empire’s foreign policy with the theory of “social imperialism:” domestic tensions should be averted by a successfully aggressive foreign policy. Here Wehler’s reliance on the *Primat der Innenpolitik* concept of Eckart Kehr was again evident.¹⁶³

Not surprisingly, Wehler’s study met with considerable resistance within the German historical profession. The diplomatic historians Klaus Hildebrand and Andreas Hillgruber attacked Wehler’s notion that the German Empire’s foreign policy resulted from its domestic situation, and they also denied Wehler’s claim that political history should be dependent on (and subordinated to) social history.¹⁶⁴ Thomas Nipperdey, for two decades Wehler’s most distinguished opponent, chastised the Bielefelder for what he considered Wehler’s overly deterministic and reductionist argumentation, and above all for his acting “simultaneously as prosecutor and judge” – according to Nipperdey, Wehler was conducting “a trial against the great-grandfathers.”¹⁶⁵ He also considered Wehler’s relentless criticism of the Prussian-German elites and his anti-nationalist stance as problematic and thus labeled him *Treitschke redivivus* (reversed Treitschke).¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ See Kehr, *Der Primat der Innenpolitik*.

¹⁶⁴ See Andreas Hillgruber, “Politische Geschichte in moderner Sicht,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 216 (1973), 529 – 552; Klaus Hildebrand, “Geschichte oder ‘Gesellschaftsgeschichte’? Die Notwendigkeit einer politischen Geschichtsschreibung von den internationalen Beziehungen,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 223 (1976), 328 – 357; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Kritik und kritische Antikritik,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 225, (1977), 347 – 384

¹⁶⁵ Thomas Nipperdey, “Wehlers ‘Kaiserreich’. Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975), 542.

¹⁶⁶ Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896) in 1874 took Leopold von Ranke’s chair at the University of Berlin. A former liberal and now ardent Prussian-German nationalist, Treitschke became the unofficial court historian of the German Empire.

American historians were able to respond to the social historians' challenge in a more sober manner. After all, it was not their great-grandfathers whom Wehler had put on trial. But this did not mean that Americans fully embraced the concepts and interpretations advanced by the German social historians. As far as it is possible to generalize, Americans welcomed the "fresh air" that Wehler and his followers brought into German historiography, but at the same time they cautioned against exaggerations and blind spots. In an overall fairly positive review, Konrad H. Jarausch argued that while *Das deutsche Kaiserreich* comprised useful "conceptual guides for [future] research, many of Wehler's constructs are still highly questionable, and though they contain important partial truths, they are too fragile for the erection of an entire Wilhelminian façade" – a reference to Wehler's reliance on Eckart Kehr.¹⁶⁷ Eventually Wehler, "because of his justified animus against conventional wisdom, [...] has consciously overstressed the negative entries on the balance sheet" of the German Empire.¹⁶⁸ An English edition of *Das deutsche Kaiserreich* was published twelve years later, in 1985. Apparently, several translators were unable to please Wehler, and the text went through multiple revisions, which accounted for the enormous delay.¹⁶⁹ Still, the final result did not read as well as the German original, and furthermore the debate on the German Empire had already moved in other directions.

¹⁶⁷ Jarausch, "Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918*," 730-731.

¹⁶⁸ Jarausch, "Review of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918*," 732.

¹⁶⁹ *The German Empire, 1871-1918* (Dover, NH, 1985).

Programmatic Statements and First Responses

Understandably, as historians' personalities matter in the process of gaining professional influence, the tone of a historical work also contributes to its reception. Since Jürgen Kocka usually expressed his criticism of the historiographical status quo more diplomatically than Hans-Ulrich Wehler, his studies never triggered the same fierce reactions, even though Kocka's distance from "traditionalist" diplomatic historians was certainly no less significant. One example was the reception of his *Klassengesellschaft im Krieg*, a study that drew on Karl Marx to a greater extent than most other contributions of the Bielefelder. The diplomatic historian Andreas Hillgruber concluded his review with the telling statement: "Many intelligent thoughts in this study will certainly inspire further research in social history. Nevertheless, the question remains whether the methodological and theoretical effort has not been overdone, and whether the same results could have been achieved without it."¹⁷⁰

Like Wehler, Kocka also repeatedly articulated his vision of a social history. Combining several articles he had written between 1966 and 1975, he published a programmatic text, *Sozialgeschichte*, in 1977. In this volume Kocka first outlined a few epistemological questions, before turning to the development of social history in German historiography since the late nineteenth century.¹⁷¹ Kocka explicitly distanced social history from the *Strukturgeschichte* that Werner Conze has advocated since the late 1950s. This move, while certainly grounded in methodological differences, also had a strategic function, as Conze had been one of the few "modernizers" of the profession. Now Wehler and Kocka

¹⁷⁰ Andreas Hillgruber, "Review of Jürgen Kocka, *Klassengesellschaft im Krieg*. *Deutsche Sozialgeschichte 1914-1918*," *Historische Zeitschrift* 220 (1975), 758.

¹⁷¹ Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte. Begriff – Entwicklung – Probleme* (Göttingen, 1977).

managed in tandem to outpace him in this capacity. Kocka then distinguished between *Sozialgeschichte* as “history of an area/a segment” (*Geschichte eines Teilbereichs*) and *Sozialgeschichte* as history of society (*Geschichte ganzer Gesellschaften*). Finally, the younger Bielefelder articulated his position regarding the societal purpose of historiography, cautioning against demands to provide West Germans with an identifiable past. While Kocka argued for a “limited political mandate” of historiography, in the sense that it should help stabilize a liberal-democratic society through historical education, he objected to both its complete politicization and the notion that apolitical historiography was either possible or even desirable.¹⁷²

Not surprisingly, Werner Conze himself provided a first response. Yet his review in *Historische Zeitschrift* hardly engaged the volume. At the end of what was a summary rather than a critique, Conze concluded: “The decidedness of his argumentation is impressive. Polemics are used generously. This calls for answers.”¹⁷³ But Conze himself did not attempt to provide one. Thomas Etzemüller has argued that by the late 1970s, Conze—as well as Theodor Schieder—realized that they were no longer at the forefront of the methodological debates, even though they still occupied important positions within the West German historical profession. Instead, they thought it to be upon the next generation to argue about historiography’s direction, and Conze was therefore pleased to see the British historian Richard J. Evans (born in 1947) articulate a critique of the Bielefelder.¹⁷⁴ As the Bielefelder

¹⁷² Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*, 112-131.

¹⁷³ Werner Conze, “Review of Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 229 (1979), 96-97.

¹⁷⁴ Werner Conze, “Review of Richard J. Evans (ed.), *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany*,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 66 (1979), 288-290. For the context, see Thomas Etzemüller, *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte*, 341-343.

themselves would notice during the next decade, the transition from historiographical challenger to historiographical establishment could unfold quite suddenly, and the consequences for the new members of the establishment were not always welcome.

But even now the response that the Bielefelder elicited on the other side of the Atlantic was not just simple agreement. On the one hand, Kocka's manifesto *Sozialgeschichte* was received as a "very personal, intelligently argued statement of belief that reflects the liberality and social seriousness of a good deal of historical writing of the younger group of West German historians."¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, Gordon Craig noted in his review of a Fritz Fischer *Festschrift* that the "preoccupation with continuity . . . threaten[ed] to become an obsession."¹⁷⁶ Such a remark, while not directly aimed at the Bielefelder, signaled emerging American reservations about the focus of Germany's alleged deviation from a Western development, for the "continuity thesis" and the "*Sonderweg* thesis" were closely related.

Already the 1972 *Historikertag* in Regensburg had illustrated the issue of 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.¹⁷⁷ A particularly good example was the discussion surrounding the concept of "Organized Capitalism" that Wehler, Kocka, and others first

¹⁷⁵ Georg G. Iggers, "Review of Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*," *American Historical Review* 84 (1979), 414.

¹⁷⁶ Gordon Craig, "Review of Imanuel Geiss and Bernd-Jürgen Wendt (eds.), *Deutschland in der Weltpolitik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*," *American Historical Review* 81 (1976), 403.

¹⁷⁷ Berghahn, "Fritz Fischer und seine Schüler," 148.

promoted for the study of the German economy from the 1870s to the early 1920s.¹⁷⁸ 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.¹⁷⁹ 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.”¹⁸⁰

Such reservations, articulated before the publication of Wehler’s *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*, already anticipated American attitudes toward the *Sonderweg* thesis, which overall never gained many supporters in the United States. This is a surprising fact, especially if one considers that the *Bielefelder Schule* was arguably the German historiographical school with the closest ties to American historians. As Hans-Ulrich Wehler remarked when he received the AHA honorary foreign membership in 2000,

the transatlantic dialogue between American and German historians since the late 1940s is based on the fundamental experiences of the political generations that lived through the Nazi dictatorship, World War II, the postwar years, and

¹⁷⁸ See Gerald D. Feldman, “Der deutsche Organisierte Kapitalismus während der Kriegs- und Inflationsjahre,” in Heinrich August Winkler (ed.), *Organisierter Kapitalismus. Voraussetzungen und Anfänge* (Göttingen, 1974), 150-171, and the contributions 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, in the same volume.

¹⁷⁹ Charles S. Maier, Interview with the author, October 30/November 1, 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Feldman, “Der deutsche Organisierte Kapitalismus während der Kriegs- und Inflationsjahre,” 150 and 152.

the founding of the Federal Republic. These common experiences led to close contacts; I am someone who has profited immensely from them. The generations of Carl Schorske, Leonard Krieger, Hajo Holborn, Arno Mayer, Jim Sheehan, Henry Turner, Gerald Feldman, Charles Maier, and others have influenced in a lasting way the political generation in Germany to which I belong.¹⁸¹

Similarly, American accounts of German historiography have generally pictured the Bielefelder as almost exclusively embodying its progressive tradition. In contrast to the Bielefelder themselves, they generally did not emphasize the “American connection” of this school. Yet there was still a clear tendency to depict the German social historians as fighting the good fight.¹⁸²

In light of these pronouncements, one has to ask whether the *Bielefelder Schule* for theoretical and methodological purposes borrowed from American historiographical examples. To some degree, this was certainly the case. For his study on American white-collar workers between 1890 and 1940, Jürgen Kocka was significantly influenced by fellow researchers at Harvard’s Charles Warren Center led by Oscar Handlin, as well as by Alfred D. Chandler’s School of Business Administration.¹⁸³ Similarly, Hans-Ulrich Wehler built on his knowledge of debates by American historians about American imperialism for his *Habilitation* on *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*.¹⁸⁴ In fact, being familiar with both the

¹⁸¹ Andreas Daum, “German Historiography in Transatlantic Perspective,” 121.

¹⁸² See Georg Iggers, “Introduction,” in Id. (ed.), *The Social History of Politics* (Leamington Spa, 1985), 1-45; James Retallack, “Social History with a Vengeance? Some Reactions to H.-U. Wehler’s ‘Das deutsche Kaiserreich,’” *German Studies Review* 7 (1984): 423-450; Roger Fletcher, “Recent Developments in West German Historiography: The Bielefeld School and Its Critics,” *German Studies Review* 7 (1984): 451-480; Robert Moeller, “The Kaiserreich Recast: Continuity and Change in Modern German Historiography,” *Journal of Social History* 17 (1984), 655-683.

¹⁸³ See Jürgen Kocka, *Angestellte zwischen Faschismus und Demokratie*; Kocka, “Nachruf Fritz Redlich,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 5 (1979), 176; Kocka, interview with the author, March 21, 2007.

¹⁸⁴ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, 11.

extant literature and—in person—the “Wisconsin School” of William A. Williams and his students, Wehler had written a study about the rise of American imperialism between the 1860s and the 1900s first, before turning to the German Empire.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, and more importantly, in his programmatic statements on the methodological renewal of German historiography, Wehler often used developments within the American historical profession as a positive counterexample, or at least as a continuous reference point.¹⁸⁶ By no means did he endorse all new trends arising in the United States; Wehler was, for example, highly critical of the more dogmatic cliometricians.¹⁸⁷ But he always praised what he perceived as a greater openness among American historians in adopting new theories and methods—unless this openness led them to embrace Michel Foucault.¹⁸⁸

Yet as Wehler began to outline his concept for a synthetic *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, he did not explicitly rely on theories or concepts prevailing in the American historical profession. More generally, while Max Weber was reintroduced in West German Political Science and Sociology via the United States by Talcott Parsons and others, this was not the case in the historical profession.¹⁸⁹ Wehler encountered Weber not in the United States, but through his *Doktorvater* Theodor Schieder and sociologist René König at the University of

¹⁸⁵ This study was later published as Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Der Aufstieg des amerikanischen Imperialismus. Studien zur Entwicklung des Imperium Americanum 1865-1900* (Göttingen, 1974); see also Wehler, “Historiker sollten auch politisch zu den Positionen stehen, die sie in der Wissenschaft vertreten,” in Hohls and Jarausch (eds.), *Versäumte Fragen*, 246-248; Wehler, interview with author, July 2, 2007.

¹⁸⁶ See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Geschichte und Soziologie,” in Wehler, *Geschichte als Historische Sozialwissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1973), 9.

¹⁸⁷ Wehler, “Geschichte und Ökonomie,” in Wehler, *Geschichte als Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, 62.

¹⁸⁸ See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Historisches Denken am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 2000).

¹⁸⁹ For a survey of German sociology’s development after 1945, see M. Rainer Lepsius, “Die Entwicklung der Soziologie nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg 1945-1967,” in *Deutsche Soziologie seit 1945*, ed. Günther Lüschen (Opladen, 1979), 25-70; for the impact on American as well as émigré social scientists on West German political science, see Wilhelm Bleek, *Geschichte der Politikwissenschaft in Deutschland* (Munich, 2001), 265ff.

