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Item Type	Article (Version of Record)
UoW Affiliated Authors	Toon, Wendy
Full Citation	Toon, Wendy (2024) “Probably the Most Perfect Symbol of Our Democracy”: The Army, Sports, and the Re-education of German Youth during the Early American Occupation of Germany, 1945–1946. <i>Journal of American Studies</i> , First (View). pp. 1-28. ISSN 0021-8758 (print); 1469-5154 (web)
DOI/ISBN	https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875824000240
Journal/Publisher	<i>Journal of American Studies</i> Cambridge University Press
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Link to item	https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-american-studies/article/probably-the-most-perfect-symbol-of-our-democracy-the-army-sports-and-the-reeducation-of-german-youth-during-the-early-american-occupation-of-germany-19451946/FF4BE9B4E8356F902DE476D9D3BA9DEB

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“Probably the Most Perfect Symbol of Our Democracy”: The Army, Sports, and the Re-education of German Youth during the Early American Occupation of Germany, 1945–1946

WENDY TOON

During World War II, Germany and the United States fought it out on the battlefields, but once the Allies were victorious, American attention quickly turned to the playing fields. Despite recent enmity, in the spirit of amity GIs quickly started recreational games with German youngsters. This seemingly natural development was at odds with both American expectations of the Germans and vice versa. Reeducation of Germany, and especially its Nazi-indoctrinated youth, was viewed as essential to peace, and the army, through sports, became perhaps unlikely early reeducators. This article outlines sports’ inherent Americanness, this impromptu playing, and its relationship to the formal army program of youth activities.

Connections between sports, patriotism and Americanization efforts have a long history in the United States. In postbellum America, “patriotic team games” – baseball and gridiron football (basketball would be added in the 1930s) – provided “dominant cultural meanings” in American sporting tradition closely connected to the creation and expression of *national* spirit.¹ Baseball was used as a “civilizing” force in the emerging American empire, and by the late nineteenth century Americans “understood sport as a social technology for transmitting basic social norms and values.”² Politicians, the

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¹ S. W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876–1926* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), xx, 17.

² Mark Dyreson, *Crafting Patriotism for Global Dominance: America at the Olympics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 136. For a brief history of the role of baseball in American

media, educators, civic leaders, and the American sporting community celebrated the connection between sports and the “American way of life.” These inherent links between sports and American values are elucidated particularly through Mark Dyreson’s idea of the US as a “sporting republic.” He notes that “republican ideas about representative democracy, social mores, the commonweal, and civic virtue shaped American conceptions of sport.”³ These manifested in two essential Progressive “athletic commandments”: fair play and good sportsmanship.⁴ These “commandments” were very much in evidence in mid-1940s American minds and actions during the early occupation of Germany. In the interwar years an “extraordinarily tight link between sport and ‘Americanism’” persisted “premised on a deeply held belief that sport, American-style, could transform other ideologies and social systems,” “inculca[ting] habits of mind and internaliz[ation] of democratic practices.” As a “carrier of values,” sports therefore had significant potential as part of reeducative efforts during the early occupation.⁵ By World War II, sports had become an essential part of American culture and national identity, an expression of shared values about “playing by the rules” and an example of practical democracy where the “best man” or team would win.⁶ Adopting these standards would be essential to Germany’s postwar future.

Voluntary team sports’ organization had occurred in the US Zone during the post-World War I occupation of the Rhineland. Through the encouragement of the YMCA and the Knights of Columbus especially, sports became an increasingly significant part of American Forces in Germany’s activities. Baseball was highlighted as the favored sport of enlisted men. The “lure of the great American pastime” was very much in the “minds of Yanks in the Rhineland” and the *Amaroc News* reported, “The interest in the sport can never die because it is a Democratic game played by a Democratic people ... Baseball is an example of American courage, confidence, dash, energy, vim, vigor, and vitality.”⁷ Although sports’ usage was mainly motivated by

foreign policy see Robert Elias, “Baseball and American Foreign Policy,” *Transatlantica*, 2 (2011), 1–19.

³ Mark Dyreson, *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 3. ⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵ Barbara J. Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 80, 88, 89.

⁶ The American credo, “Let the best man win, whoever he is,” originated in Owen Wister, *The Virginian* (New York and London: The Macmillan Company, 1902), 147.

⁷ “Rhine Army Ready for Great Season on the Diamond,” *Stars and Stripes* (France), 11 April 1919, 7; “Play Ball,” *Amaroc News*, 1 May 1920, quoted in Douglas F. Habib, “Chastity, Masculinity, and Military Efficiency: The United States Army in Germany, 1918–1923,” *International History Review*, 28, 4 (Dec. 2006), 737–57, 755. Baseball’s inherently and exceptionally American qualities were notably elucidated in Albert G. Spalding, *America’s National Game: Historic Facts Concerning the Beginning, Evolution, Development and*

providing a diversion for American forces, Habib has argued that it was believed that “American manliness, with its democratic impulses, its vigour, its sobriety and chastity, and its sense of justice was a beacon to men of other cultures; to be admired and emulated. Some even believed that sports, by teaching such lessons, could reform the German national character.”⁸ Sports’ educative and reformatory potential had therefore been recognized, and US troops did sometimes use sports as a way of connecting with, and converting, Germans. The *Stars and Stripes* recorded, “Undoubtedly, when the Army of Occupation goes home it will leave behind it customs and ways Deutschland never knew before. Among the new things the Germans have learned ... is clean, vigorous sport, faster and more thrilling than any the Verein societies ever taught.”⁹ *National Geographic* judged that World War I “proved that sport conditions the moral fiber of a people and tempers those mental qualities that advance civilization.”¹⁰ The post-World War II initiatives, therefore, might be regarded as a continuity in some ways. However, the specific focus on youth reflected the particular context of 1945–46, as did the GI-improvised origins of Army Assistance to the German Youth Activities (GYA) program.

In the wake of World War II, American forces occupied a zone of western Germany, a sector of Berlin and the Bremen enclave. One of the many problems confronting the American occupiers was how to reeducate German youth. They saw them as a highly Nazified group, which had been indoctrinated and “educated for death,” particularly through the Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend – HJ) and the League of German Girls (Bund deutscher Mädel – BDM), but they also represented Germany’s future. Throughout the war, the Americans had analyzed Nazi policy pronouncements, Hitler’s writings, and Nazi propaganda to understand German national character. They feared that German youth was a “lost generation” who had lived only

Popularity of Base Ball with Personal Reminiscences of Its Vicissitudes, Its Victories and Its Votaries (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1911), esp. 4–6. Spalding’s influence is captured in this parroting of his essential characteristics. For an interesting discussion of the reasons for its manufactured nationalist history and a critique of its relation to exceptionalism see Francis D. Cogliano, “Baseball and American Exceptionalism,” in Adrian Smith and Dilwyn Porter, eds., *Sport and National Identity in the Post-war World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 145–67. ⁸ Habib, 755.

⁹ “Feats Amaze the Germans,” *Stars and Stripes*, 21 Feb. 1919, 6.

¹⁰ J. R. Hildebrand, “The Geography of Games: How the Sports of Nations Form a Gazetteer of the Habits and Histories of Their Peoples,” *National Geographic Magazine*, 36, 2 (Aug. 1919), 89–144, 103.

under National Socialism and therefore represented a threat in terms of the survival of Nazi ideology. The solution was about claiming hearts and minds, but, given the expectations and concerns of both Americans and Germans, “what to do” about German youth?

