

**“AMERICANIZATION AND ANTI-AMERICANISM:  
THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN CULTURE ON GERMANY AFTER 1945”,  
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, COLUMBUS, OHIO, USA, OCTOBER 16 & 17, 2002**

**Candy Floss and Cowgirls:  
Cultural Transmission and the *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Volksfest*, Berlin<sup>1</sup>**

Following the collapse of Nazi Germany in 1945 the U.S. was presented with a unique opportunity. America's overriding objectives for the occupation of Germany were reeducation and democratization. A large part of this effort was centered, not only on formal educational institutions, but also on information and cultural exchange. The impetus for this type of activity stemmed from earlier operations related to psychological warfare campaigns, such as *Voice of America* broadcasts in 1944, which provided information about U.S. industry, geography, songs, beliefs, and individual American states. The agenda was to facilitate the acceptance of the U.S. program of occupation. The *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Volksfest* has been an annual cultural event for forty years and is one of the oldest programs that still survives. This paper will discuss its origins, history, and importance within the context of the cultural Cold War.

The Long-Range Policy Statement for German Reeducation states: 'the Nazi heritage of Germany's spiritual isolation must be overcome by restoring as rapidly as possible those cultural contacts which will foster the assimilation of the German people into the society of peaceful nations.'<sup>2</sup> The *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Volksfest* can be seen as part of the process in which the cultural models and norms of styles of behavior of a mass consumption society were exported from the United States to Europe. This transmission of American culture and the "American way of life" had originally stood as an alternative to totalitarianism. By 1961 and the first *Volksfest*, the new enemy was communism. The erection of the Berlin Wall meant that West Berlin was literally at the frontline of the Cold War.

There have been three stages in the development of educational and cultural affairs in Germany. The initial period was characterized by reeducation and physical and political reconstruction. The second phase reflected changing conditions and a move toward reorientation and the final phase consisted of binational cooperation and partnership. With the transfer of power from

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<sup>2</sup> SWNCC 269/5, 5 June 1946 in United States Department of State, Germany, 1947-1949: The Story in Documents, Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950, pp. 541-2.

OMGUS (Office of Military Government, United States) to HICOG (High Commission for Germany) in 1949, High Commissioner John J. McCloy combined the activities of the Information Control Division and the Division of Education and Cultural Relations into the new Office of Public Affairs. This was created to coordinate the scattered activities of the preceding two divisions. The original occupation directive JCS 1067 had identified cultural institutions, such as museums, as being vital to the achievement of the reeducation of Germany. The directive that would follow JCS 1779 cemented American determination to bring about thorough changes. Cultural reconstruction was part of this change.

Such activities were also motivated initially by a desire to overcome a cultural anti-Americanism, especially amongst intellectuals and educated Germans. ‘Many Germans were found to have the curious notion that Americans have no artistic interests.’<sup>3</sup> Since the collapse of the Nazi regime the lifestyle of GIs had an everyday influence on the Germans. Immediate postwar scarcity meant that Germans wanted what the American GIs had. What they had, because of American production strength, was iconic American goods. Both became associated with affluence and freedom and ‘have been instruments of political and cultural education.’<sup>4</sup> The Cold War was not just a clash of military empires, but of economies, cultures, and rival ways of life. Literally flying the flag, every U.S. military base became an outpost of American trade and culture. Coca-Cola and blue jeans, for example, were the symbols of modern consumerist culture worldwide, the objects that millions aspired to use and flaunt. Considering the permanent influence of the armed forces in Berlin, it is fitting that it was the United States Air Force that came up with the idea of the *Volkfest*.

The *Volkfest* is centered on a Wild West theme and utilizes American symbolism of the West as open space, a realm of freedom. As Kroes has explained ‘America as empty space, the epic America of the frontier, America as a mythical West, had long before the consumption revolution been turned into a symbol of freedom. ... The West appears as a vision of plenty.’<sup>5</sup> Consumption, leisure time, and “freedom” become inextricably woven. Objectives of the *Volkfest* included the strengthening of liberal democracy in Germany, the building of stronger

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<sup>3</sup> Harold Zink, *The United States in Germany, 1944-1955*, Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1957, p. 246.

<sup>4</sup> Rob Kroes, “American Empire and Cultural Imperialism: A View From the Receiving End,” *The American Impact on Western Europe: Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective*, Conference at the German Historical Institute, Washington D.C., March 25-27, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Rob Kroes, “American Empire and Cultural Imperialism: A View From the Receiving End,” *The American Impact on Western Europe: Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective*, Conference at the German Historical Institute, Washington D.C., March 25-27, 1999.

ties with America, and presenting a well-rounded picture of the United States. It also represented a wish to prevent future aggression through candy floss and cowgirls. The lessons of wartime psychological warfare had been learned. 'If you have something worthwhile to say, dress it in the glittering robes of entertainment and you will find a ready market'.<sup>6</sup> The *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Volksfest* is a classic example of this and of Americanization, 'not merely a process of importation and blending that percolated gently into West German Society; rather it was a process that was deliberately planned, consciously advanced, and actively manipulated'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Darryl F. Zanuck, addressing the Writer's Congress in Los Angeles, 1943, quoted in Ralph Willett, The Americanization of Germany, 1945-1949, London & New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Volker Berghahn, "Conceptualizing the American Impact on Germany: West German Society and the Problem of Americanization," The American Impact on Western Europe: Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective, Conference at the German Historical Institute, Washington D.C., March 25-27, 1999.