Cologne.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, Jürgen Kocka developed his version of social history in a German rather than a German-American context.¹⁹¹ Although both Wehler and Kocka were much more aware of new trends in both United States history and social sciences than most of their German colleagues, this familiarity apparently did not directly affect their respective conceptions of *Sozialgeschichte*.

Regarding the interpretive dimension, it appears that American historians ultimately contributed more to the remodeling than the construction of the *Bielefelder Schule*. Among these scholars was Gerald Feldman, who, as we have seen, turned out to be an early and outspoken critic of the concept of “Organized Capitalism” that Wehler, Kocka, and others first promoted at the German *Historikertag* in 1972 for the study of the German economy from the 1870s to the early 1920s.¹⁹² Feldman’s own work on World War I and German inflation also led him to question the strong emphasis on continuities between 1871 and 1945 and to instead characterize World War I as an important caesura in German history.¹⁹³

The Bismarck biographer Otto Pflanze questioned the heuristic value of the concepts of *Sammlungspolitik*, *Sozialimperialismus*, and *Bonapartismus*, which Wehler employed in his seminal *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*.¹⁹⁴ More generally, Pflanze remained suspicious of the

¹⁹⁰ Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*, 127f.; Wehler outlines his concept of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* in *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Erster Band: Vom Feudalismus des Alten Reiches bis zur defensiven Modernisierung der Reformära, 1700-1815* (Munich, 1987), 6-31.

¹⁹¹ Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*, chap. 1, and *passim*. See also the contributions of Kocka, “Max Webers Bedeutung für die Geschichtswissenschaft,” and Wehler, “Max Webers Klassentheorie und die neuere Sozialgeschichte,” in Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Max Weber, der Historiker* (Göttingen, 1986), 13-27, and 193-202.

¹⁹² See Feldman, “Der deutsche Organisierte Kapitalismus während der Kriegs- und Inflationsjahre,” 150-171.

¹⁹³ Gerald D. Feldman, *Iron and Steel in the German Inflation: 1916-1923* (Princeton, NJ, 1977); Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economic, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924* (Princeton, NJ, 1993); Feldman, personal e-mail to the author, March 4, 2003.

¹⁹⁴ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918* (Göttingen, 1973).

Historische Sozialwissenschaft project, cautioning against a “drifting into the magnetic fields of generalization.”¹⁹⁵ One might speculate whether it was a coincidence that Pflanze was able to publish his comprehensive critique of Wehler in *Historische Zeitschrift*, which Bismarck biographer Lothar Gall had edited since 1975. Pflanze’s nationality could have increased the appeal of his positions, as it contradicted the methodological and interpretive proximity between American historians of modern Germany and the proponents of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* that Wehler repeatedly stressed. Gall himself had already articulated his own reservations regarding the “Bonapartism” concept in his journal a few years earlier.¹⁹⁶

Two students of Klaus Epstein, Margaret Anderson and Kenneth Barkin, published a comprehensive critique of both the *kleindeutsche* perspective and the anti-Catholic bias, which they saw as not limited to but also represented by the *Bielefelder Schule*.¹⁹⁷ Finally, when James J. Sheehan argued in his classic study on German liberalism against recent scholarship, which tended to “explain the liberals’ failure in terms of their moral deficiencies,” this critique applied to the *Bielefelder Schule* as well.¹⁹⁸

All this suggests that even though transatlantic contacts were undoubtedly significant for the *Bielefelder*, they did not manifest themselves decisively in their works. And yet, the “American connection” served a specific purpose during the fierce controversies that accompanied the establishment of the *Bielefelder Schule* within the German historical profession in the late 1960s and afterward: it became both a reference point and a label,

¹⁹⁵ Otto Pflanze, “Bismarcks Herrschaftstechnik als Problem der gegenwärtigen Historiographie,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 234 (1982), 561-599, here 562.

¹⁹⁶ Lothar Gall, “Bismarck und der Bonapartismus,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 223 (1976), 618-637.

¹⁹⁷ See Margaret Anderson and Kenneth Barkin, “The Myth of the Puttkamer Purge and the Reality of the Kulturkampf,” *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1982), 647-686.

¹⁹⁸ James J. Sheehan, *German Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1978), 2.

which the Bielefelder attached to themselves. Applying a clever promotional strategy, the Bielefelder pictured themselves not only as the “critical” and “interdisciplinary” school of modern German history, but also as the most international, or more specifically the most “Americanized,” one.¹⁹⁹ Accordingly, the Bielefelders’ 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 on their opponents’ lack of a critical stance, an interdisciplinary orientation, and a sufficiently international perspective.²⁰⁰ When the “traditionalists” took issue with the project of history as a social science, the Bielefelder responded that this very definition of history was widely accepted in the United States, implying that only a few old-fashioned Germans refused to accept a development that had become common wisdom abroad.²⁰¹ In reality, however, some Americans were as suspicious of the Bielefelders’ *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* as the German “conservatives.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Most recently, Hans-Ulrich Wehler has reiterated this point in the interview/memoir volume *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation*, 39-43 and 74-80.

²⁰⁰ For a critique of Hillgruber’s and Hildebrand’s methodological and political conservatism, see Wehler, “Geschichtswissenschaft heute,” in Habermas (ed.), *Stichworte zur geistigen Situation der Zeit*, and later in Wehler, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung*, 26 and 36f.; Wehler, “Moderne Politikgeschichte oder ‘Grosse Politik der Kabinette,’” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975), 344-369; Wehler, “Kritik und kritische Antikritik,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 225 (1977), 347-384; Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*, 68; editorial statement, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975): 5-7. 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 Wehler, *Krisenherde des Kaiserreichs 1871-1918. Studien zur deutschen Sozial- und Verfassungsgeschichte* (Göttingen, 2nd ed., 1979), 12, where he emphasizes the “denkbar schmale Angebot an wahrhaft modernen politikhistorischen Arbeiten. . . . Lohnen sie, stammen sie oft aus den Vereinigten Staaten oder neuerdings aus England. Hierzulande müssen die Vertreter der ‘modernen Politikgeschichte’ noch einen erheblichen Nachholbedarf befriedigen.”

²⁰¹ See Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*, 191, footnote 5; and Wehler, “Moderne Politikgeschichte oder ‘Grosse Politik der Kabinette,’” 358-359, and “Kritik und kritische Antikritik,” 367.

²⁰² Otto Pflanze was not alone in questioning the far-reaching claims of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. In 1971, John L. Snell wrote to Theodor Schieder, “Thank you for your offprint of your essay in the Heimpel Festschrift.

These remarks are not meant to diminish the existence or the significance of the transatlantic scholarly contacts that West German historians in general and the *Bielefelder Schule* in particular have maintained throughout the last decades. Instead, they suggest that historians, in order to be successful (i.e., to reach a wider audience), must not only produce convincing scholarly work, they must also promote it well. The Bielefelder clearly succeeded in both areas. Part of the Bielefelders' promotional strategy was to claim the American historians of modern Germany as allies in their progressive historiographical enterprise. Even though this was a considerable oversimplification, it worked, as most historiographical surveys illustrate.²⁰³

Ultimately, by the late 1960s, German and American historians had different views of the stage at which the reconsideration of modern German history had arrived. The revisionist impulse, initially much stronger on the American side, was now increasing within the West German historical profession. An American observer later wrote about the Fischer-Kontroverse as the “declaration of independence” for younger German historians²⁰⁴—and he was certainly correct: by the late 1960s, the Germans of Wehler's generation had declared their independence, but had yet to fight most of the revolutionary wars. By contrast, American historians took the controversy as a sign that West German historians had finally achieved the long overdue pluralization of their profession. Most Americans no longer saw

I find it a perceptive statement of the differences between History and the social sciences and a timely reminder of the limits to which History can or should be made into a social science.” John L. Snell to Theodor Schieder, December 31, 1971, BAK, NL Schieder, Box 175.

²⁰³ Main examples include Iggers, “Introduction,” in *The Social History of Politics*, ed. Iggers; Retallack, “Social History with a Vengeance?”; Roger Fletcher, “Recent Developments in West German Historiography”; Moeller, “The Kaiserreich Recast.”

²⁰⁴ Theodore Hamerow, “Guilt, Redemption, and Writing German History,” *American Historical Review* 88 (1983), 66.

the front lines as running between apologetic reactionaries on the one side and revisionist progressives on the other. For the Americans, by the late 1960s the revolution was already over.

In West Germany, however, the fierce historiographical debates continued into the 1980s. The Bielefelder were still arguing with methodological and political conservatives, who since the 1970s seemed to gain support among an important constituency, the non-professional audience. The supposedly outdated biographical genre became fashionable again, much to the dismay of the Bielefelder who did not believe very much in its heuristic value. In addition, the social historians received competition in the area of political progressivism, as historians of everyday life and gender historians also claimed to pursue an emancipatory historiographical enterprise. These debates are at the center of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

The 1980s: In Defense of Intellectual Hegemony

By the late 1970s, the *Bielefelder Schule* had become a fixture within the West German historical profession. Its protagonists did not—and never would—constitute the dominant “new orthodoxy,” as unsympathetic observers liked to lament.¹ But hardly a decade after the school’s founding the Bielefelder had clearly established themselves as an important historiographical camp in the Federal Republic. Despite Bielefeld’s only mildly appealing geographical location—Hans-Ulrich Wehler himself liked to refer to it as the “East-Westphalian steppe”—it assumed the status of a pilgrimage site for many students of history, in particular those with an interest in theory and interdisciplinary work. To be sure, *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* did not constitute the only attraction at the university; Reinhart Koselleck and the sociologist Niklas Luhmann gained a large number of followers as well. The *Bielefelder Schule* did, however, unquestionably shape the intellectual profile of both the history department and the university to a significant extent.²

¹ Imanuel Geiss, “Unsere ‘Neue Orthodoxie’ ist heute viel illiberaler als ihre akademischen Väter nach 1945,” in Rüdiger Hohls/Konrad H. Jarausch (eds.), *Versäumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart, 2000), 218-239; Thomas Nipperdey, “Organisierter Kapitalismus, Verbände und die Krise des Kaiserreichs,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 5 (1979), 418-433, designation of “orthodoxy” 424/425.

² See the student day recollections by Gustav Seibt, “Bielefeld im Raketenwinter 1983/84,” and by Valentin Groebner, “Theoriegesättigt. Angekommen in Bielefeld 1989,” in Stefan Schlak/Sonja Asal (eds.), *Was war Bielefeld? Eine ideengeschichtliche Nachfrage* (Göttingen, 2009), 171-178 and 179-189.

In addition, the *Bielefelder Schule* had also gained a prominent space in the West German intellectual sphere, and by the early 1980s, its protagonists published regularly in newspapers and magazines. The weekly *Die Zeit* and the monthly magazine *Merkur* in particular offered these historians a forum to review important new studies and to comment on historical-political issues. The editors of these publications knew that they could always expect resolutely argued articles, written for a broader audience. Together with other like-minded historians such as Hans Mommsen, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Heinrich August Winkler, the Bielefelder constituted a distinct part of the Federal Republic's left-liberal intelligentsia. Though certainly differing in temperament, none of these historians was one to dodge a controversy, and all of them self-confidently fought for a politically progressive historiography.

The 1980s, however, saw a number of challenges for these historians, which this chapter will survey. What made the Bielefelders' intellectual position so difficult was the combination of continuing conservative criticism on the one hand and new historiographical competition from the Left on the other. The charge of methodological traditionalism or even apologetics, so conveniently and generously employed against diplomatic historians, could not be used against neo-Marxists, historians of everyday life, and women's historians. Indeed, the political proximity of the Bielefelder and their progressive critics may have added to the acrimony of their debates. The controversies of the 1980s also serve as a reminder of the interrelationship between historiography and politics: in West Germany, the SPD found itself caught between the resurgent CDU and the newly established Green Party, which had emerged from the new social movements of the 1970s. The situation within the West German historical profession was strikingly similar: the social historians were caught between their

old conservative foes (most of whom did indeed sympathize with the CDU) and “alternative” historiographical movements, whose members were often close to the Greens.¹ This observation does not necessarily imply institutional affiliations, since many of the historians of the different camps did not belong to the respective parties. However, an ideological affinity certainly existed that created a three-cornered contest.

Establishment Completed

In 1979, Jürgen Habermas edited the two-volume anthology *Stichworte zur geistigen Situation der Zeit* (Observations on the Spiritual Situation of the Age), presenting essays of thirty-two academics, commentators, and writers of the “contemplative Left,” who considered the label “intellectual” a badge of honor rather than a dirty word.² Born between 1922 and 1940, almost all of the contributors belonged to the 1945ers, whose political positions in the Federal Republic can be labeled “reformist.” This stance distinguished them from the 1968ers and their at times radical critique of the Federal Republic’s political and societal conditions. The *Stichworte* volumes featured prominent novelists such as Martin Walser and Uwe Johnson, theologians Dorothee Sölle and Jürgen Moltmann, social scientists Ralf Dahrendorf and Klaus von Beyme, literary scholars Fritz J. Raddatz and Karl-Heinz Bohrer, and contributions by three historians, Hans Mommsen, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Hans-Ulrich Wehler.

¹ The connection between political and methodological position emphasizes Aldelheid von Saldern, “Schwere Geburten. Neue Forschungsrichtungen in der bundesrepublikanischen Geschichtswissenschaft,” *Werkstatt Geschichte* 40 (2005), 18 (footnote 65).

² Jürgen Habermas, “Einleitung,” in Id. (ed.), *Stichworte zur “geistigen Situation der Zeit.” 1. Band: Nation und Republik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1979), 12: “It is my impression that in this volume a contemplative Left presents itself, without militancy, but also without self-pity and resignation; equally distant from certainty and insecurity.”