At a formal level, policy in this area prioritized education reform at school and university level, some of which involved physical education and sports.¹¹ This article, however, focusses on instinctive and impromptu reeducation initiatives undertaken by US military personnel outside the formal education system in 1945 and 1946, prior to all-out official support of GYA in October 1946, in which sports played a significant part. These voluntary endeavors have escaped scholarly attention but are especially useful for understanding how the process of reeducation worked on the ground; they also reveal much about the relationship between sports and democracy in the minds of “ordinary” Americans. It was widely believed that American sportsmanship, by setting a positive example, might lead young Germans to appreciate the virtues of a democratic way of life. US soldiers thus became “salesmen of democracy” by teaching them sports, such as baseball and gridiron football, “probably the most perfect symbol of our democracy.”¹² The essential question became, “Can democracy be built on the playing fields of Germany?”¹³

German youth’s future potential and malleability had been considered vital to the success of Nazism and targeted accordingly. As late as February 1945 Hitler extolled the importance of youth as “the most precious thing that Germany possesses.”¹⁴ Their reeducation was equally viewed by the Americans as essential to Germany’s post-Nazi prospects. Understanding the context for these early interactions between the conquerors and their young, defeated foes necessitates comparison of wartime perceptions of the role of sports in the “American way of life” with American assessments of Nazi youth sports policy, as well as consideration of their expectations of each other after three and a half years of war.

¹¹ See, for example, Karl-Heinz Fuessl and Gregory Paul Wegner, “Education under Radical Change: Education Policy and the Youth Program of the United States in Postwar Germany,” *History of Education Quarterly*, 36, 1 (Spring 1996), 1–18; Heather L. Dichter, “Rebuilding Physical Education in the Western Occupation Zones of Germany, 1945–1949,” *History of Education*, 41, 6 (Nov. 2012), 787–806.

¹² Hugo Goldsmith, “Play Ball Instead of Fight,” *Wilson Daily Times*, 23 Dec. 1944, 6.

¹³ USFET, *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 38 (22 April 1946), 9.

¹⁴ Chancellor Hitler’s Message on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Announcement of the NSDAP’s Program, 24 Feb. 1945, at www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1945/450224a.html.

“SPORTS IS THE PLACE TO TEACH AND TO REACH THE
YOUNG”

Despite competing sporting virtues and oppositional political premises, both Nazi Germany and the USA agreed on the power of sports over youth, with both seeing potential for their own specific ends. In the early 1940s, American sports were considered inherently democratic and importantly, given the context of belief in victory, as imbued with future reeducative possibilities. Influential sportswriter John Tunis, who emphasized sportsmanship and downgraded the idea of winning at all costs, defined American sport as “a game or some form of physical exercise done for the fun of it. Because it gives you pleasure. Sport of this type is obviously democratic.” German sports culture prior to 1933 that did not serve military and racial purposes was largely ignored by the Americans, and planners/commentators focussed instead on the role of the HJ and the BDM. As Tunis noted in contrast, under Nazism “sport is the training of cannon fodder.”¹⁵ Significantly, Raymond Gram Swing of the Council for Democracy wrote the introduction to Tunis’s *Democracy and Sport* (1941) – he highlighted the importance of both “intense individual effort and ... team play” as the “foundations of successful democracy,” and identified sports as a conduit through which children learn “the principles of citizenship ... sportsmanship.”¹⁶ Recognizing the power of sport to affect both bodies and minds – “a playing nation is a healthy nation” – Tunis concluded that sports taught “democratic behavior in practice.” He was emphatic: “*Sports* is the place to teach and to reach the young.”¹⁷ Significantly, these ideas gained traction, becoming part of the cultural baggage that many US servicemen carried with them into postwar Germany.

Tunis was not alone in foreseeing sports’ potential for reeducation. In 1944, a widely publicized opinion piece by sports goods manufacturer Hugo Goldsmith was to prove strikingly prescient. “There probably won’t be any footballs or baseballs on the table when the Allied Nations sit down after the war to plan for a lasting peace,” he explained, “but it is not unlikely that the American system of sports will contribute in a tangible measure to a greater understanding between nations after the war.” Predicting that GIs would play American games after victory in Europe, he foresaw the development of a relationship between soldiers, American sports and German youth, who “should see and play enough of our games to learn that sport

¹⁵ John R. Tunis, *Democracy and Sport* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Company, 1941), 3, 22.

¹⁶ Raymond Gram Swing, “Introduction,” in *ibid.*, vii–viii. For the Council for Democracy see Cedric Larson, “The Council for Democracy,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 6, 2, (Summer 1942), 284–90.

¹⁷ Tunis, 36, 8–9, 47, original emphasis.

for sports' sake is the real answer and that athletics are not just a means of preparing youth for death on a battle field." Restating the link between "our" sports and democracy, Goldsmith went on to effectively outline the agenda of the GYA two years before it existed. "Part of our job, perhaps, will be to try to change the warped perspective of the German youngsters by encouraging them to play our games, providing opportunities and facilities for them."¹⁸ American sports, it seemed, could change minds, promote peace, underpin democracy, and end the connection with militarism. The eventual coaching and training programs and the Recreation Centers (*Jugendbeime*) were practical means employed to achieve that end. This aligned with the official definition of reeducation "as a systematic attempt at removing certain mental and moral weaknesses prevalent among German youth."¹⁹ Informal GI activities were understood through that lens, and belief in sports as a democratic force was an attitudinal mainstay amongst the occupiers, but, as this article will demonstrate, the term was interpreted on the ground in different ways.

In American propaganda, sport was routinely highlighted as a defining feature of American character. In 1942 the USA was described as the "most sports-minded nation in the world," and her troops were characterized as a team of "citizen soldiers."²⁰ Sheldon-Claire's "This is America" campaign for the War Production Board in 1942 included a poster proclaiming, "This is America ... Where a fellow can start on the home team and wind up in the big league."²¹ Showing members of a rural baseball team, it prioritized team spirit but emphasized that individual effort was also required to secure victory. Baseball, widely regarded as "our National Game," appropriated special significance and was used in campaigns to increase production, to combat absenteeism and to encourage healthy eating, as well as promoting physical fitness generally.²² Many claims were made for baseball: it promoted Allied goodwill, it helped make "Good Neighbors," it raised funds for war relief charities, and it persuaded the public to buy war bonds. Not surprisingly,

¹⁸ Goldsmith, 6.

¹⁹ Henry J. Kellermann, *The Present Status of German Youth* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1946), 1.

²⁰ Burton Benjamin, "The Scoreboard," *Daily Herald*, 17 Aug. 1942, 2.

²¹ See <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/515758>.

²² Spalding, *America's National Game*, 4. For example, "Cy" Hungerford, "What Is An American?" 1941, at <https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/40295>; "These Are Defense Posters," *Life*, 24 March 1941, 12; "You Can't Win a Ballgame Lying Down! Play the Game!," n.d., at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/516216>; "Every Child Needs a Good School Lunch," War Food Administration, 1944, at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/514223>; Army Service Forces suggestion poster, "If Your First Suggestions Aren't Hits Don't Be Discouraged. Keep Trying! Make a Suggestion Today," 1944, at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/514132>.

it was said to be a favorite pastime of Allied Supreme Commander Gen. Dwight Eisenhower.

In *War Comes to America* (1942), part of the Why We Fight series, one of the most important filmic portrayals of American national identity produced during the war, Americans were described as a “sports-loving people.” Sequences highlighted baseball, football, basketball, bowling, skiing, and boxing.²³ Wilson Sporting Goods declared that “Baseball is America ... a part of the goal our boys are fighting for.”²⁴ This was an often-repeated sentiment, manifested in many forms. A cartoon character, for example, explained “Yeah, Mr. Mars – it’s an old American custom ... one of the things we’re fightin’ for is the right to play games.”²⁵ Significantly, and especially so for the purposes of this article, US anti-Nazi propaganda also incorporated a sustained focus on the current and future peril posed by German youth, whose minds had been warped under years of Nazi indoctrination. The implication was that it would be necessary to provide an antidote to the Nazi poison, and this helps to supply a context for the sporting encounters with German children initiated by American soldiers in the early years of the occupation.

The role assigned to physical culture under the Third Reich was to build a nation that was fit to fight a war while demonstrating Aryan physical supremacy. As a result, under Nazism youth sport was “coordinated” and from 1936 the HJ had monopoly over sports for those over the age of ten. In 1944, American Civil Affairs planners concluded that HJ “perform[ed] the two main educational tasks in the upbringing of German youth – indoctrination and pre-military training.” Understanding that a youth program would “play an important role in the de-Nazification of young minds, and in the reorientation of their political and ideological concepts,” the War Department recommended that after Germany was occupied “normal youth activities such as hiking, games, and sports might be permitted, although Military Government should be on its guard against any militaristic tinge in these activities.”²⁶ After Germany’s defeat, the HJ was classed as a paramilitary organization and dissolved. Like the Nazis before them, American policy was to be shaped by the idea that “youngsters” aged between ten and eighteen represented Germany’s future. The Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS) concluded that they were both “the hope and the problem of the German people” and that “the treatment of this all-important age-group will determine whether they will become the nucleus of a future

²³ See <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/36073>.

²⁴ *Sporting News*, 5 April 1945, 21.

²⁵ “Knocking All Opposition Silly,” *Sporting News*, 19 Oct. 1944, 21.

²⁶ War Department Pamphlet No. 31-182, *Civil Affairs Guide: The Problem of German Youth under Military Government* (29 July 1944), 5, 14.

nationalistic group 10, 15, or 20 years hence, or whether they will develop into the strong basis of a democratic and peaceful Germany.”²⁷ It was envisaged that the army, under the overriding auspices of OMGUS, would mobilize sport as a form of democratic participation as part of the reeducation of German youth.

Inter-Allied planning regarding sports had begun in 1944 and centered around the “Elimination and Prohibition of Military Training,” Allied Control Council (ACC) Law 8, November 1945, reflected anxieties about the relationship between sports and militarism in Germany, as well as American predilections regarding the role of sports. ACC Directive 23, “Limitation and Demilitarization of Sport in Germany,” issued a month later, however, while addressing concerns about militarism, found a role for sports in postwar reeducation. While it required that “all sport and military or para-military athletic organizations” should be dissolved, and specifically prohibited “organizations engaged in Aviation, Parachuting, Gliding, Fencing, Military or Para-military drill or display, shooting with firearms,” it also set out a more positive agenda for physical education focussed on “health, hygiene and recreation.”²⁸ During discussions an American representative raised the argument that “such games as football ... could do much to promote the democratic way of life.”²⁹ Then, in March 1946, implementing instructions were issued by United States Forces European Theater (USFET) formalizing the sporting relationship between the occupiers and the occupied.³⁰

Propaganda for internal consumption was an essential part of both the Nazi regime and the American war effort. In Germany, once the US entered the conflict, the process of enmification began in earnest. Goebbels’s Ministry of Propaganda set to work cementing and developing anti-American images. Predictably, this was stepped up after the opening of the “Second Front” in June 1944. In January 1939, Goebbels had proclaimed, “We have nothing against the American people,” but in actuality this article marked the

²⁷ OMGUS, *Monthly Report of the Military Governor* (hereafter *Monthly Report*), 10 (May 1946), 16.

²⁸ *Occupation of Germany: Policy and Progress, 1945–46* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1947), 103. For ACC policy development see Heather Dichter, “‘Strict Measures Must Be Taken’: Wartime Planning and the Allied Control of Sport in Occupied Germany,” *Stadion*, 34, 2 (2008), 193–217; and for sports in the French zone see Stefanie Woite-Wehle, *Zwischen Kontrolle und Demokratisierung: Die Sportpolitik der französischen Besatzungsmacht in Südwestdeutschland 1945–1950* (Schorndorf: Karl Hofmann, 2001).

²⁹ Maj. Gen. Oliver Echols, 6 Dec. 1945, quoted in Dichter, “‘Strict Measures Must Be Taken,’” 200.

³⁰ OMGUS, “Control of Sport Activities,” (AG 353.8), 15 March 1946, *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 38 (22 April 1946), 6.

beginning of an anti-American propaganda campaign.³¹ Nazi stereotypes of Americans focussed on several themes. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” were perverted into Germany’s Four Freedoms: “freedom from capitalism, freedom from Anglo-Saxon imperialism, freedom from Bolshevism and freedom from Jews.”³² The US was characterized as an immoral, profit-hungry capitalist state, its empire builders prospering at the expense of the rest of the world and of its own people; it typified the *Seelenlosigkeit* (soullessness) of pure materialism.³³ Even worse, the USA was a racial hodgepodge – “a hopeless jumble,” or, according to Hitler, a “mongrel people.”³⁴ This helped underpin characterization of US forces overseas as ignorant despoilers of the cultured lands of Europe.³⁵

Nazi propaganda claimed that the US was effectively under Jewish control, pointing the finger at various high-profile statesmen, businessmen and Wall Street bankers.³⁶ For Hitler this represented an “unnatural alliance between exploiting capitalism and destructive bolshevism,” a “devilish coalition” instigated by “International Jewry.”³⁷ Roosevelt himself (“F. D. Rosenfeld/t”) was sometimes said to have Jewish ancestry or was accused of being under Jewish and Bolshevik control.³⁸ When the aerial bombing of Germany accelerated, Americans, especially aircrew, were characterized as murderous gangsters, as *Luftgangster* (“gangsters of the air”).³⁹ After “D-Day,” when invasion of Germany seemed possible, propaganda focussing on the treatment of women by Jewish and Black troops and associated anxieties about miscegenation were accentuated. It was claimed that the Americans would pose as “liberators” whilst

³¹ “Was will eigentlich Amerika” (What Does America Really Want?), in Joseph Goebbels, *Die Zeit ohne Beispiel* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1941), 29.

³² Thomas Kernan, “This Is Germany Today,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 3 June 1944, 22, 38, 40–41.

³³ For example, Arthur Johnson, “PanAmerika,” *Kladderadatsch*, 15 (2 April 1944); Werner Hahmann, “Die Politik der Guten Nachbarschaft” (The Politics of Good Neighborhood), *Kladderadatsch*, 31 (30 July 1944); Kernan, 22; and Arthur Johnson, “Der Fresskrampf” (The Food Cramp), *Kladderadatsch*, 23 (4 June 1944). *Kladderadatsch* was a satirical weekly which reflected Nazi perspectives.

³⁴ A. E. Johann, *Das Land ohne Herz: Eine Reise ins unbekannte Amerika* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag, 1942), 25; and Klaus P. Fischer, *Hitler and America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 2. ³⁵ Kernan, 40. ³⁶ Goebbels, 24.