In an essay on the “burden of the past” Hans Mommsen argued that the Federal Republic’s intellectual development had not kept up with its enormous economic and social progress. For Mommsen, the coming to terms (*Bewältigung*) with the Nazi past had to unfold “not as a one-time enlightenment, but as a recurring examination of the causes and mechanisms of the fascist rule.”³ His brother Wolfgang, then director of the German Historical Institute in London, offered a comparison of German and British self-conceptions in the late 1970s and argued that apart from an exaggerated pride, Germans were still lacking the necessary aplomb in dealing with radical political forces, as illustrated by the *Berufsverbote* for left-wing radicals during the 1970s.⁴ Both Mommsens expressed positions fairly common among left-liberal intellectuals at the end of the decade. The optimism of the early 1970s, when the Brandt-Scheel government had for many signaled a liberalization of the Federal Republic, had receded.

While Hans and Wolfgang J. Mommsen tackled topics of a broader political nature, it was Hans-Ulrich Wehler who contributed a long essay on the development and state of the West German historical profession.⁵ The leading spokesman of the Bielefelder drew the well-known picture of developments up to the 1970s, emphasizing the profession’s initial backwardness which had only been rectified in the wake of the *Fischer-Kontroverse* and—in Wehler’s opinion—the much more decisive methodological battles of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Wehler paid tribute to Theodor Schieder and Werner Conze, who had provided

³ Hans Mommsen, “Die Last der Vergangenheit,” in Habermas (ed.), *Stichworte zur “geistigen Situation der Zeit,”* 164-184, quote on 184.

⁴ Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “‘Wir sind wieder wer.’ Wandlungen im politischen Selbstverständnis der Deutschen,” in Habermas (ed.), *Stichworte zur “geistigen Situation der Zeit,”* 185-208.

⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Geschichtswissenschaft heute,” in Habermas (ed.), *Stichworte zur “geistigen Situation der Zeit,”* 709-753.

his own generation with institutional protection and thus enabled them to advance new methods and more critical views of German history. He applauded the fact that social and economic history had become firmly established within the profession's mainstream, and that "traditional political history's predominance" was a thing of the past. However, when discussing more recent developments, in particular what Wehler perceived as the beginning of the conservative backlash, he lost his previous, relative restraint. He castigated the "shabby McCarthyism," which he thought had pervaded the profession since mid-decade, and which suspected left-liberal historians of Marxist-Leninist leanings. This attitude, according to Wehler, was not limited to the usual suspects (such as Walther Hubatsch), but also included younger historians, such as Winfried Baumgart and Klaus Hildebrand.⁶ Moreover, in an updated version of this text that appeared the following year in one of Wehler's many essay collections under the programmatic title *Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung*, he radicalized his position even further. Now Wehler also included the rather "centrist" Thomas Nipperdey in a loose group of essentially reactionary historians, whom he accused of hiding their value judgments behind the demand for scholarly objectivity instead of explicating their own positions.⁷

Apart from directly engaging some of his opponents, Wehler's essay also had the purpose of providing a counter-point to another, more conservative text with a similar scope. Two years earlier, Werner Conze had surveyed the conditions and results of post-war East

⁶ Wehler, "Geschichtswissenschaft heute," in Habermas (ed.), *Stichworte zur "geistigen Situation der Zeit,"* 709.

⁷ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Zur Lage der Geschichtswissenschaft in der Bundesrepublik 1949-1979," in Id. (ed.), *Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Geschichtsschreibung. Studien zu Aufgaben und Traditionen deutscher Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen, 1980), 13-40 and 299-317.

and West German historiography in his keynote speech at the German historians' convention and then published the text in *Historische Zeitschrift*. Conze's take on the West German historical profession's modernization differed significantly from Wehler's, and he therefore did not fail to mention that by far not all younger historians had participated in the Bielefelder's enterprise.⁸ What aroused Wehler's ire, however, was Conze's assertion that criticism of previous apologetic tendencies had, among some West German historians, turned into "the desire to put the politically responsible of the generation of the grand- and great-grandfathers in front of a tribunal set up by subsequent generations." More generally, the much-invoked "*Revision des deutschen Geschichtsbilds*" (revision of the German conception of history) had unfolded "partly masochistically, partly superficially."⁹ Ostensibly presenting a neutral survey of the profession's development, the outgoing President of the Historians' Association clearly expressed his dissatisfaction with many of the recent historiographical trends in the Federal Republic, including the *Bielefelder Schule*. In response, Wehler attacked Conze as well, accusing him of a tendency toward "a striking black-and-white perspective"—a criticism Wehler's opponents usually leveled against the Bielefelder.¹⁰ It should also be noted that while the text was already exceedingly polemical, Wehler reserved his extensive footnotes for even more aggressive charges—a characteristic that became his trademark.

⁸ Werner Conze, "Die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft seit 1945. Bedingungen und Ergebnisse," *Historische Zeitschrift* 225 (1977), 1-28. On page 22, Conze remarked that many younger historians did not adhere to the "erroneous antithesis of the 'primacy of domestic politics.'"

⁹ Conze, "Die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft seit 1945. Bedingungen und Ergebnisse," 14 (both quotes). Here, Conze echoed Thomas Nipperdey, who had likewise accused Wehler of "conducting a trial against the great-grandfathers." Nipperdey, "Wehlers 'Kaiserreich': eine kritische Auseinandersetzung," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975), 542.

¹⁰ Wehler, "Zur Lage der Geschichtswissenschaft in der Bundesrepublik 1949-1979," 308.

Even by his own previous standards, Wehler's style was exceedingly harsh, and his text prompted his mentor Theodor Schieder to chide him in a private letter. When Wehler invoked his *Doktorvater's* formative influence, Schieder wrote, he should keep in mind that Schieder himself had always tried to maintain a more consensual style, mediating between generations as well as between historians of the same generation who held different positions. In an almost paternal tone, Schieder reminded his former student that one "always had to assume that even the ones whom you accuse of conservatism operate from the common basis on which we all stand." Schieder added: "It appears to be some sort of a trauma of yours that every dissenting opinion immediately marks a relapse into times past" and advised Wehler that "historiography cannot be understood only from the perspective of political conflicts." Ultimately he asked Wehler to "take this letter as an admonition, but as a well-intentioned one, for you as well as for all of us historians."¹¹

Without a doubt, the polemical attacks on—perceived or real—"traditionalists" remained Wehler's trademark, but the Bielefelder and his colleagues of *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* did not resort to close-minded editorial illiberalism. Accordingly, the journal routinely offered opponents of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* a chance to advocate their positions. In fact, Thomas Nipperdey had published his comprehensive critique of Wehler's *Kaiserreich* volume in the journal's fourth issue, and Karl-Georg Faber objected to Wehler's *Stichworte* article in the Bielefelders' journal. A few years later, Hans Medick articulated his views on *Historische Sozialwissenschaft's* weaknesses and the opportunities provided by cultural anthropology; and, at the peak of the *Historikerstreit*, Ernst Nolte was able to

¹¹ Theodor Schieder to Hans-Ulrich Wehler, November 25, 1980, BAK, NL Theodor Schieder, Box 386.

respond to harsh review essays by Hans Mommsen and Wolfgang Schieder.¹² Despite the aggressive style with which the Bielefelder often conducted their scholarly disputes, their editorial policies reflected a belief in the unrestricted exchange of ideas, something that not all editors of West German historical journals practiced.

Two years after Wehler's polemical survey, Wolfgang J. Mommsen offered yet another account of the West German historical profession's current state. It appeared in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, for which Mommsen also served on the editorial board, which in some ways made this a slightly odd exercise. It should be noted however, that it was certainly common practice at the time to ask like-minded historians to provide texts that conformed with a journal's general leaning. Only two years earlier, the editor of *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* Karl Dietrich Erdmann had instructed Klaus Hildebrand to provide an essay aiming at the so-called structuralist historians of National Socialism, above all Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat, of whom Erdmann disapproved. The editor explicitly asked for a scathing text, "with a decent amount of irony."¹³ Hildebrand's subsequent article—a conference report on the notorious meeting of historians of National Socialism at Cumberland Lodge—led to a protracted and highly polemical exchange with Hans Mommsen and his brother Wolfgang who, as director of the German Historical Institute

¹² Thomas Nipperdey, "Wehlers 'Kaiserreich.' Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 1 (1975), 539-560; Karl-Georg Faber, "Geschichtswissenschaft als retrospektive Politik? Bemerkungen zu einem Aufsatz von Hans-Ulrich Wehler," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 6 (1980), 574-585; Hans Medick, "'Missionare im Ruderboot'?" Ethnologische Erkenntnisweisen als Herausforderung an die Sozialgeschichte," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 10 (1984), 295-319; Ernst Nolte, "Das Vor-Urteil als 'strenge Wissenschaft'. Zu den Rezensionen von Hans Mommsen und Wolfgang Schieder," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 15 (1989), 537-551.

¹³ Karl Dietrich Erdmann to Klaus Hildebrand, July 23, 1979, BAK, NL Karl Dietrich Erdmann, Box 160.

in London, had organized the conference and disputed Hildebrand's account.¹⁴ Hildebrand's contributions ultimately became so condescending—he stated, for example, that he would not continue a discussion with Wolfgang J. Mommsen until the latter had done sufficient archival research and substantiated his views on National Socialism—that even Erdmann, the debate's initiator, asked him to tone them down.¹⁵

Focusing on modern history, Mommsen observed the main currents within the profession since 1945. The theme of West German historiography now having caught up with international and particularly Western (i.e. American, British, and French) scholarship was strikingly similar to Wehler's.¹⁶ Emphasizing the pluralization of the field in the wake of the *Fischer-Kontroverse* and other debates of the 1960s, Mommsen evaluated the Bielefelder's contribution to the profession's methodological renewal overwhelmingly positively. In his discussion of interpretive issues, he adopted an occasionally somewhat distant position, in particular regarding the contested question of continuity between the German Empire and National Socialism. Moreover, Mommsen had earlier introduced the term "Kehrites" to denote a number of younger social historians who emphasized domestic

¹⁴ Klaus Hildebrand, "Nationalsozialismus ohne Hitler?," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 31 (1980), 289-305; "Externus" [Hans Mommsen], "Hildebrands Lied – oder: wie die GWU ihre Leser informiert," *Geschichtsdidaktik* 5 (1980) 325-327; Karl Dietrich Erdmann, "Antwort an einen Dunkelmann: wie informiert die GWU ihre Leser," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 32 (1981), 197-198; Klaus Hildebrand, "Noch einmal: zur Interpretation des Nationalsozialismus," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 32 (1981), 199-204; "Externus" [Hans Mommsen], "Die GWU und ihre Frontberichterstatter: Fortsetzung eines 'Gedankenaustauschs,'" *Geschichtsdidaktik* 6 (1981), 233-238; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Die 'reine Wahrheit' über das nationalsozialistische Herrschaftssystem?," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 32 (1981), 738-741; Klaus Hildebrand, "Die verfolgende Unschuld," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 32 (1981), 742.

¹⁵ Hildebrand, "Die verfolgende Unschuld," 742. Karl Dietrich Erdmann to Klaus Hildebrand, August 4, 1981, BAK, NL Karl Dietrich Erdmann, Box 160. Erdmann wrote: "Since you are supposed to have the last word in this debate, you should alter the tone of your argument for the sake of effect. You should place yourself on a higher level than Mommsen and argue mostly in a factual manner, and plausibly for our readers."

¹⁶ Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Gegenwärtige Tendenzen in der Geschichtsschreibung der Bundesrepublik" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 7 (1981), 149-188; reference to international scholarship on 165.

factors in their explanations of German imperialism—a label many of the alleged “Kehrites” rejected.¹⁷

Ultimately, Mommsen’s essay illustrated that left-liberal West German historians never formed a completely homogeneous group. The charge of the existence of a “reigning orthodoxy” was more of a conservative rhetorical device than an accurate reflection of the West German historiographical landscape. Yet they generally stood fairly unified against their conservative colleagues, as various debates during the 1980s would reveal. Lastly Mommsen’s article also revealed the tendency of many of the left-liberal historians to historicize their own achievements of the late 1960s and 1970s early, which may at least partly explain why their interpretation of the historical profession’s development has been so successful. In the United States, sympathetic observers such as Georg G. Iggers, provided historiographical surveys, which led to a similar result: the emphasis on the West German historical profession’s methodological progress during that time became inextricably linked with *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*.¹⁸

¹⁷ Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “Domestic Factors in German Foreign Policy before 1914,” *Central European History* 6 (1973), 3-43, definition of the “Kehrites” on 8. The label was also used by Geoff Eley, “Die ‘Kehrites’ und das Kaiserreich: Bemerkungen zu einer aktuellen Kontroverse,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 4 (1978), 91-107; and rejected by Hans-Jürgen Puhle, “Zur Legende von der ‘Kehrschen Schule,’” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 4 (1978), 108-119.

¹⁸ Of course, the main actor in the process of self-historicization was Hans-Ulrich Wehler, whose article in Habermas’ *Stichworte zur geistigen Situation der Zeit* was only one of many similar texts. For the United States, see Georg G. Iggers, “Introduction,” in Id. (ed.), *The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historical Writing since 1945* (Dover, NH, 1985), as well as numerous other texts by the same author. For a discussion of the legitimizing function of historiographical writings, see also Christoph Conrad/Sebastian Conrad, “Wie vergleicht man Historiographien,” in Id. (eds.), *Die Nation schreiben. Geschichtswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 2002), 25-26.

Winds Of Change – from All Directions

In 1982, the end of the coalition between Free Democrats and Social Democrats brought a center-right government to power and a historian, Helmut Kohl—who liked to insist that he was actually Dr. Kohl—into the office of the Chancellor. Part of Kohl’s political agenda was to initiate a *geistig-moralische Wende* (an intellectual and moral turn) in the Federal Republic, in order to undo what he considered to be the damage caused by the 1968ers. This turn also encompassed the desire to establish a new attitude toward the German past, which many critics feared might ultimately be a rather old one and lead to the relativization of German guilt.¹⁹ These critics took Kohl’s notorious statement that he felt gratitude about the “mercy of late birth” (Kohl had been born in 1930) as proof for his unwillingness to continue the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* of his predecessors.²⁰ In his very first governmental address Kohl emphasized the importance of historical reflection for the German nation. To that end, he announced his plans to establish a “house of history” (*Haus der Geschichte*) in Bonn, which would chronicle the development of the Federal Republic. Some historians took the starting point of 1945 as a sign that the new government was no longer interested in keeping the memory of National Socialism present.²¹

Kohl’s “politics of the past,” in retrospect, did not change the perspectives of most Germans on 20th century German history, nor did it alter the overall responsible ways in which the German government under Kohl and his successors dealt with the country’s

¹⁹ The broader context provides Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948-1990* (Darmstadt, 1999), 303-345.

²⁰ This was a quote from a speech Kohl gave at the Knesset on January 24, 1984. In the context of the speech, Kohl meant to say that the time of his birth prevented him from becoming implicated in National Socialist crimes. To label this phrase apologetic thus seems unfair.

²¹ Bundestag Plenarprotokoll, 9. Wahlperiode, 121. Sitzung, October 13, 1982, 7227. I would like to thank Jacob Eder for providing me with a copy of the transcript.

historical legacy. It would thus be tempting to dismiss left-liberal responses as mere hysteria. Yet Kohl's rhetoric regarding a "normalization" of the Federal Republic's relationship with the Nazi past, as well as his proposed projects, seemed to suggest that a distinctive break with the previous Social Democratic-Liberal governments was underway. Apart from the *Haus der Geschichte* in Bonn, Kohl's agenda encompassed the foundation of a German Historical Museum in Berlin, and the historians who were asked to serve on the advisory boards were almost exclusively conservatives who had repeatedly denounced what they considered to have been an excessive focus on historical continuity between 1871 and 1945.

Kohl relied in particular on the advice of Michael Stürmer, a historian at the University of Erlangen who early in his career had been counted among the left-liberals and in his *Habilitation* had expressed views on the German Empire quite similar to Wehler's.²² It appears, however, that negative experiences with educational reformers at the University of Kassel in the early 1970s had soon turned Stürmer into a conservative. He left Kassel for the University of Erlangen, where he became a colleague of Walther Peter Fuchs, the Chancellor's *Doktorvater*, who introduced Stürmer to Kohl. By the early 1980s, Stürmer had adopted the geopolitical argument that the German Empire's location in Central Europe, the notorious *Mittellage*, was a key reason for its restlessness.²³ Apart from his political and interpretive metamorphosis, Stürmer also readjusted the focus of his writings. He continued to publish scholarly work on the German Empire, but also wrote op-ed pieces in medium-quality newspapers and magazines such as *Die Welt* and *Bunte*. It seems fair to say that by

²² Michael Stürmer, *Regierung und Reichstag im Bismarckstaat 1871-1880. Cäsarismus oder Parlamentarismus* (Düsseldorf, 1974).

²³ Michael Stürmer, *Das ruhelose Reich 1866-1918* (Berlin, 1983).

the 1980s Stürmer had become as much of a journalist as a historian.²⁴ Of the four conservative historians at the center of the *Historikerstreit*—and one has to emphasize that they had little in common besides being politically right of center—Stürmer was the most politically conscious one, and he emphasized the connection between the past, its current interpretation, and the latter’s significance for the future. Complaining that the Federal Republic suffered from a deficient historical identity, he contended that “in a country without history, whoever supplies memory, shapes concepts, and interprets the past, will win the future.”²⁵ What Stürmer argued in an often rather mannered style, bore striking resemblance to Wehler’s own position. Both historians were convinced that West Germans had to continue to draw important lessons from the past. They differed, however, regarding the question of exactly which lessons had to be learned.

Historians of the left-liberal “camp,” such as Hans Mommsen, expressed their dissatisfaction with this new approach to create an “identifiable” German past à la Stürmer, which they feared would discontinue reflections on the rise of National Socialism.²⁶ Jürgen Habermas criticized the one-sided selection of historians advising the museum’s conceptualization, which was not representative of the historical profession, pointing out that Jürgen Kocka served as the liberal fig leaf on a board of conservatives.²⁷ Of course, Ronald Reagan’s disastrous visit to the Bitburg cemetery in 1985 only exacerbated concerns on the

²⁴ On Stürmer’s intellectual development, see Volker R. Berghahn, “Geschichtswissenschaft und grosse Politik,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 11/1987, March 14, 1987, 25-37.

²⁵ Michael Stürmer, “Geschichte in einem geschichtslosen Land,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 25, 1986.

²⁶ Hans Mommsen, “Verordnete Geschichtsbilder. Historische Museumspläne der Bundesregierung,” *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 37 (1986), 13-24.

²⁷ Jürgen Habermas, “Eine Art Schadensabwicklung. Apologetische Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung,” *Die Zeit*, July 7, 1986.

Left. After representatives of the Federal Republic had not been allowed to participate in the fortieth anniversary of V-Day in June of 1984, Chancellor Kohl invited President Reagan to visit the military cemetery in Bitburg and lay a wreath as part of the V-E Day celebrations forty years after the end of World War II. After all, the West German government argued, the Federal Republic had time and again proven to be a reliable NATO ally. Unfortunately, the cemetery also provided a resting place for almost fifty members of the *Waffen SS*, which made the proposed visit a highly problematic enterprise.²⁸ The choice of the Bitburg cemetery, it should be noted, was the result of inadequate staff preparation. Nevertheless, the West Germans insisted that a cancellation would amount to a diplomatic affront, whereas prominent representatives of Holocaust memory in the United States, such as Elie Wiesel, appealed to Reagan not to travel to Bitburg.²⁹ Ultimately, Kohl and Reagan combined visits to Bitburg and the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, but this did little to placate their critics. For them the Bitburg controversy, together with Kohl's museum projects, symbolized a distinct shift of the West German political culture. The fact that some prominent politicians in Kohl's CDU speculated about reversing elements of Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, including a possible renegotiation of the Eastern borders of a future unified Germany, only enhanced the suspicions on the Left.

²⁸ Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 7-16.

²⁹ American responses to the affair are collected in Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.), *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington, IN, 1986).

The Revival of Biographies and Prussia

If the political climate seemed to have become significantly more conservative, developments within the historical profession did not offer much cause for optimism either. Apart from continuing conservative attacks on the *Bielefelder Schule*, these years witnessed a rediscovery of the biographical genre among historians, much to the dismay of the social historians who saw the biographical approach as heuristically problematic.³⁰ Lothar Gall published his enormously successful Bismarck biography, the earnings from which enabled him to acquire a *Porsche* sports car.³¹ Ernst Engelberg, the doyen of methodologically and politically dogmatic East German historiography, most likely would have purchased a different automobile, but his surprisingly sympathetic portrayal of the Iron Chancellor also sold well on the other side of the Iron Curtain.³² As an American reviewer remarked, Engelberg's study advanced "conclusions much more likely to have pleased A. O. Meyer or Hans Rothfels, than, let us say, Erich Eyck," which indicated Engelberg was closer to the conservative Bismarck enthusiasts than to the Chancellor's liberal critics.³³ And Fritz Stern's dual biography of Bismarck and his banker Gerson Bleichröder, while by no means offering

³⁰ This attitude was not limited to the Bielefelder and would not change in the subsequent decades, either. In the preface of his seminal Hitler biography, Ian Kershaw recounts Hans Mommsen's reservation about the biographical approach. Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris, 1889-1936* (London, 1998), xviii.

³¹ Information provided by Prof. Wolfram Siemann, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, January 20, 2001.

³² Lothar Gall, *Bismarck. Der weisse Revolutionär* (Berlin, 1980); Ernst Engelberg, *Bismarck. Urpreusse und Reichsgründer* (Berlin, 1985). Engelberg's merciless reactions to supposed renegades within the East German historical profession are chronicled by Martin Sabrow, *Das Diktat des Konsenses. Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR, 1949-1969* (München, 2001).

³³ Hans A. Schmitt, "Review of Ernst Engelberg, *Bismarck. Urpreusse und Reichsgründer*," *Journal of Modern History* 59 (1987), 622-624, quote on 622. Compare Arnold Oskar Meyer, *Bismarck: der Mensch und der Staatsmann* (Leipzig, 1944); Hans Rothfels, *Bismarck, der Osten, und das Reich* (Darmstadt, 1960); and Erich Eyck, *Bismarck and the German Empire* (London, 1950).

a hagiographic interpretation, also belonged to the genre of narrative-driven historical works that became commercially highly successful.³⁴

In a review of both Stern's and Gall's studies Jürgen Kocka therefore reflected upon the difficulties for *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* of maintaining the necessary terminological and theoretical sophistication without losing access to a broader audience.³⁵ And Hans-Ulrich Wehler, without failing to mention the merits of Gall's Bismarck biography, also listed a number of interpretive inconsistencies. Wehler's main criticism, however, concerned Gall's frequent use of the adjective sober, for example when asserting to purport a "sober perspective." With this claim, Wehler argued, Gall situated himself outside the debates surrounding Bismarck's policies and implied a bias among other historians advancing different interpretations. Wehler's criticism seems plausible, yet one has to keep in mind that the Bielefelder himself often resorted to similar rhetorical strategies: he liked to argue, for instance, that a "cost-benefit analysis" had convinced him of the "superiority" of a certain argument or theory—this phrase was an integral part of Wehler's repertoire.³⁶ Ultimately, Wehler explained the success of Gall's study with its appearance during the so-called *Preussenwelle* (Prussia wave) that arrived in West Germany in the late 1970s. It manifested itself in a number of well-attended exhibitions, such as the *Preussenausstellung*

³⁴ Fritz Stern, *Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder, and the Building of the German Empire* (New York, 1977).

³⁵ Jürgen Kocka, "Bismarck-Biographien," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 7 (1981), 572-581.

³⁶ See, for example, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Kritik und kritische Anti-Kritik," *Historische Zeitschrift* 225 (1977), 347-384, quote on 358.

in Berlin in 1981, as well as best-selling books focusing on different aspects of Prussian history, by the journalists Sebastian Haffner and Bernt Engelmann.³⁷

This increasing nostalgia for Prussia severely worried the social historians, who regarded it as a misguided attempt to rehabilitate historical traditions that had proven so calamitous. Hans-Ulrich Wehler articulated his reservations about this trend in a collection of essays with the title *Ist Preussen wieder chic?* (Is Prussia chic again?).³⁸ The volume presented generally polemical texts previously published in scholarly journals and newspapers. This frequent re-publication of texts became Wehler's trademark—by 2010, nine such volumes had appeared.³⁹ Wehler left little doubt about his position, deploring the recent development that the Prussian “authoritarian state” now reappeared in a “golden frame.” He emphatically denied the necessity of any recourse to what he considered a sanitized Prussian history in order to construct a positive West German historical identity. On the contrary, for Wehler this historical identity necessitated a distinct break with the authoritarian Prussian tradition.⁴⁰

³⁷ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Galls ‘Bismarck’—Vorzüge, Grenzen und Rezeption einer Biographie,” *Geschichtsdidaktik* 6 (1981), 205-212. Sebastian Haffner, *Preussen ohne Legende* (Hamburg, 1979); Bernt Engelmann, *Preussen – Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten* (München, 1980).

³⁸ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Ist Preussen wieder chic? Politik und Polemik in zwanzig Essays* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983).

³⁹ *Aus der Geschichte lernen? Essays* (München, 1988); *Die Gegenwart als Geschichte. Essays* (München, 1995); *Politik in der Geschichte. Essays* (München, 1998); *Die Herausforderung der Kulturgeschichte* (München, 1998); *Umbruch und Kontinuität. Essays zum 20. Jahrhundert* (München, 2000); *Konflikte zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts* (München, 2003); *Notizen zur deutschen Geschichte* (München, 2007); *Land ohne Unterschichten? Neue Essays zur deutschen Geschichte* (München, 2010).

⁴⁰ Wehler, “Nicht verstehen! – der Preussennostalgie widerstehen!” in Id., *Ist Preussen wieder chic?*, 67-71.

Leftist Dissent

By the early 1980s, the *Bielefelder Schule* was used to battling conservatives. What was new about this decade was that for the first time the progressive social historians also came under attack from various groups of historians on the Left. The subsequent rivalry among scholars who shared many values as well as opponents, and who held the similar view that historiography was supposed to have an “emancipatory” rather than an “affirmative” function, might account for the acrimony of these debates. In addition, conservatives readily drew on the arguments of Leftist critics, despite the fact that the interpretive commonalities between those critics and themselves were quite limited.

The first challenge arose from a number of young, un-orthodox Neo-Marxist British historians, Geoff Eley, Richard Evans, and David Blackbourn. In 1978, Evans had published a collection of essays, including contributions by Eley, Blackbourn, and himself, which sought to correct some of the Bielefelder’s assumptions about the German Empire as well as the continuity question.⁴¹ Shortly thereafter Eley and Blackbourn combined two texts targeting even more explicitly the alleged “myths of German history.” The work’s publication in German as a small paperback assured a wide reception in West Germany.⁴² An unsympathetic historian remarked twenty-five years later that while the Bielefelder had argued, “Germany was bad,” the British neo-Marxists had responded, “Germany was bad—and so was England.”⁴³ This verdict points to the important fact that the British critics did not

⁴¹ Richard J. Evans (ed.), *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London, 1978).

⁴² David Blackbourn/Geoff Eley, *Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung. Die gescheiterte bürgerliche Revolution von 1848* (Frankfurt am Main, 1980). An expanded English edition was published as *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984).