³⁷ Hitler’s message, 24 Feb. 1945.

³⁸ For example, Oskar Garvens, “Präsident Roosevelt,” *Kladderadatsch*, 20 (18 May 1941); Max Bauer, “Für dein Sternenbanner!” (For the Stars and Stripes!), *Fliegende Blätter*, 5010 (7 Aug. 1941), 90; and “Das Risiko” (The Risk), *Kladderadatsch*, 8 (20 Feb. 1944).

³⁹ For example, Arthur Johnson, “Murder Incorporated,” *Kladderadatsch*, 32 (6 Aug. 1944), a phrase originating from the moniker on the flight jacket of a downed American bombardier over Bremen in December 1943, and “USA-Luftgangster nennen sich selbst ‘Mordverein’” (US Gangsters of the Air Call Themselves “Murder Club”), *Völkischer Beobachter*, 20 Dec. 1943, 1.

bringing cruelty and misery as they had done in Italy.⁴⁰ Goebbels was seeking, a contemporary observer noted, to shape the stance of postwar Europeans regarding the US and towards democracy and liberalism more generally.⁴¹ This threatened to undermine the Pax Americana, for which Americans were fighting.

That Americans were well aware of these characterizations was demonstrated by the “orientation” materials provided to troops and by surveying the opinions of German POWs after D-Day. The *Pocket Guide to Germany* explained that the Nazis represented the US “as a land of great wealth and terrible poverty, corrupted by politicians, terrorized by gangsters, and filled with unemployment.” Its soldiers were “vicious and brutal, products of gangsterism and corruption”; its airmen bombed “only churches and hospitals ... deliberately machine-gunning women and children.” “German hatred against America,” it was noted, “has been concentrated by education, propaganda, and the accuracy of the Allied Forces bombardment.”⁴² From December 1944 to January 1945, POWs responded to questions designed to test the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda regarding “Expectations of Anglo-American Occupation of Germany.” Would US troops be “imbued with the spirit of revenge” or adopt “a hostile attitude to the civilian population”? Would they “mistreat German civilians” and “molest German women”? Responses showed that most respondents, whether “Nazis,” “Followers,” or “Anti-Nazis,” had “no particular fears,” calling the effectiveness of Goebbels’s propaganda campaign into question.⁴³ Young prisoners, however, tended to be more pessimistic. S. J. Woolf reported, “The defiant [pro-Nazi] youngster is too typical of a German youth whose poisoned minds must be de-educated and re-educated.”⁴⁴

German dread of defeat, as Niall Ferguson has argued, was “compounded by the involvement of the Wehrmacht in massacres of civilians, particularly Jews,” and Germans generally feared American retribution for the genocide of the Jews. However, despite concerted anti-American efforts by the regime, it is important to note that the “vast majority” of prisoners – mostly taken after the official surrender – preferred to give themselves up to American troops in the hope of better treatment.⁴⁵ By 1945, most Germans seem to have adopted a fatalistic attitude towards the end of the war, hoping that it

⁴⁰ “Die Befreier” (The Liberators), *Kladderadatsch*, 22 (28 May 1944); and Kernan, 38.

⁴¹ Kernan, 38.

⁴² *Pocket Guide to Germany* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1944), 11, 12, 7.

⁴³ Psychological Warfare Division, “Expectations of Anglo-American Occupation of Germany,” 14 Feb. 1945, MSS.154/3/PW/1/158-162, Richard Crossman Papers, University of Warwick Library, UK.

⁴⁴ “New Nazi Attitude,” *Abilene Reporter News*, 15 July 1944, 4.

⁴⁵ Niall Ferguson, “Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing in the Age of Total War: Towards a Political Economy of Military Defeat,” *War in History*, 11, 2 (April 2004), 148–92.

would come soon and that the consequences would not be too dire. Another survey revealed that Germans “had always thought of the American people as being dollar-hungry, sex-crazy and under the thumb of the Jews,” but perceptions changed quickly behind the barbed wire. Their captors were the “first Americans we’ve met, and we think they are grand people.”⁴⁶ Thus it seemed that attitudinal change and positive interaction were possible, though this was far from a certainty in late 1944 and early 1945.⁴⁷

The idea that German youth had been brainwashed and the potential threat that this posed (the *Jugendproblem*) remained a cause for concern. The principal ingredients of the Nazi totalitarian formula – brutality, suppression of opposition and religion, indoctrination, and regimentation – ran counter to American commitment to freedom of the individual and democracy. There was anxiety about the future on both sides. *Saturday Evening Post* correspondent Ernest Hauser observed, having spoken with hundreds of POWs in France towards the end of 1944, “The younger folk who never knew anything but how to be good Nazis frankly admit they wouldn’t know how to act in a non-Nazi world. They wouldn’t know how to take the first step, once the doors of their mental cage were flung open.”⁴⁸ However, despite persistent anxieties about German youth and its heavy exposure to Nazi propaganda, American faith in the possibility of reeducation remained largely unshaken.

Moreover, it was important not to be tempted by racial/biological explanations of German militarism. “What Nazi and Fascist youth are now, they have become through the influence of single-minded leaders ... They were not born that way,” noted psychologist George Stoddard.⁴⁹ Dorothy Thompson, in her widely distributed column, also made a case for not castigating German youth for the “sins of the elders.” To do so would mean accepting “the dreary Nazi philosophy that certain peoples are tainted with ineradicable sin, which is passed on in the very genes.”⁵⁰ The militarism of German youth could be explained instead as the “result of a brutal training which starts in

⁴⁶ Ernest O. Hauser, “German Prisoners Talk Your Ears Off,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 20 Jan. 1945, 105.

⁴⁷ It is worth noting that a June–July 1945 investigation of German attitudes toward the occupation found that “although there were some cases of rape, looting and similar incidents, the behavior of the [American] troops was very much better than the Germans had dared to hope.” In thirty-four cities, 65% of 3,711 “found the occupation better than they expected.” US Strategic Bombing Survey, Morale Division, *The Effects of Strategic Bombing on German Morale*, Volume I (May 1947), 130. ⁴⁸ Hauser, 20.

⁴⁹ George D. Stoddard, “Teach Them the Ways of Democracy,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 235 (Sept. 1944), 25–32, 31.

⁵⁰ Dorothy Thompson, “Nazi Indoctrination of German Youth,” *Amarillo Globe*, 21 June 1943, 10.

babyhood.”⁵¹ Reeducation would “immunize” youth through benign democratic instruction. As early as 1944, the role of sports in this context was being acknowledged in the press and elsewhere: “What German youngsters seem to need more than anything else just now is a chance to live normally, to play games without guns.” This would be the “antidote for arrogance and brutality.”⁵²

Some experts were pessimistic about what could be achieved. Gregor Ziemer, author of the best seller *Education for Death* (1941), had argued that

whoever is sent into Germany to recondition the millions of boys and girls after this war will have to face suspicion, distrust, even hot hatred. You can't instill in youngsters a hatred of everything a democracy stands for ... then have those same democracies bomb their homes, kill their relations; and expect this youth to greet the personal representatives of such democracies when they arrive as conquerors, with anything but an intensified hatred. German youth will hate everything American.⁵³

Though more optimistic views tended to prevail, War Department planners and military commanders had to decide what position they would take once final victory was secured. One of the most important statements came from Eisenhower in September 1944 when Allied forces crossed the German frontier; they arrived, he proclaimed, “as conquerors, but not as oppressors.”⁵⁴ It was prudent, however, to proceed with caution and this was reflected in the instructions given to the soon-to-be-occupiers. The *Pocket Guide* was clear: “There must be no fraternization. This is absolute!” At the same time, it would be possible “by your conduct [to] give them a glimpse of life in a Democracy.” A sporting analogy was used to encourage men to stay on guard: “In prize-fighting ... only the careless fighter drops his hands.” Significantly, Germans between the ages of fourteen and twenty-eight were identified as a particular problem. “When you played games,” GIs were advised, “you were taught to fight to the last whistle no matter how big the score against you: you learned not to cheat and that if you couldn't win fairly, then you took your licking like a man and shook hands with the man who beat you.” German youth learned the “exact opposite.”⁵⁵ How they would react to the realities of defeat and occupation remained a cause for concern.