⁴³ Gerald D. Feldman, Interview with the author, November 17, 2006.

only disagree with the Bielefelders' take on the German Empire, in particular the alleged weakness of the bourgeoisie, but they also took issue with what they considered to be an overly rosy picture of nineteenth century Britain.⁴⁴ Although both historians set out to correct the received wisdom regarding the Wilhelmine Empire, they differed argumentatively and stylistically. Blackbourn was more measured than Eley on both counts, which is why the ensuing debate focused on the latter scholar.

Without assessing the validity of the respective arguments, a few comments on the unfolding of the debate are in order. First, the temperament of the participants accounted for much of its harshness. Both Eley and Wehler were talented polemicists, and Eley was, like the Bielefelder, fond of the footnote-blow. For example, commenting on Wehler's claims regarding the sociology of social imperialism, Eley remarked that these were "mere assertions backed by no empirical research."⁴⁵ While Wehler was used to his political positions being castigated, such criticism struck a nerve. Moreover, the fact that the British historian published his first critique of Wehler at the age of 25 had to appear preposterous to the older historian who subsequently resorted to condescension.⁴⁶ In a later response to Eley, Wehler remarked that while he and other German historians criticized by Eley had given the British historian "as the younger one sufficient time to defend himself," the closed season

⁴⁴ Geoff Eley, "The British Model and the German Road: Rethinking the Course of German History Before 1914," in Blackbourn/Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History*, 62-74. Konrad H. Jarausch/Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, 2003), 98-99.

⁴⁵ See Geoff Eley, "Defining Social Imperialism. Use and Abuse of an Idea," *Social History* 3 (1976), 65-90; quote on 89, footnote 107.

⁴⁶ Geoff Eley, "Sammlungspolitik, Social Imperialism, and the Navy Law of 1898," *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* 15 (1974), 29-63.

was now over and the time had come for a harsh counter-attack.⁴⁷ Ironically, Wehler, whom conservative West German historians previously had suspected of harboring Marxist leanings, and whose theoretical eclecticism had allowed him to borrow from Marx if he considered it heuristically fruitful, now attacked Eley for his supposedly dogmatic neo-Marxism.⁴⁸

Of course, seen from the West German conservative perspective, these controversies among leftists of different shades elicited enormous glee. Werner Conze reviewed Evans' volume and devoted a third of his text to a summary of the British historian's criticism of the Bielefelder's "new orthodoxy."⁴⁹ The conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported with unrestrained *Schadenfreude* on this unexpected challenge to the overly self-critical take on modern German history advanced by the Bielefelder.⁵⁰ The book even became the subject of a radio broadcast, and the 1982 convention of the German Historians' Association devoted a panel to the discussion.⁵¹ And in a review of the expanded English version of Eley's and Blackbourn's book, Thomas Nipperdey praised the resulting debate's relativization of several of the Bielefelders' positions: the German *Sonderweg*, the overemphasis on the feudal and pre-bourgeois elements' influence, and the underestimation of the bourgeoisie. The irony of this unlikely alliance between the "neo-historicist"

⁴⁷ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "'Deutscher Sonderweg' oder allgemeine Probleme des westlichen Kapitalismus," *Merkur* 35 (1981), 478-487 and 760, again in Id., *Ist Preussen wieder chic?*, 19-32.

⁴⁸ Wehler, "'Deutscher Sonderweg' oder allgemeine Probleme des westlichen Kapitalismus," 480-481.

⁴⁹ Werner Conze, "Review of Richard J. Evans, *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany*," *Vierteljahrshefte für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 66 (1979), 288-290.

⁵⁰ Eberhard Straub, "Woher aber kam der Nationalsozialismus? Englische Historiker über Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 9, 1980; Id., "Die eingebildeten Leiden der Deutschen," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 22, 1981.

⁵¹ Eley/Blackbourn, "Introduction," in Id. *The Peculiarities of German History*, 2

Nipperdey and the British neo-Marxists was not lost on the German historian. Yet since Blackbourn, Evans, and Eley were “good historians,” Nipperdey concluded, their—in his opinion—questionable ideological disposition did not matter.⁵² In light of all this, it appeared that what Jürgen Habermas had concurrently termed the *neue Unübersichtlichkeit* (new complexity) of the political realm had affected historiography on modern Germany as well.⁵³

American Critics

In less strident form, interpretive criticism of the *Bielefelder Schule* also emerged on the other side of the Atlantic, voiced by historians who did not belong to the Left. As we have seen in the previous chapter, American responses to the Bielefelder’s main works had generally been respectful, but never entirely uncritical. But now the voices rejecting various aspects of the Bielefelder’s positions became louder. In 1982, Otto Pflanze published a trenchant critique of several heuristic models employed by Wehler in his analyses of the German Empire.⁵⁴ As a fellow at the Munich *Historisches Kolleg* in 1980/81, where he had been working on the second volume of his comprehensive Bismarck biography, Pflanze had organized a conference on the “domestic problems of Bismarck’s Empire,” which led to a volume collecting views quite different from Wehler’s.⁵⁵ Now he voiced doubts regarding the concepts of *Sammlungspolitik*, *Sozialimperialismus*, and *Bonapartismus*, which Wehler

⁵² Thomas Nipperdey, “Review of Geoff Eley/David Blackbourn, *The Peculiarities of German History*,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 249 (1989), 434-437.

⁵³ Jürgen Habermas, *Die Neue Unübersichtlichkeit. Kleine politische Schriften V* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985).

⁵⁴ Otto Pflanze, “Bismarck’s Herrschaftstechnik als Problem der gegenwärtigen Historiographie,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 234 (1982), 561-599.

⁵⁵ Otto Pflanze (ed.), *Innenpolitische Probleme des Bismarck-Reiches* (München, 1983).

employed in his seminal *Das deutsche Kaiserreich*.⁵⁶ More generally, Pflanze was suspicious of the *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* project, cautioning against a “drifting into the magnetic fields of generalization.”⁵⁷

The same year, Margaret Anderson and Kenneth Barkin, two former students of Klaus Epstein, published a comprehensive critique of both the *kleindeutsche* perspective and the anti-Catholic bias, which they saw as not limited to, but also represented by, the *Bielefelder Schule*.⁵⁸ Ironically, Anderson and Barkin had first submitted their manuscript to the *American Historical Review*, whose editor at the time was Otto Pflanze. Pflanze rejected the manuscript for a number of reasons, and in justifying his decision he characterized “Wehler and his associates” as pursuing “a ‘socialist’ oriented historiography.” The so-called “Kehrites,” Pflanze argued, were in fact not very much influenced by Kehr—their “sources [were] Karl Marx, Talcott Parsons, Reinhard Bendix, and the ‘Frankfurt School’ of sociology.”⁵⁹ Pflanze’s judgment was curiously wrong, yet very revealing. Both Parsons and Bendix were instrumental in introducing and popularizing Max Weber among American social scientists—Parsons had also provided the first English translation of Max Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in 1930—but the source of influence on the Bielefelder was of course Weber himself, whom Wehler and Kocka discovered as students in

⁵⁶ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918* (Göttingen, 1973).

⁵⁷ Otto Pflanze, “Bismarcks Herrschaftstechnik als Problem der gegenwärtigen Historiographie,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 234 (1982), 561-599, here 562.

⁵⁸ See Margaret Anderson and Kenneth Barkin, “The Myth of the Puttkamer Purge and the Reality of the Kulturkampf,” *Journal of Modern History* 54 (1982), 647-686.

⁵⁹ Otto Pflanze to Margaret Anderson and Kenneth Barkin, November 6, 1981; Kenneth Barkin pointed out some of the editor’s questionable characterizations in his response to Otto Pflanze, November 23, 1981; Pflanze remained unconvinced in his response to Kenneth Barkin, December 4, 1981. I would like to thank Prof. Barkin for providing me with copies of these letters.

West Germany, not in the United States. Nor was the impact of the Frankfurt School (with the exception of Jürgen Habermas) on the Bielefelder particularly significant, even if Wehler wrote in his *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* that he aimed at developing a “critical theory” of imperialism.⁶⁰ The same was true for Karl Marx, whom Wehler, Kocka (slightly more so), and like-minded historians regarded as a potential source of inspiration, without ever succumbing to the danger of dogmatism.⁶¹ Pflanze seems to have been deceived by Wehler’s remark that a historian could learn more from Marx than from Ranke, which in the context of the late 1960s served more as a provocation of the West German historiographical establishment than as an actual statement of faith.⁶² Moreover, Wehler’s as well as Heinrich August Winkler’s responses to Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn revealed the skepticism of left-liberal West Germans toward a heavy reliance on Marx.⁶³ Only three years earlier, Winkler had published a trenchant critique of neo-Marxist concepts of revolution and fascism with the telling subtitle “on the revision of Historical Materialism.”⁶⁴ Pflanze’s assessment, while inaccurate, therefore betrays some of the concerns the traditionalist American historian apparently harbored regarding the *Bielefelder Schule*—the label “socialist” clearly possessed a negative connotation.

⁶⁰ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* (Köln, 1969), 14.

⁶¹ The work most inspired by Marx was Kocka’s *Klassengesellschaft im Kriege. Deutsche Sozialgeschichte 1914-1918* (Göttingen, 1973).

⁶² Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*, Introduction.

⁶³ Wehler, “‘Deutscher Sonderweg’ oder allgemeine Probleme des westlichen Kapitalismus? Zur Kritik einiger Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung”; Heinrich August Winkler, “Der deutsche Sonderweg. Eine Nachlese,” *Merkur* 35 (1981), 793-804.

⁶⁴ Heinrich August Winkler, *Revolution, Staat, Faschismus. Zur Revision des Historischen Materialismus* (Göttingen, 1978).

However, one should note that, despite his role as the editor of the *American Historical Review*, by the early 1980s Pflanze was no longer in touch with the intellectual currents within the American historical profession. Thus his views were not necessarily typical of American historians of modern Germany. As in West Germany, in the United States the leading historians by then were mostly born between 1930 and the early 1940s, training graduate students at places such as Berkeley (Gerald Feldman), Stanford (James Sheehan), Yale (Henry Turner), and UNC Chapel Hill (Konrad H. Jarausch). With Geoff Eley and Michael Geyer, the University of Michigan had attracted two even slightly younger historians, who turned its history department into an attractive place to study Germany. Still, Pflanze's voice was one of many in the growing transatlantic chorus of critics who attacked certain tenets of the *Bielefelder Schule*.

The “Barefoot Historians”

Yet another group of historians with whom the Bielefelder had to contend and who came primarily from a leftist background were the *Alltagshistoriker* (historians of everyday life). The appearance of *Alltagsgeschichte* illustrated once again the influence of political conditions on scholarship. Just as the spirit of the 1960s had led scholars to embrace structural history and modernization theories, the rising skepticism toward modernity and its effects on individuals helped spur the emergence of historians who became interested in history from the bottom up.⁶⁵ Some of the local groups emerging around the time were situated in the “alternative” West German milieu of environmentalist and pacifist activists.

⁶⁵ Thomas Lindenberger, “‘Alltagsgeschichte’ oder: als um die zünftigen Grenzen der Geschichtswissenschaft noch gestritten wurde,” in Martin Sabrow/Ralph Jessen/Klaus Grosse Kracht (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte. Grosse Kontroversen seit 1945* (München, 2003), 74-91.

The historian of everyday life's local orientation found expression in the slogan "dig where you stand," coined by the Swedish journalist Sven Lindquist, who had published a "manual for researching one's own history" in 1978.⁶⁶ Whereas the Bielefelder and other historians in their orbit had tended toward the United States, historians of everyday life received inspiration from the British history workshop movement, whose flagship *History Workshop Journal* had begun publishing in 1976.⁶⁷ *Alltagsgeschichte* was a diverse historiographical movement and developed simultaneously within and outside West German history departments. Even in retrospect, Thomas Lindenberger, one of the participants in this new enterprise, declared attempts to precisely define what *Alltagsgeschichte* stood for to be futile. The new movement defied categorization because its members had, depending on the respective regional and local situation, varying interests—and forming a distinct historiographical school was clearly not a priority.⁶⁸

Accordingly, the Bielefelder tended to distinguish between good (i.e., professional) and bad (i.e., amateur) historians of everyday life. The former were often social historians with impeccable credentials, such as Lutz Niethammer and Hans Medick, whose studies could not be dismissed as lacking scholarly rigor.⁶⁹ And of course nobody denied the significance and sophistication of the *Bayern-Projekt*, which Martin Broszat initiated at the

⁶⁶ A German translation appeared as *Grabe, wo du stehst. Handbuch zur Erforschung der eigenen Geschichte* (Bonn, 1989).

⁶⁷ For the British context, see Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: from Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2005), 51-53.

⁶⁸ Peter Schöttler, "Die Geschichtswerkstatt e.V. Zu einem Versuch, basisdemokratische Geschichtsinitiativen und -forschungen zu 'vernetzen,'" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 10 (1984), 421-424.