⁵¹ DeWitt Mackenzie, “Nazis Throwing German Youth into Maws of War, Life Means Nothing,” *Ada Evening News*, 25 June 1942, 2.

⁵² “German Youth,” *Amarillo Daily News*, 13 Sept. 1944, 6.

⁵³ Gregor Ziemer, “Rehabilitating Fascist Youth,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 7, 4 (Winter 1943), 583–91, 586–87.

⁵⁴ MG Germany, Supreme Commander's Area of Control, Proclamation 1, 28 Sept. 1944, at <https://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/39761>.

⁵⁵ *Pocket Guide to Germany*, 2, 3, 6, 7–8.

REEDUCATION BEHIND BARBED WIRE

Last-ditch survival attempts by the Nazi regime, motivated by avoiding a second German “capitulation” despite impending defeat, famously involved the conscription of boys aged twelve and above and the creation of the Volkssturm (“people’s assault”) in autumn 1944. From January 1943 boys had become *Luftwaffenhelfer* and joined anti-tank units. American face-to-face encounters with German youth began in early 1945 as GIs began capturing these “child soldiers” after the Allies crossed the Rhine, taking significant numbers of prisoners as they progressed towards Berlin. Much was made of the fanatical loyalty of youth troops, but in the face of defeat some boys were happy that it was all over, while others broke down, fearing that they would be treated badly by an enemy that they had been taught to hate. How to process the large number of very young POWs caused military leaders some concern, but a solution was found through the creation of a dedicated camp, Continental Central Prisoner of War Enclosure (CCPWE) 15, in France. It was here that individual American officers, acting on a voluntary basis, initiated the first youth reeducation experiments in April 1945. For Associated Press it was the “largest scale program of experimental educational de-Nazification of German youth yet to be attempted in prison camps in the European theater of operations.”⁵⁶ Another news agency highlighted the role assigned to sports as an essential part of the camp’s curriculum, observing that these sports, “unlike those they knew in Nazi Germany, are carefully ‘unregimented’ games – soccer, handball, cat-and-mouse, drop-the-handkerchief and the like.”⁵⁷

Life magazine also reported on the camp, explaining that the “American Army has been undertaking to re-educate the great problem children of Europe, the Hitler Youth.” Major William McGrath (*sic* – McGrath) had “separated these beardless boys from the older prisoners of war and set them to learning the first principles of democracy as part of their general schooling.”⁵⁸ Pfc. Francis Tourtellot directed a program in this so-called “Baby Cage” which involved various required subjects (arithmetic, biology, English, American history, German music, religion, and sports).⁵⁹ The aim was to reeducate the seven thousand prisoners over a period of four months, “to discredit their exaggerated Nazi admiration for nation, army and

⁵⁶ James M. Long, “U.S. Camp Aims at De-Nazifying of Hitler Youth,” *East Liverpool Review*, 8 Aug. 1945, 2.

⁵⁷ Edward A. Evans, “Religion Taught Boy Prisoners at German Camp,” *El Paso Herald Post*, 22 Aug. 1945, 9.

⁵⁸ “Educating Hitler Youth: Young German Prisoners of War, Age 12 to 17, Are Taught Democracy by the Americans,” *Life*, 8 Oct. 1945, 75.

⁵⁹ Howard Katzander, “PW Baby Cage,” *Yank: The Army Weekly*, 19 Oct. 1945, 16.

race.”⁶⁰ Conditions were far from ideal. It was difficult, the camp’s commandant Cpt. Alfred Johnson observed, to “teach democracy to boys in cages,” but some “real progress” had been made.⁶¹ A July 1945 USFET survey showed that “the result of the re-education can be seen in the fact that the Ps/W boys ... consistently exhibited much stronger pro-American and anti-Nazi sentiments than their civilian contemporaries.”⁶² This was impressive as the only expenditure had been the cost of “one piano, four violins and six footballs,” but it was too early to judge whether a “fundamental conversion to democracy” had been achieved.⁶³ The fact that democracy was being imposed by the military remained a persistent problem throughout the ensuing occupation, although some took the view that using soldiers as reeducators was likely to succeed as German youth “have been brought up to respect men in uniform who carry guns.”⁶⁴ The experiment at CCPWE 15 appears to have inspired the “University,” established in May 1945 at CCPWE 19, also in France, plus its reeducation program for the 17,000 German prisoners under the age of eighteen who were held there. Sport, it was noted, was the most popular part of the extracurricular program.⁶⁵

Encounters between American soldiers and German youth inevitably increased after the formal surrender, and it was the relationship between GIs and young civilians that demonstrated the power of sports in reeducation most emphatically. As *Yank* noted, “When the Americans first came, the Germans hid in their homes. They had heard Goebbels warn again and again that the Americans would murder the men and rape the women.” However, the experience of occupation was quite different, as soldiers “played with the German kids, looked wistfully at the German girls, and helped old Germans when their carts broke down.”⁶⁶ GYA’s official history later explained how the playing began:

the small children who frequently clustered about the soldiers during halts in towns and villages caught the soldier’s attention and often his sympathy. Many soldiers enjoyed the smiles which came to the faces of the children when they were given candy, chewing gum, and bits of food from the military rations. Broken and

⁶⁰ “Educating Hitler Youth,” 77.

⁶¹ Edward A. Evans, “School Educates Young Nazis in Democracy,” *El Paso Herald Post*, 13 Aug. 1945, 3.

⁶² Donald V. McGranahan and Morris Janowitz, “Studies of German Youth,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 41, 1 (Jan. 1946), 3–14, 11.

⁶³ “Educating Hitler Youth,” 77; McGranahan and Janowitz, 12.

⁶⁴ Ernest O. Hauser, “The Germans Just Don’t Believe Us,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 3 Aug. 1946, 83.

⁶⁵ See Anne Broilliard and Benoit Lenoel, *Prisonniers allemands en Normandie: Un camp américain à Foucarville, 1944–1947* (Bayeux: OREP, 2017).

⁶⁶ Debs Myer, “Germany – Morning after a Five-Year Bender,” *Yank*, 17 Aug. 1945, 3.

hesitatingly shy efforts at conversation and games soon followed the handouts of candy and food. From such spontaneous beginnings developed the first concerted actions by which American military personnel befriended German youth. Probably without realizing it, let alone without being trained or prepared for it, these men were dealing with one of the many formidable social problems emerging from the chaos of war.⁶⁷

These games were in contravention of the non-fraternization order of September 1944, which prohibited playing games or engaging in sports with Germans, but this was gradually relaxed. From June 1945, it no longer applied to “very small children.”⁶⁸ In 1946, an amnesty to the ban was granted to all Germans born after 1 January 1919, except for those classed as “major offenders” or “offenders.”⁶⁹ This reflected the position of Lt. Gen. Lucius D. Clay, deputy governor of the US Zone, who argued that those Germans who had been fourteen years old or younger when Hitler came to power “had had little chance to know anything but Nazi ideology and they could not be excluded from society if they were to be rehabilitated.”⁷⁰ They must be able to take the “helping hand held out by the Army.”⁷¹

By November 1945, OMGUS reported that “tactical troops and Military Government detachments have, in many areas, made a valuable contribution by encouraging participation of children in various American games.” This voluntary undertaking had resulted in “a useful type of fraternization” facilitating “spontaneous instruction in democracy through the media of sports, games, and the development of the spirit of sportsmanship and tolerance.” It was noted that troops had made sports equipment available to young Germans and instructed them in the mysteries of baseball and football.⁷² The first instance of this kind of voluntary initiative probably dates from August 1945 when two members of the 331st Infantry Regiment, Pfc. Joseph Carr and S-Sgt. Francis Coyne, stationed at Pocking, “adopted a plan of Americanization which incorporates our good old American sport of baseball.” “The kids like the Americans (and their chocolates) and they’re not as war-minded as some would think.” Many had never participated in sporting activity previously and were keen to get acquainted with “the

⁶⁷ *The US Armed Forces German Youth Activities Program, 1945–1955* (Historical Division Headquarters, US Army, Europe, 1956), 1.

⁶⁸ Oliver J. Frederiksen, *The American Military Occupation of Germany, 1945–1953* (Historical Division, Headquarters, US Army, Europe, 1953), 129, 130.

⁶⁹ OMGUS, Law for Liberation from National Socialism and Militarism, 5 March 1946.

⁷⁰ Lucius D. Clay, *Decision in Germany* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1950), 260.

⁷¹ Cable, Clay, personal, to Noce, confidential, 12 Aug. 1947, in Jean Edward Smith, ed., *The Papers of General Lucius D. Clay, Germany 1945–1949*, Volume I (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1974), 401.

⁷² *Monthly Report*, 4 (Nov. 1945), 20, 6.

Doughs and their favorite pastime.” “Might as well teach them the right sports,” Carr added in a telling aside.⁷³

This spontaneous effort is significant for several reasons. First, it reveals the pervasiveness of sports in American life; with victory achieved, soldiers returned to recreations that they enjoyed in peacetime. Second, the choice of baseball as the “right” sport testifies to its status as *the* national sport of the USA, an idea that had been routinely referenced in wartime propaganda. Third, a link had effectively been made between “Americanization,” democratization, sports, and youth reeducation; moreover, it had been made instinctively by GIs with no specialist training and no formal responsibilities for education or reeducation. It was also important that American troops had learned from this informal encounter that German youth were not as “war-minded” as their own wartime propaganda might have led them to expect. Arguably, it was such grassroots encounters, many no doubt unrecorded, that gave real momentum to the development in due course of a more formal organized youth sports program.

At the start of the occupation, the policy of the Military Government (MG) was to assign responsibility for voluntary youth groups to the Germans, but this was quickly reversed in the light of experience. By September 1945, Lt. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes, Seventh Army, was anxious to encourage American participation in youth organization, arguing that there were officers and enlisted men in every unit who would “eagerly seize on this opportunity to assist in the regeneration of German youth through the medium of acquainting them with the activities and interests normal to youths of their own age in our country.”⁷⁴ Sports was prioritized as a “normal” (i.e. American) pursuit and soldiers were soon offering instruction in baseball and football. For example, GIs at Pforzheim “without prompting from above” taught boys “our sports.”⁷⁵ Sports supplied a social lubricant for the occupation’s intended social engineering, or, to use MG vernacular, they represented “an excellent opportunity for ‘guided fraternization’” with significant future potential.⁷⁶ The Seventh Army decided to formalize soldier–youth associations within its Western Military District by establishing an official German youth program in

⁷³ “Combat Men Use Baseball to De-Nazify German Youth,” *83rd Thunderbolt*, 25 Aug. 1945, 6. A similar sports program was organized in Heppenheim also in August 1945. “Youth Program,” *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 6 (1 Sept. 1945), 23.

⁷⁴ Letter, Keyes to Corps, Division, Regional Military Government Commanders, and Separate Unit Commanders, “Organization of Youth Activities,” 14 Sept. 1945, in Charles E. Campbell, *Occupation Forces in Europe Series, 1945–46: German Youth Activities of the United States Army* (Frankfurt am Main: Office of the Chief Historian, European Command, 11 May 1948), 31.

⁷⁵ “Occupation Troops and Youth Activities,” *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 16 (10 Nov. 1945), 18.

⁷⁶ *Monthly Report*, 10 (May 1946), 17.

October 1945. Voluntary groups were created “for cultural, religious, and recreational purposes”; the intention was “to foster democratic ideas, independence of thought, and ideals of fair play, tolerance, and honesty.” There were some restrictions, notably that parades, drilling, marching or any form of pre-military or paramilitary training were specifically forbidden.⁷⁷ The MG was cautiously optimistic about this Seventh Army initiative, noting that “its potential significance is very great because the sector of the German population whose regeneration has been always considered most difficult is the youthful element.”⁷⁸ An enthusiastic USFET staffer elaborated on this theme:

With soldiers as youth leaders, the Germans can learn what American sportsmanship is, and why we think and act as we do; that we are not as superficial as so many Continentals seem to think, but that our kind of training and living has produced something which is called American democracy – a commodity which cannot be sold to the Germans in any other way except demonstration. One of the most effective means of achieving international amity and understanding in the past has been through the medium of sports and other similar mutual activities.⁷⁹

Thus, proposed youth schemes aligned with the overarching aim of the reeducation program, the achievement of a lasting peace.

The idea that sports encapsulated the “American way of life” and could be used to teach the ways of democracy began to resonate at the highest levels of the occupation administration in the autumn of 1945. After attending a football game in October, James K. Pollock, special adviser to Clay, commented that Germans “could have been given several good lessons arising out of the great American game” and wondered “why we have not made an effort to explain football to the young Germans who seem very eager to learn about American ways?”⁸⁰ GIs, however, acting on their own initiative, were already taking the lead in this respect. The 71st Infantry Division, for example, organized a sports clinic for youths near Augsburg in October 1945; this included four days of baseball instruction and attracted over 350 German children and “close to a thousand” spectators. S-Sgt. Rudy Rundus, formerly of the St. Louis Cardinals, and nine GI coaches reported that attendees “learned not only to play ball, but also the American conception of sportsmanship and fairplay [which] made the clinic one of the most useful post-war enterprises in which they had participated.”⁸¹ The *Sporting News*, significantly, made a specific link to the reeducation agenda, describing the event as “an interesting step toward re-educating German youth in democracy and

⁷⁷ Campbell, 9, 10.

⁷⁸ *Monthly Report*, 5 (Dec. 1945), 20.

⁷⁹ *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 16 (10 Nov. 1945), 17.

⁸⁰ James K. Pollock, *Besatzung und Staatsaufbau nach 1945: Occupation Diary and Private Correspondence 1945–1948* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1994), 111–12.