⁶⁹ See, for example, the important three volumes by Lutz Niethammer, *Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930-1960* (Berlin/Bonn, 1983-85); and Hans Medick/Peter Kriedte/Jürgen Schlumbohm (eds.), *Industrialisierung vor der Industrialisierung. Gewerbliche Warenproduktion auf dem Land in der Formationsperiode des Kapitalismus* (Göttingen, 1977)

Institut für Zeitgeschichte in the mid-1970s, and which analyzed the National Socialist regime from below.⁷⁰ The *Bayern-Projekt* also revealed that while there might have been a conceptual danger for historians of everyday life to succumb to nostalgia (arguably particularly problematic for the Nazi period), in practice this did not happen. If Bielefeld symbolized the center of progressive social history in West Germany, Göttingen became the equivalent for *Alltagsgeschichte*. There, at the *Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte*, director Rudolf Vierhaus had assembled a number of historians of everyday life, including Alf Lüdtke, Hans Medick, Peter Kriedte, and Jürgen Schlumbohm, who produced widely acknowledged scholarship. With the inclusion of the American historian David Sabeau, a research fellow between 1976 and 1983, the institute even had a slightly transatlantic character.⁷¹ And since Georg Iggers had become a frequent visitor at the Institute (and ultimately divided his time between Göttingen and Buffalo), the foremost American observer of German historiography was present to chronicle the developments.⁷²

Charges against the historians of everyday life concerned methodological as well as interpretive aspects. Interpretively, social historians (not only from the Bielefeld camp) argued that, in their attempt to do justice to the losers of historical processes, proponents of *Alltagsgeschichte* tended to glorify the “little man” and the “little woman,” whose less

⁷⁰ Michael Wildt, “Das ‘Bayern-Projekt’, die Alltagsforschung und die ‘Volksgemeinschaft,’” in Norbert Frei (ed.), *Martin Broszat, der “Staat Hitlers,” und die Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2007), 119-129.

⁷¹ An important early (1977) publication was the aforementioned study on “proto-industrialization,” Medick/Kriedte/Schlumbohm (eds.), *Industrialisierung vor der Industrialisierung*; later works included David Sabeau, *Property, Production, and Family in Neckarhausen, 1700-1870* (Cambridge, MA, 1991) and Hans Medick, *Weben und überleben in Laichingen 1650-1900. Lokalgeschichte als allgemeine Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1997).

⁷² Georg G. Iggers, *Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein kritischer Blick in internationalen Zusammenhang* (Göttingen, 1993); an English translation appeared as *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, CT, 1997)

appealing sides remained neglected. Not surprisingly, it was Wehler who coined the memorable phrase that historians of everyday life turned “peasant bandits into heroes.”⁷³ The desire to portray the lower classes in sympathetic light often resulted in exaggerated identification at the expense of analysis. Jürgen Kocka diagnosed a “generally anti-analytical attitude” among these historians.⁷⁴ Proponents of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* also took issue with what they perceived as an excessive fear of “modernity.” While they would later admit that *Alltagsgeschichte*’s insistence on the costs of progress had led them to reevaluate their own positions to a degree, the first response was rejection. In Wehler’s case, dismissal became mixed with considerable condescension – he coined the label “barefoot historians,” clearly implying a lack of sophistication.⁷⁵ Finally, Wehler criticized that historians of everyday life had yet to produce a synthetical work on nineteenth or twentieth century Germany. In fact, he argued, *Alltagsgeschichte* lacked the ability to provide an integrative synthesis, according to Wehler the “pinnacle of historiography,” because it did not possess a distinct paradigm. Accordingly, historians could “only tell stories of everyday life, but not a German history of *the* everyday life from 1800 to 1980.”⁷⁶ Since the historiographical debates of the last decade have often questioned the desirability of such master narratives, in particular with a strictly national focus, this alleged deficit of *Alltagsgeschichte* today seems

⁷³ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Neoromantik und Pseudorealismus in der Alltagsgeschichte,” in Id. *Ist Preussen wieder chic?*, 99-106, quote 103.

⁷⁴ Jürgen Kocka, “Historische Sozialwissenschaft und Alltagsgeschichte,” in Id., *Sozialgeschichte. Begriff – Entwicklung – Probleme* (Göttingen, 1986), 172.

⁷⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Geschichte – von unten gesehen,” *Die Zeit*, May 5, 1985.

⁷⁶ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Königsweg zu neuen Ufern oder Irrgarten der Illusionen,” in Id., *Aus der Geschichte lernen? Essays* (München, 1988), 130-152, quotes on 146 and 147.

excusable.⁷⁷ Perhaps more importantly, historians of everyday life never strove to produce a synthesis, a fact that makes Wehler's complaint seem gratuitous. Yet at the time, Thomas Nipperdey had just published the first volume of his *Deutsche Geschichte*, and Wehler was in the process of writing his *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*.⁷⁸ For many historians, especially those eager to reach a wider audience, the publication of a comprehensive interpretation of German history was the ultimate goal.

How deep the scars of the debates between social historians and historians of everyday life had become could be seen during the late 1990s, when German historians for the first time broached the history of their profession during the Nazi years. In this debate Theodor Schieder's intellectual contribution to Nazi measures of ethnic cleansing in Poland, which had been discovered a few years earlier, became widely known.⁷⁹ To be sure, the shift in attitude among some of the progressive historians seemed puzzling: they had never shied away from dismantling the historical profession's traditions, but now resorted to a curiously defensive and empathetic position vis-à-vis those incriminated historians with whom they had had personal relationships. Commenting on Wehler's defense of his mentor Schieder, Peter Schöttler acidly remarked on the irony that the protagonist of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* argued for an empathetic (*verstehend*) approach, something that

⁷⁷ See Konrad H. Jarausch/Martin Sabrow (eds.), *Die historische Meistererzählung. Deutungslinien der deutschen Nationalgeschichte* (Göttingen, 2002); Konrad H. Jarausch/Michael Geyer, "A Return to National History? The Master Narrative and Beyond," in Id., *Shattered Past*, 37-60.

⁷⁸ Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1866. Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (München, 1983); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Volume I: Vom Feudalismus des Alten Reiches bis zur defensiven Modernisierung der Reformära 1700-1815* (München, 1987).

⁷⁹ Angelika Ebbinghaus/Karl Heinz Roth, "Vorläufer des 'Generalplans Ost'. Eine Dokumentation über Theodor Schieders Polendenkschrift vom 7. Oktober 1939", in 1999. *Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* 7 (1992), 62-94.

throughout his career he had so adamantly rejected.⁸⁰ Schöttler was not only arguing for the sake of historical justice and accuracy, but he also recognized an opportunity to settle old scores, as he had belonged to the first generation of “barefoot historians” who in the early 1980s had fallen victim to the Bielefelders’ invectives.⁸¹

Women’s History

If the Bielefelder had deemed historians of everyday life insufficiently professional and articulated this in no uncertain terms, the response to women’s history seemed to take a slightly different form: the social historians sometimes preferred to ignore rather than engage the new historiographical direction.⁸² Nevertheless, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* published an issue on “women in the nineteenth and twentieth century history” in 1981, which by West German standards was quite early.⁸³ Hans-Ulrich Wehler provided the preface, in which he acknowledged the necessity of the West German historical profession to catch up with developments in Western Europe and the United States. He was undoubtedly correct; compared to the United States, women’s history as a distinct field emerged rather late, just as women in the American historical profession had started to organize earlier.⁸⁴ Consequently, Karin Hausen began her 1981 survey of women’s history in the United States by deploring

⁸⁰ Peter Schöttler, “Von der rheinischen Landesgeschichte zur nazistischen Volksgeschichte oder die ‘unhörbare Stimme des Blutes,’” in Winfried Schulze/Otto Gerhard Oexle (eds.), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 89-113, especially 92-93 and 107.

⁸¹ Schöttler, “Die Geschichtswerkstatt e. V. Zu einem Versuch, basisdemokratische Geschichtsinitiativen und -forschungen zu vernetzen.”

⁸² Von Saldern, “Schwere Geburten,” 15-18.

⁸³ *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 7 (1981), issue 3/4

⁸⁴ See Joan W. Scott, “American Women Historians,” in Id., *Gender and the Politics of History. Revised edition* (New York, 1999), 178-198, esp. 192-193.

the backwardness of the West German historical profession.⁸⁵ It is also true that some were more backward than others: in contrast to other journals, such as *Historische Zeitschrift*, in which women's history remained non-existent, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* offered the new historiographical direction at least some space.⁸⁶ Yet only rarely did the Bielefelder contemplate what women's historians (or gender historians) might have to offer to *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. Instead, they focused on conferences from which male scholars were excluded, in order to deplore the new movement's "irrational elements." Jürgen Kocka even went so far as to liken the exclusion of male historians from the 1981 meeting of women's historians at the University of Bielefeld to the exclusion of Jewish scholars in Nazi Germany.⁸⁷ By drawing this dubious comparison, Kocka revealed not only his lacking awareness of the reasons why female historians deemed it necessary to meet among themselves, but he also ignored the fact that in the American historical profession such events were widely accepted, common practice, as several participants of the Bielefeld conference pointed out in response.⁸⁸

As had been the case with the other historiographical challenges to *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, the Bielefelder practiced "initially rejection and defamation, later enrichment and integration," which meant at least partial acceptance.⁸⁹ In 1986, an updated

⁸⁵ Karin Hausen, "Women's History in den Vereinigten Staaten," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 7 (1981), 347-363.

⁸⁶ See the statistics provided by Ute Frevert, "Bewegung und Disziplin in der Frauengeschichte. Ein Forschungsbericht," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 14 (1988), 240-262, statistics on 263.

⁸⁷ Jürgen Kocka, letter to M. Oubaid, Geschäftsstelle Frauenforschung, Universität Bielefeld, April 27, 1981, in *Frauengeschichte. Dokumentation des 3. Historikerinnentreffens in Bielefeld, April '81* (München, 1981), 123.

⁸⁸ Berliner Historikerinnen-Gruppe, "Offener Brief an den Rektor der Universität Bielefeld, May 21, 1981," in *Frauengeschichte. Dokumentation des 3. Historikerinnentreffens in Bielefeld, April '81*, 124-128.

⁸⁹ Von Saldern, "Schwere Geburten," 16.

edition of Jürgen Kocka's volume *Sozialgeschichte* appeared. In the last chapter, which discussed historiographical developments in the previous decade (the book had originally been published in 1977), Kocka conceded that women's history counted among the "most important new approaches," but added that its challenge to the historical profession had unfolded "at times in a utopian and exaggerated manner, and in contradiction to the basic principles of scholarly work."⁹⁰ The professionalization argument, employed against historians of everyday life, played an important role in this discussion as well.

Just when the debates between social historians and their respective challengers were raging, the Norwegian social scientist Johan Galtung famously contrasted four distinctive intellectual styles, constructing the ideal types of the "Saxonic", the "Teutonic", the "Gallic", and the "Nipponic" intellectual style.⁹¹ Among other elements, Galtung distinguished between the rather conversational style of debate in Anglo-American academia and the more contentious style of debate within its German counterpart. But apart from these—alleged or imagined—peculiarities of German academia, structural characteristics of the university system also seem to have contributed to the acrimony of these debates. The historical profession in West Germany was, despite the expansion of the late 1960s and early 1970s, still a comparatively manageable world, in which a small number of scholars exerted significant influence on the distribution of jobs. The existence of few powerful "middle-aged boys networks" constricted the establishment of new historiographical directions. Moreover, by 1980 the vast majority of full professors were far from retirement, which led to very few

⁹⁰ Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte. Begriff – Entwicklung – Probleme* (Göttingen, 1986), 139.

⁹¹ See Johan Galtung, "Structure, Culture, and Intellectual Style: an Essay Comparing Saxonic, Teutonic, Gallic, and Nipponic Approaches," *Social Science Information* 20 (1981), 817-856.

job openings. Finally, the decreasing funding for universities made the creation of new academic position almost impossible. These factors explain why most historians of everyday life and women's historians were ultimately prevented from gaining a permanent institutional foothold.

From the Bielefelders' perspective, their recently gained position within the historical profession had to be defended. While during the early 1970s they had felt that time was on their side, it now seemed that *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* was losing ground, even more so outside than within the confines of the academic discipline. Apart from interpretive disagreements, the 1980s also saw a slow shift of German history's "vanishing point" from 1933 to 1941.⁹² American as well as German historians began to direct their attention to the genesis of the Holocaust. As a consequence, the issues of the Nazi rise to power and of the continuities between German Empire and Nazi Germany became less pressing, and the Bielefelder began to lose their position on the cutting edge of research. Lastly, as soon as the "family feuds" among left-of-center historians of different shades had receded, the next battle with conservative scholars was about to begin.

The *Historikerstreit* – Restoring Old Dichotomies?

If the debates of the early 1980s seemed to suggest that the historiographical "camps" had become increasingly diversified, the *Historikerstreit* restored the previous dichotomy and split the West German historiographical profession along one distinct line, "conservatives" vs. "left-liberals". This debate, characterized more by its acrimonious nature than by its

⁹² See Helmut Walser Smith, "The Vanishing Point of German History: An Essay on Perspective," *History and Memory* 17 (2005), 269-295, esp. 283-288.

contribution to historiographical progress, seemed to revolve around the question of National Socialism's singularity.⁹³ Yet in reality, what was at stake went far beyond particular historiographical questions. It was the intellectual hegemony of left-liberal academics, who had fought for the establishment of a critical rather than affirmative "use" of modern German history, and who saw their achievements endangered. This is not to say that the *Historikerstreit* was entirely irrelevant from a scholarly point of view. As Ulrich Herbert has convincingly argued, the objection to Nolte's obvious apologetics ultimately resulted in increasing research on the mechanics of the Holocaust.⁹⁴ Still, the debate was primarily a political one, and in this evaluation historians on both sides of the divide agreed—Hans-Ulrich Wehler termed it "primarily a political battle for the self-conception of the Federal Republic and the political consciousness of its citizens," while for the conservative diplomatic historian Andreas Hillgruber, Jürgen Habermas' articles, which had started the controversy, were "not grounded in scholarship, but politically motivated."⁹⁵

Since the development of the *Historikerstreit* has been recounted multiple times, a few comments may suffice.⁹⁶ Alarmed by Chancellor Kohl's "politics of the past" during the

⁹³ The title of the volume representing the main contributions suggested just that. See Reinhard Piper (ed.), *"Historikerstreit." Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (München, 1987).

⁹⁴ Ulrich Herbert, "Der Historikerstreit. Politische, wissenschaftliche und biographische Aspekte," in Martin Sabrow/Ralf Jessen/Klaus Grosse Kracht (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte. Grosse Kontroversen seit 1945* (München, 2003), 94-113.