⁸¹ “Rudy Rundus Instructs Hitler Youth,” *Belleville Telescope*, 18 Oct. 1945, 1.

sportsmanship through the medium of baseball with highly successful results.”⁸² An *MG Monthly Report* in November applauded the numerous youth activities in which US service personnel were engaged across the zone. In Bremen, the 115th Infantry Division’s kite contest and sportsfest at the “Ike” Stadium, and a soccer competition for German youths which attracted 12,000 spectators, were reported favorably, a clear indication that the central authority was aware of these initiatives and approved of them.⁸³ By this time youth committees were forming throughout the zone and opportunities for German children to experience sporting activities were increasing. Over five million were reported to have participated between October 1945 and March 1946.⁸⁴

The progress made on the ground seems all the more remarkable given the persistence of anxieties regarding the problem of German youth in Washington. Byron Price, President Truman’s “personal representative,” sent to survey the state of relations between the occupying forces and the German people, was still referring in November 1945 to former HJ teenagers as “potentially the most dangerous single element of the population.” His report to President Truman was judiciously phrased:

It may be hoped that the current effort to organize these crooked minded children into non-military societies and clubs after the American fashion will help turn them away from idleness and subversion. It must be remembered, however, that many natural ties bind Hitler youth to the millions of recently discharged German soldiers, to criminal elements among DPs [displaced persons], and to the increasing company of nazis [*sic*] out of office.⁸⁵

Some press reports from the zone also urged caution. It might seem that young Germans were responding positively, but “it would be wrong to believe that beneath their docility and their helplessness, real or feigned, there is not a considerable amount of hatred and malice.”⁸⁶ Viewed in this way, all Germans were potentially wolves in sheep’s clothing.

This aside, soldier–youth contacts emanating from “the invention and doing of the young GI himself” began to attract favorable attention back home.⁸⁷ In the fall of 1945, Sgt. Patrick J. Moriarity gave boys “a chance to

⁸² A. L. Marder, “350 Youths Attend Clinic Held by 71st Division Diamond Stars,” *Sporting News*, 18 Oct. 1945, 14.

⁸⁴ Frederiksen, *The American Military Occupation of Germany*, 105.

⁸⁵ Letter, Truman to Price, 30 Aug. 1945, at www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/231213; “The Price Report” (9 Nov. 1945), *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 21 (15 Dec. 1945), 9.

⁸⁶ Drew Middleton, “Germans Today,” *New York Times Magazine*, 16 Sept. 1945, 11.

⁸⁷ Frederic Sondern Jr., “GI Teachers for German Children,” *Reader’s Digest*, 50, 300 (April 1947), 47–51, in Robert Twyman, *Congressional Record*, 80 Cong., 1 sess., 3 April 1947, 3118.

play in grim, postsurrender Germany.”⁸⁸ His spontaneous goodwill acted as an inspiration that was emulated elsewhere, which caused Thomas F. Dunn, director of the Bremen Military Government, to claim, “It has become a truism that the units in the Bremen Enclave pioneered in the field of Army assistance to German youth activities.”⁸⁹ Formalized by the provision of accommodation and equipment in April 1946, Moriarity and nine other GIs of the 104th Labor Supervision Group created “a nucleus for informal training in democratic principles,” the Bremen Boys’ Club.⁹⁰ *Life* reported positively, “Although the sergeant admits that many of his boys came at first because of the food and the warmth, they come now ... because they are learning to like these strange new democratic ways.” Sports – football, sailing, hiking, athletics, and basketball – were a major feature.⁹¹ Baseball, a key component, was also on offer, but had exposed “Nazi” tendencies. “They simply don’t know the meaning of teamwork,” a corporal complained. “Everybody wants to be the pitcher,” he continued, “They make politics over it. As for sportsmanship – if they lose a game, they talk about losing their honor, and make out that the other guys were cheating.” There were clearly some negative hangovers, but on balance a positive view of sports’ reeducative potential prevailed. “The most promising campaign yet launched to affect the German mind of the future,” was one assessment of the Bremen scheme when it was discussed by Congress.⁹² It seems likely that such positive evaluations persuaded the military governor, Gen. Joseph T. McNarney, to commit to experimentally assisting zonewide GYA programs starting on 14 April 1946. As a result, there was a “sharp increase both in attendance and in interest displayed” in youth activities, explained in part by a “favorable turn of the weather which aided in the expansion of sports activities.”⁹³ From August, GIs would be excused training duties for up to four hours a week if they volunteered to support this “extremely important job.”⁹⁴ The emphasis was on “sports, especially baseball,” and a reporter greeted the new dispensation accordingly: “It’s

⁸⁸ Clay, *Decision in Germany*, 64.

⁸⁹ Dunn quoted in Anna-Maria Pedron, *Amerikaner vor Ort: Besatzer und Besetzte in der Enklave Bremen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Bremen: Staatsarchiv, 2010), 279.

⁹⁰ “German Youth Program,” *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 67 (11 Nov. 1946), 14; Georgia Lightfoot, “Teaching German Youth to Take Hold,” *Army Information Digest*, 2, 4 (April 1947), 24.

⁹¹ “Bremen Boys’ Club: A U.S. Sergeant Finances a Lesson in Democracy,” *Life*, 9 Dec. 1946, 37. ⁹² Sondern Jr. in Twyman, *Congressional Record*, 3 April 1947, 3118.

⁹³ *Monthly Report*, 10 (May 1946), 19.

⁹⁴ “U.S. to Encourage German Re-training,” *Avalanche Journal*, 15 Sept. 1946, 7; McNarney quoted in Robert C. Hall, “Three Years of GYA,” *Information Bulletin*, 158 (5 April 1949), 7.

Abner Doubleday and baseball vs. Adolf Hitler and the Nazi virus in a tussle to re-educate German youth for democracy.”⁹⁵ By August 1946, 37.5 percent of youth group members were engaged in sports.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, sports programs initiated by GIs continued to proliferate and numbers of participants continued to grow. The success of the movement reflected the enthusiasm for sports in the ranks of the occupying forces, but it was also clear that they were generally aware of the wider significance attributed to these activities. Press interest often allowed them the opportunity to make links between sports, democracy, and the reeducation agenda, or perhaps made the link for them. In June 1946, Sgt. Earl Albers of the 3110th Signal Service Battalion stationed in Berlin was identified as a “young American who feels that the best way to bring democracy to the children is to teach them to play the game.” Albers preached what he called the “softball message,” explaining “first learn how to play together, then later you can learn how to get along together politically.”⁹⁷ He had arrived in Berlin in April 1946 and been moved by “the hardship and hopelessness of the bombed city.” Having encountered boys playing soccer with a ball made of rags, “he came back – with a real ball.”⁹⁸ An impromptu game of baseball in the street prompted Albers and T/5 Maxton Friesen to rent a sports field near their barracks to teach the game to German children, who seemed eager to learn. By the end of 1946, baseball, football, swimming and waterball were on offer and 28,000 children were participating.⁹⁹

As an increasing number of servicemen were involved in such ventures, the level of official support increased accordingly. From August 1946, OMGUS athletic officer Maj. Emmette Huff was overseeing contributions to the sports program from thirty units which were attracting between 50,000 and 60,000 Berlin youngsters aged between six and eighteen to weekly sessions, where they were “instructed by hundreds of American soldiers who regard themselves as teachers of democracy as well as sports coaches.”¹⁰⁰ Following orders from Clay, Albers, assisted by three colleagues, opened the first *Jugendheim* at Zehlendorf in September 1946, the model for all clubhouses

⁹⁵ Hall; Richard Kasischke, “German Kids Jam Sports Classes,” *Somerset Daily American*, 1 Aug. 1946, 5.