⁹⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum Historikerstreit* (München, 1988), 10; Andreas Hillgruber, "Für die Forschung gibt es kein Frageverbot," *Rheinischer Merkur/Christ und Welt*, October 31, 1986.

⁹⁶ The most recent balanced account provides Klaus Grosse Kracht, *Die zankende Zunft. Historische Kontroversen in Deutschland nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2005), 91-114. The controversy was also observed by British and American scholars of German history: Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York, 1988); Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1988).

previous years, as well as several essays by Ernst Nolte, Jürgen Habermas attacked what he considered the “apologetic tendencies of West German contemporary history.”⁹⁷ Habermas lumped together a fairly heterogeneous group of four historians who he claimed represented the historiographical shift toward apologetics. Ernst Nolte, author of a highly regarded, comparative study on fascism, oscillated between history and philosophy. Michael Stürmer’s scholarly work focused more on nineteenth century than on contemporary history, even though he touched upon these issues in the many articles he published in non-academic venues. Of the four historians, the Kohl adviser Stürmer was the only public intellectual, whose presence in the media matched Habermas’ and the Bielefelders’. Finally, Andreas Hillgruber—as well as Klaus Hildebrand, who vehemently defended him—were rather traditional diplomatic historians. Of the four, only Nolte was a true apologist, advancing increasingly outrageous arguments trivializing National Socialism and the Holocaust, all under the guise of philosophical speculation and rhetorical questions.⁹⁸

Regardless of its factual accuracy, Habermas’ article triggered an avalanche of responses, in which the tone adopted by historians on the Left as well as on the Right became increasingly agitated. The *Historikerstreit* also revealed that the trenches in which the combatants were fighting (the military terminology seems appropriate given the tenor of the debate) had already been dug around 1968. Andreas Hillgruber, for example, accused Jürgen Habermas of writing in the style of “APO pamphlets” (referring to texts by the leftist Extra-

⁹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, “Eine Art Schadensabwicklung. Apologetische Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung,” *Die Zeit*, July 7, 1986.

⁹⁸ Ernst Nolte, “Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 6, 1986; Id., *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg, 1917-1945. Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Berlin, 1987).

Parliamentary Opposition of the late 1960s).⁹⁹ Habermas had never had any connection to student radicalism, but both Hillgruber (in Cologne) and Nolte (in Marburg and later Berlin) had been victims of left-wing students who had launched vicious campaigns against them, distributing leaflets and interrupting lectures. In the 1970s, Nolte had been a founding member of the *Bund Freiheit der Wissenschaft*, a conservative organization of university professors attempting to curb the influence of the student movement on West German universities. Ultimately, the debate led to a consolidation of the left-liberal and conservative historiographical camps, with the former regaining some of the ground it had lost in the previous years. On the left-liberal side, the debate unified experts on National Socialism such as the “functionalist” Hans Mommsen and the “intentionalist” Eberhard Jäckel, who had previously had significant interpretive disagreements, but who both considered Nolte’s position fundamentally wrong. For the broader public, the controversy offered the rare spectacle of prominent scholars launching salvos at each other in the press.¹⁰⁰

The *Historikerstreit* was a very German affair—this verdict holds true in at least two respects. It refers to the way in which the debate unfolded, with both sides simultaneously fanning the flames and accusing the opponents of polemics, thus proving Johan Galtung’s theory regarding the teutonic academic style. The controversy was also German insofar as American—or other foreign—historians participated in the debate not through direct interventions but only through reviews of the protagonists’ works that were at the center of the debate. Moreover, American and British historians took stock of the controversy only

⁹⁹ Andreas Hillgruber, “Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Heinz Janssen, und die Aufklärung Anno 1986,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 37 (1986), 725-738, quote 725.

¹⁰⁰ Many of the contributions in daily and weekly newspapers are collected in Piper (ed.), “*Historikerstreit*.” For an analysis of the *Historikerstreit* as a “media debate,” see Grosse Kracht, *Die zankende Zunft*, 91-114.

after the dust had settled.¹⁰¹ But once they began to comment on the debate, they were unanimous in their opposition to Ernst Nolte's apologetics, even though Habermas received a fair share of criticism as well. Similar to the *Fischer-Kontroverse* more than 20 years earlier, the *Historikerstreit* thus in sum affirmed the "progressive" transatlantic alliance of historians.

All of the debates reviewed above concerned West German historiography's methodological and interpretive dimension. Yet the free-floating intelligentsia within the historical profession was of course firmly embedded in its institutional structures, and during the 1980s this dimension received increasing attention as well. While conservative West German historians usually lost the debates conducted outside the narrow confines of scholarly journals, because their left-liberal colleagues tended to dominate the discourse in daily and weekly newspapers, they were much more successful behind the scenes. By the 1980s, they had managed to engineer conservative majorities in most historical institutions' academic advisory boards. While this may appear, especially to American readers, as an overly political interpretation of these academic processes, the mode of thinking in particular camps was something left-liberals and conservatives shared. This would continue well into the 1990s. Klaus Hildebrand, whose contacts with and even exposure to the American historical profession had been distinctly limited, became the chairman of the German Historical Institute's advisory board in Washington D.C. in 1993.¹⁰² While academic politics of this sort had traditionally gone more or less unnoticed, in the stormy climate of the 1980s

¹⁰¹ Exemplary are the contributions by Gordon Craig, "The War of the German Historians," *New York Review of Books*, January 15, 1987, a review of the books by Hillgruber and Stürmer that figured in the *Historikerstreit*; Charles S. Maier, "Immoral Equivalence: Revisiting the Nazi Past for the Kohl Era," *The New Republic*, December 1, 1986, 36-41.

¹⁰² For a list of advisory boards of the most important historical institutions, see the appendix in Hohls/Jarausch (eds.) *Versäumte Fragen*, 503-516.

Hans-Ulrich Wehler castigated these developments, which he claimed had not just led to ideological conformity but also brought second-rate historians into influential positions.¹⁰³

Of course, the question of what constitutes first- and second-rate very much depends on the position of the observer. Yet it is striking that academic advisory boards of German Historical Institutes were sometimes comprised of historians with very little—if any—connection to the country where the institute was located. Klaus Hildebrand's chairmanship at the GHI in Washington D.C seems to have been a result of his successful academic politics rather than his familiarity with American history or the American historical profession. More generally, a comparison of the academic advisory boards of institutions both inside and outside Germany reveals a near omnipresence of a few distinguished names, almost all of whom could be counted as conservative. This observation underscores the fact that despite some statements to the contrary, there never was a "prevailing orthodoxy" within the West German historical profession.

The historiographical battles surrounding *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* did of course not end with unification. But what changed during the 1990s was the correlation between methodological and political positions. When Hans-Ulrich Wehler vehemently rejected a cultural history based on Michel Foucault, he did not argue with historians of a distinct political persuasion.¹⁰⁴ In fact, many representatives of a younger generation, who tended toward cultural rather than social history, regarded the close connection between historiography and politics as somewhat outdated. And while many historians of Wehler's

¹⁰³ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Neokonservative Wissenschaftspolitik. Eine Anmerkung zum Historikerstreit," *Merkur* 41 (1987), 1091-1096.

¹⁰⁴ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Die Herausforderung der Kulturgeschichte* (München, 1998).

generation had sought and gained access to non-academic publication venues, the succeeding cohort seemed to be much less interested in the role of public intellectuals—something Wehler deplored.¹⁰⁵ While many of the Bielefelder's generation had ostentatiously challenged the preceding generations, now younger scholars were more quietly venturing in new directions, politely ignoring the social historians' objections. The atmosphere at the conference "Das Deutsche Kaiserreich in der Kontroverse – Probleme und Perspektiven," which was held in Berlin in January 2007 on the occasion of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's 75th birthday, illustrates this change quite well. When the honored historian, together with Jürgen Kocka, once again launched a tirade against cultural historians (the term used was *Kulturalisten*, which had a derogatory connotation), the response of the audience, where historians in their thirties and forties were in the majority, ranged between amusement and boredom.¹⁰⁶ It was obvious that this younger generation did not deem it necessary to continue the old debates.

¹⁰⁵ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation. Ein Gespräch mit Manfred Hettling und Cornelius Torp* (München, 2006), 184.

¹⁰⁶ Personal observation at the conference. See also the conference report "Das Deutsche Kaiserreich in der Kontroverse – Probleme und Perspektiven," January 11-13, 2007, Berlin, H-Soz-u-Kult, January 25, 2007, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=1469>; and the conference volume, Sven Oliver Müller/Cornelius Torp (eds.), *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich in der Kontroverse* (Göttingen, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Rethinking Modern German History: a Transatlantic Enterprise?

This dissertation has provided an account of the German-American scholarly community of modern German history between the end of World War II and the 1980s. Within this community, the study has traced the intellectual and institutional development of the *Bielefelder Schule*, a group of social historians with close ties to scholars on the other side of Atlantic. By following the Bielefelders' establishment within and their impact on the West German historical profession, the dissertation has combined a national and a transnational focus in order to contribute to the growing literature on postwar West German historiography. As I have argued in the previous chapters, the prevailing notions about the transatlantic scholarly community do not adequately capture its complexities. Conceiving of this community in a more differentiated way also leads us to correct some assumptions about the *Bielefelder Schule*. Yet before I summarize my findings, we should briefly recall the prevailing images of the German-American community of historians and the *Bielefelder Schule*.

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

¹ Ernst Schulin, “German and American Historiography in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in Lehmann/Sheehan, *An Interrupted Past*, 31.

of view.¹ This has created the impression of American historians providing some sort of developmental aid to their German colleagues, who were slowly moving along on their “long way West:” throughout the postwar years, Americans consistently intervened on behalf of those German historians who proposed a “critical” perspective on the German past. During the 1960s’ *Fischer-Kontroverse* about the origins and the course of World War I, Americans sided with Fritz Fischer, who was initially very isolated within the German historical profession. As late as the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, American historians were unanimous in their opposition to Ernst Nolte’s apologetics regarding the singularity of National Socialism and the Holocaust.²

These prevailing notions about the role of American scholars of modern German history have also shaped my own perspective on this topic. An article growing out of my M.A. thesis argued along the lines of the same German-American historiographical dichotomy.³ However, critics of this position have correctly argued that it implicitly or explicitly casts American historians of modern Germany as impartial observers of West German historiography and as neutral arbiters in the notoriously fierce debates among their German colleagues.⁴ Ultimately, such an interpretation assumes that the physical distance

¹ See Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *The Return to the Western Tradition: German Historiography since 1945* (Washington, D.C., 1991); Georg Iggers, “Introduction”, in Id., *The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historical Writing Since 1945* (Leamington Spa, 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), 121f.; Jürgen Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte: Begriff – Entwicklung – Probleme* (Göttingen, 1977), 40.

² See Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1988); Gordon Craig, “Review of Ernst Nolte, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg*,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 36 (1988), 772-773.

³ Philipp Stelzel, “Fritz Fischer and the American Historical Profession: Tracing the Transatlantic Dimension of the Fischer-Kontroverse,” *Storia della Storiografia* 44 (2003), 67-84.

⁴ John L. Harvey, Contribution to an *H-German* discussion, April 5, 2006.

from the studied country somehow facilitates a more “objective” perspective, an argument that simply reverses the previous conservative German claim of foreigners lacking proper understanding of and empathy for the peculiarities of German history. Following this critique, my research has indeed revealed a more complex picture and has led me to suggest an alternative conceptualization of the post-World War II German-American community of historians.

The *Bielefelder Schule* appears in most accounts as embodying the progressive West German historiographical tradition. This observation is generally linked to the school’s emergence within a transatlantic scholarly context. *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*, the argument goes, successfully modernized the West German historical profession, because it provided a “critical” perspective on the German past, re-conceptualized historiography in an interdisciplinary fashion, and internationalized the field by drawing on American influences and bringing American scholars into the conversation. As we have seen, this perception has been the result of many texts written by the *Bielefelder Schule*’s protagonists, other left-liberal historians of the same generation, and sympathetic American observers. Yet my research suggests that we need to conceive of the role of American historians in the genesis of the *Bielefelder Schule* in a less one-dimensional way.

A Transatlantic Conversation

The decades under review in this dissertation 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 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 essentialist critique, which mostly conservative Germans leveled against disagreeable foreign perspectives, has lost its effectiveness. As we have seen, as late as the early 1960s, even an émigré historian such as Klaus Epstein viewed American-born historians as disadvantaged when analyzing complex events in German history. Yet most historians of his age cohort, and certainly the overwhelming majority of scholars of the succeeding generations, deemed such an argument to be inappropriate.

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. Gerhard Ritter's successful attempt to reestablish the journal *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* through a transatlantic group of Reformation scholars constitutes one such example. Hans-Ulrich Wehler's selection of members for *Geschichte und Gesellschaft's* consulting committee, which ultimately contained nine American scholars, belongs to a similar category. 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 “court of appeals,” in particular during the many hard-fought historiographical debates.⁵

⁵ Other foreign historians could serve in the same role. This constitutes one of two main reasons why Eley's, Blackbourn's, and Evans' critique of the *Sonderweg* paradigm warmed the hearts of German conservatives.

When Theodor Schieder recommended émigré historian Klaus Epstein for several *Lehrstühle* in the Federal Republic, he knew that the American would not push revisionism beyond the limits that Schieder and other moderate conservatives deemed acceptable. Similarly, Otto Pflanze's dismissal of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's Bismarck interpretation was particularly valuable for the Bielefelder's conservative West German critics. After all, it was articulated by one of the Americans, who were generally believed to fall in line with the proponents of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft*. It did not matter that Pflanze himself was largely out of touch with American historiographical developments of the time. What mattered was that he could be cast as an objective outside observer. 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.

While an outside perspective does not guarantee more convincing scholarship, it at least can enable historians to deal with politically or morally sensitive issues at an earlier time. Hans W. Gatzke's study *Drive to the West*, completed in 1947 and published in 1950, anticipated many of Fritz Fischer's arguments of the 1960s regarding the German Empire's war aims in World War I.⁶ This observation is certainly not limited to historiography on modern Germany. Similarly, it was less difficult for the American historian Robert Paxton to

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."

⁶ Hans W. Gatzke, *Germany's Drive to the West: A Study of Germany's Western War Aims during the First World War* (Baltimore, Md., 1950). The study grew out of a dissertation directed by William L. Langer at Harvard.

tackle the delicate question of French collaboration with the Nazi regime in Vichy than for French scholars, who were affected by their societal taboos regarding this topic.⁷ These different implications resulting from writing one's own as opposed to someone else's history should not be neglected. Of course, the postwar American historical profession also included German émigrés, who in dealing with Germany did write their own history. Yet approaching the "German problem" from abroad meant to be unrestricted by the unspoken rules of the West German historical profession.

For all these reasons, we should not assume that German and American historians were working in synchronicity toward or against a certain goal. Instead, we should think of them as proceeding on different trajectories. Immediately after World War II, and for about the following two decades, American historians were likely to believe in a German *Sonderweg*. For some, this *Sonderweg* manifested itself in German militarism and an unhealthy influence of the military elite on political developments, as Gordon Craig argued in the 1950s. Other historians, such as Leonard Krieger, Fritz Stern, and George Mosse, ventured into the realm of ideas and attributed the calamitous "special path" to a "German mind" or a "Germanic ideology." None of these historians contended that the decline into the National Socialist abyss was an inevitable result of these historical developments. But the claim of a peculiar German trajectory existed implicitly or explicitly in all of these studies. Moreover, while the American historical profession was diverse enough to offer space to German historians of all political shades, Americans also carefully observed the ways in which their West German colleagues broached delicate areas of German history.

⁷ Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York, 1972); for the historiographical context see Sarah Fishman (ed.), *France at War: Vichy and the Historians* (Oxford/New York, 2000).

Subsequently, they did not shy away from criticizing what they perceived as apologetic tendencies and from praising critical ones.

As a result, by the late 1960s, German and American historians had different views of the stage at which the reconsideration of modern German history had arrived. The revisionist impulse, initially much stronger on the American side, now increased within the West German historical profession. Theodore Hamerow later wrote about the Fischer-Kontroverse as the “declaration of independence” for younger German historians—and he was certainly correct: By the late 1960s, the Germans of Wehler’s generation had declared their independence from their conservative predecessors.⁸ Yet the revolutionary wars were just about to begin. By contrast, American historians regarded the controversy as a sign that West German historians had finally achieved the long overdue pluralization of their profession. Many Americans no longer saw the front lines as running between apologetic reactionaries on the one side and revisionist progressives on the other. For the Americans, by the late 1960s the revolution was already nearing its conclusion.

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

⁸ Theodore Hamerow, “Guilt, Redemption, and Writing German History,” *American Historical Review* 88 (1983), 53-72; quote 66.

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.⁹ All of them characterized the field of post-1945 German-American historiography as well.

While this study has analyzed the transatlantic community primarily from a German perspective, we also need to ask what American historians gained from the transatlantic conversation. Many Americans who studied with German émigrés have emphasized the invaluable training in thorough German *Quellenkritik* (source criticism). Moreover, through academic contacts of their advisers, as well as exchange programs funded by the West German state, young American historians often received the opportunity to study and research in Germany. This cooperation on a practical level benefited successive generations of Americans, who were also able to form their first academic contacts with German colleagues. Dissertations on German history written exclusively based on monographs and printed sources available in American libraries soon became a thing of the past. The depth of American research on German history has unquestionably increased over the last decades.

⁹ Daniel T. Rodgers, “An Age of Social Politics,” in Thomas Bender (ed.), *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002), 260.

Finally, young Americans who survived the trenches and snipers of the notorious German *Oberseminar* (research colloquium) were armed and ready for all future conferences.

What is the state of the German-American scholarly community of modern German history today? In the Federal Republic, more historians are aware of historiographical developments in the United States than in previous decades. Germans are more likely to follow debates among American colleagues, read American monographs, journal articles, and book reviews. The number of Germans contributing articles and reviews to American journals has increased as well. Conversely, American historians of Germany—at least if they work at research institutions—are generally familiar with the most recent work in the Federal Republic. This state of affairs embodies a striking contrast to the situation of the field *Germanistik* (German Literature), where Germans hardly pay attention to their American colleagues. Remaining provincialism on both sides of the Atlantic, which would be difficult to deny, is a problem not only haunting the German-American community of historians. As Richard J. Evans has recently shown, many European historians remain confined to their respective national scholarly networks, often hardly paying attention to scholarship abroad, not even in the particular country whose history they specialize in.¹⁰ But it is safe to say that the extended transatlantic conversation of the last decades has increased the mutual awareness.

¹⁰ Richard J. Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders: British Historians and the European Continent* (Cambridge, UK, 2009).

The Bielefelder Schule: Achievements, Limitations, Legacy

The question of the achievements, limitations, and legacy of the *Bielefelder Schule* is more complicated. The answer depends on the observer's methodological position as much as it does on the interpretive and political views. In the Federal Republic, many historians of the middle generation (born in the 1950s and early 1960s) today seem to believe that *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* will only continue to occupy those with historiographical interest. The *Bielefelder Schule's* focus on a Prussian-dominated German nation state appears to be outdated, as does its emphasis on history's socioeconomic dimension. However, since the historical professions in the Federal Republic and the United States have taken several methodological turns over the last three decades, it is conceivable that social and economic history will again become more popular. Yet regardless of these speculations, an assessment of the *Bielefelder Schule's* achievements should distinguish an interpretive, a methodological, and a political dimension.

Our perspectives on the German *Sonderweg* have changed considerably since this interpretation was first articulated. Many historians have abandoned the concept altogether. Even its previously most forceful advocates have in the meantime modified their positions.¹¹ However one evaluates the specific elements of this paradigm today—and despite numerous funeral eulogies, it is not completely dead—one fact seems hard to deny: the fierce debates triggered by the Bielefelders' insistence on the peculiarities of German history have been impressively fruitful. While not all historiographical controversies result in heuristic

¹¹ See, for example, the conclusion in the fourth volume of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Vol. 4: Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914-1949* (München, 2003), 985-994 ("Rückblick auf das deutsche Zeitalter der Extreme"); and Jürgen Kocka, "Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: the Case of the German *Sonderweg*," *History and Theory* 38 (1999), 40-50.

progress, this one certainly did. By advocating their positions intelligently as well as forcefully (which included taking advantage of institutional resources), Wehler, Kocka, and other historians in their orbit ultimately forced everyone else to at least engage with them. Conversely, the criticism articulated by historians of very different methodological and political persuasions against this conception required the Bielefelder to reexamine their own assumptions. Despite all initial resistance and polemics, the proponents of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* proved nevertheless capable of modifying many of their previously cherished positions. Even if Hans-Ulrich Wehler had, in his *Deutsche Kaiserreich*, promoted the “primacy of domestic politics,” in the third volume of *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* he spoke of an “interdependence of domestic and foreign politics.”¹² Ultimately, the controversies often led the combatants to refine their respective interpretations. The two multi-volume histories of Germany, written by Wehler and his eternal counterpart Thomas Nipperdey, are the prime example for this mutually beneficial outcome.¹³

Finally, one has to recognize that the Bielefelder wrestled with questions that at the time were particularly pressing, or “relevant,” to use the contemporary term. Referring to topics pursued by historians of everyday life in the 1980s, Kenneth Barkin in 1990 acidly remarked that “if contemporary German historians can choose to write about village *Spinnstuben* or urge us to become missionaries in rowboats, it is because the big question

¹² Compare Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918* (Göttingen, 1973), 184; and Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Vol. 3: Von der ‚Deutschen Doppelrevolution‘ bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs 1849-1914* (München, 1995), 965f.

¹³ Paul Nolte, “Darstellungsweisen deutscher Geschichte. Erzählstrukturen und ‘master narratives’ bei Nipperdey und Wehler,” in Christoph Conrad/Sebastian Conrad (eds.), *Die Nation schreiben. Geschichtswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 2002), 236-268.

was addressed for a good three decades.”¹⁴ The “big question” was of course how the Nazi rise to power had been possible, and Barkin—in my opinion correctly—pointed to the impossibility of escaping this question after World War II.

Similar to the interpretive dimension, the methodological positions of the Bielefelder seem dated to many contemporary observers. Despite the sometimes-plausible criticism of the disadvantages of large-scale socioeconomic approaches, one needs to remember in which historiographical context they developed. To ridicule some of the proponents of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* for their reliance on modernization theories would be similar to dismissing cultural historians for their dependence on Michel Foucault, who may very well be equally passé ten or twenty years from now. In both cases, historians followed theoretical and methodological trends of the time, or mere “fashions,” as their critics would claim. Observing the historiographical landscape of the last decades, one is struck by the recurrence of utterly similar arguments in methodological debates. Representatives of the historical profession’s establishments will routinely dismiss proponents of new approaches as “fashionable,” whereas the accused in return will level the charge of “traditionalism” against their critics. To alter a famous phrase by Marx, we can therefore argue that “men (and women) write their own historiography, but they do not write it as they please, they do not write it under the circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.” Of course, this does not imply any historiographical determinism. Instead, it serves as a reminder that historians do not work in

¹⁴ Kenneth Barkin, “German Émigré Historians in America: The Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies,” in Hartmut Lehmann/James J. Sheehan (eds.), *An Interrupted Past: German Speaking Refugee Historians in the United States after 1933* (Cambridge, UK, 1991), 149-169, quote 157-158.

a vacuum, but in their choice of topics as well as approaches are profoundly influenced by the times in which they live.

Any evaluation of the *Bielefelder Schule*'s legacy would be incomplete without the consideration of historiography's political dimension and the relationship between historians and their societies. For the engagement of the leading figures of *Historische Sozialwissenschaft* in public debates of various kinds remains extraordinary. Wehler's and Heinrich August Winkler's vehement objection to the admission of Turkey into the European Union during the last years only constitutes the latest example for their participation in public debates. The generational explanation, advanced by Dirk Moses and the political theorist Jan-Werner Müller, appears convincing. The "1945ers" on both the Left and the Right, whether historians, social scientists, or philosophers, saw it as crucial to engage in public debates in order to shape the historical and political consciousness of West German citizens. Arguably, the experience of war, postwar, and reconstruction offered the lesson that the civic engagement of intellectuals could help maintain the stability of the democratic German state.¹⁵ Historians of this generation such as Wehler and Hans and Wolfgang J. Mommsen, believed—correctly, in my view—that they had to become involved in the transformation of a polity. They assumed that West German attitudes about the nation's recent past would directly affect the success or failure of the democratic state. By battling real—and sometimes perceived—apologists, they contributed to the *innere Demokratisierung* (inner democratization) of the Federal Republic.

¹⁵ A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge, UK, 2007); Jan-Werner Müller, *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification, and National Identity* (New Haven, 2000).

By contrast, the next generation, which had grown up in such a stable democracy, was more likely to take West Germany's political conditions for granted. Therefore Hans-Ulrich Wehler frequently deplores the fact that in the Federal Republic, today few historians aspire to fulfill role of the public intellectual.¹⁶ To be sure, there are still regular commentators on historical-political issues. Among the Left-liberals, Ulrich Herbert and Norbert Frei cover topics related to National Socialism and its legacy, whereas Martin Sabrow assumes a similar role for the GDR. The moderate Conservative Paul Nolte has followed his *Doktorvater* Wehler's footsteps at least regarding his recurrent presence in the media. Nolte's frequent interventions in debates about societal reforms in the Federal Republic even transcend Wehler's activities in this area—but he remains an exception to the rule.¹⁷ Further on the Right, Andreas Rödder regularly writes for the conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, yet without matching Michael Stürmer's intellectual presence and impact or assuming Stürmer's role as a political adviser.

In addition, historians in Germany today, just like German society at large, are wrestling with other questions than Wehler's generation. The legacy of National Socialism no longer occupies the central place it once did. While it remains important, it has become one of several themes occupying intellectuals and the media. The integration of migrant workers into German society, the reform of the welfare state, and, linked to the latter issue, the persistent social inequality within German society are but a few topics that have gained increasing attention in the last two decades. Historians still comment on these problems, as

¹⁶ Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Eine lebhaftige Kampfsituation. Ein Gespräch mit Manfred Hettling und Cornelius Torp* (München, 2006), 184.

¹⁷ Paul Nolte, *Generation Reform. Jenseits der blockierten Republik* (München, 2004); Id., *Riskante Moderne. Die Deutschen und der neue Kapitalismus* (München, 2006).

far as they relate to their research interests, and thus Wehler's complaint does not accurately depict the current situation.

Yet perhaps one has to move away from the narrow academic debates and the *feuilleton* sections of German quality papers to assess the actual significance of the *Bielefelder Schule*. As in many other cases, popular culture may offer us some clues: On October 30, 2008, the comedian Harald Schmidt, host of a popular German TV show similar to David Letterman's "Late Show," used *Playmobil* plastic toy figures to reenact the plot of the fifth volume of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*.¹⁸ Introducing his audience even to the University of Bielefeld's reform concept and to the author's academic biography, Schmidt offered a fairly accurate account of Wehler's arguments regarding the transformation of German society after World War II. It would be difficult to make a more convincing argument for the influence of the *Bielefelder Schule* on the Federal Republic.

¹⁸ http://lesesaal.faz.net/wehler/autor_videos.php?vid=5&vidblock=3; accessed April 22, 2010.

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