⁹⁶ Or 177,363 out of 2,011,644 ten- to eighteen-year-olds. *Monthly Report*, 14 (Sept. 1946), 13. There were 262,664 in September and 246,108 in November. *Monthly Report*, 16 (Oct. 1946), 18; *Monthly Report*, 18 (Dec. 1946), 17.

⁹⁷ Irene Angerstein, “Enthusiastic German Youth Learns American Way,” *Hamilton Daily News Journal*, 22 Nov. 1946, 21.

⁹⁸ “Salut für den Sergeant,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, 14 Sept. 2013.

⁹⁹ Judy Barden, “Two GIs Aid Berlin Youths,” *Arizona Republic*, 9 Dec. 1946, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Kasischke, *Gastonia Daily Gazette*, 9 Sept. 1946, 4.

later set up in Berlin and the US Zone.¹⁰¹ High-profile events were organized which testified to the strength and efficacy of the movement, such as the “slug-fest” in October which saw four teams compete for the Berlin Championship. These included Albers’s Zehlendorf Bears and rivals sponsored by the Tempelhof USAAF base and the 16th Constabulary, each of them testifying to the way in which the softball message was being taken up by the various services in Berlin and across the American Zone.¹⁰² Air force units at Nordholz organized activities for children in nearby villages, using softball – which was said to be especially popular with older youths – to teach “the value of cooperation and friendly competition.”¹⁰³

It seems clear, however, that these MG directives were a post hoc response to the voluntary initiatives already undertaken by Carr, Moriarity, Albers, and likeminded GIs. These top-down interventions indicate a perceived need to assert control over what had, up to that point, been a spontaneous development. Official support for such schemes betrayed continuing anxieties regarding German youth which derived from pessimistic assessments made during the war years referred to earlier. At command level the idea persisted that an HJ-indoctrinated generation “constitute[d] a potentially dangerous and unhealthy element which must bear constant surveillance and watchful vigilance.”¹⁰⁴ An October 1946 directive marking the official beginning of thoroughgoing army assistance to GYA explained, “Athletics may well be utilized as a means of establishing contact with German youth and of demonstrating fair play but care should be taken to ensure [*sic*] that athletics are not used for such ends as may be incompatible with our occupational mission.”¹⁰⁵ There were other reasons for proceeding with caution, not least that sports-led youth programs were by now a subject of inter-Allied disagreement. In September 1946, the Soviets objected to American emphasis on sports, and baseball in particular, lodging a protest at the Berlin Allied *Kommandatur* that this “militaristic” game breached Directive 23.¹⁰⁶ Undeterred by this criticism, the Americans expanded the program of reeducation by baseball: “It’s ...

¹⁰¹ Albers’s colleagues were Cpl. Asa Blackburn, Pfc. Tsuttomu Yoshioka, and Pfc. George Shigenaga. Lyn Davis, “Independence Is Watchword of Berlin Youth House,” *OMGUS Observer*, 1 Nov. 1946, 5; Jeanette Der Bedrosian, “A Soldier’s Act of Defiance Has Lifelong Consequences,” *The Gazette*, 21 Oct. 2010.

¹⁰² “German Softball Tourney Held at Tempelhof Field,” *OMGUS Observer*, 11 Oct. 1946, 6.

¹⁰³ “Teaches Sports to Germans,” *Brainerd Daily Dispatch*, 19 Aug. 1946, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Monthly Report*, 4 (Nov. 1945), 4.

¹⁰⁵ USFET, Directive AG 353.8 GCT-AGO, “Army Assistance to German Youth Activities, U.S. Zone,” Section C: Sport Activities, 5 Oct. 1946. “Army Outlines Aid to German Youth,” *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 64 (21 Oct. 1946), 13, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Kasischke, “U.S. Army Will Expand German Sports Program,” *Galveston Daily News*, 27 Sept. 1946, 18.

our baseball bats against the Russians with their uniformed program, and may be the best method win,” an MG officer commented.¹⁰⁷ Following a further intervention in November by McNarney, the Women’s Army Corps were also encouraged to act as “ambassadors of democracy” by offering opportunities for German girls to take up “American sports such as volleyball, softball, table tennis, football and badminton.”¹⁰⁸ This was highly significant in terms of reeducation as surveys had previously suggested that “girls appeared less pro-American and more Nazified than boys.”¹⁰⁹ Reflecting perceived American success, in 1947 Military Government Regulation, Title 8, Part 7, “Youth and Recreational Activities,” was a further stamp of official approval for the formation of GYA organizations across the US Zone.¹¹⁰ However, by this point there were mutterings of some internal doubt about baseball’s use if the premise was solely that “if they learn a game popular in a democratic country they will become democratic.”¹¹¹

“SALESMEN OF DEMOCRACY”?

An official history concluded that the Army Assistance Program to German Youth Activities “presented one of the few bright spots in a picture darkened by extensive fraternization for material gain or other selfish reasons.”¹¹² The issue of motivation is interesting, and some tentative conclusions can be drawn about what inspired these young men to initiate contact with German youth through sports. As battle-weary forces occupied German territory, their expectations were shaped by the experience of fighting Nazism at first hand, and by briefings suggesting that they would meet dogged resistance from fanatical German youth. While GIs had every reason to be cautious in 1945, it was soon apparent that the conquering army’s attitudes to defeated Germany were often influenced by other factors and this was especially evident in GI relationships with children and young people generally. “Even the toughest soldier,” it was widely acknowledged, “cannot deny the universal

¹⁰⁷ Irene Angerstein, “Ball Bats Compete with Red Ties to Win German Youth,” *Escanaba Daily Press*, 23 Oct. 1946, 3.

¹⁰⁸ “McNarney Calls for More Attention to Democracy for German Girls,” *Amarillo Daily News*, 9 Nov. 1946, 6; “Butte WAC Aids in Occupation,” *Montana Standard*, 13 July 1947, 11. Two girls’ softball teams, including Alber’s “Zehlendorf Girls,” played the day after the boys’ slugfest in Berlin. *OMGUS Observer*, 11 Oct. 1946, 6.

¹⁰⁹ McGranahan and Janowitz, “Studies of German Youth,” 4.

¹¹⁰ 14 March 1947, ‘Section C: Sport Activities’, US Department of State, *Germany, 1947–1949: The Story in Documents* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1950), 583–86.

¹¹¹ Delbert Clark, “Training of Youth in Germany Lags,” *New York Times*, 16 Jan. 1947, 20.

¹¹² *The Relations of Occupation Personnel with the Civil Population, 1946–1948* (Karlsruhe: Historical Division, EUCOM, 1951), 46.

appeal of children.”¹¹³ US infantrymen were young men in a foreign country and after victory had been won their thoughts may well have turned to enjoying the peace. Playing games, it might be argued, was evidence of the psychological conversion from war to peace and it may well have seemed that no harm, and possibly much good, might come from teaching German kids the American pastimes with which they were familiar. As early as 1887, *Puck* magazine identified that Americans had “Sport on the Brain.”¹¹⁴ Therefore the explanation might merely be that Americans were, and had been from the beginning of the century, sports-minded. To play games was a natural consequence of this American consciousness. The GIs were themselves, of course, sports fans. Sports and sporting analogies were staples of public discourse and were a considerable feature of materials for GIs. Practical, as well as ideological, considerations were important here: baseball equipment was part of the army’s Special Services’ recreational kit for overseas troops and was readily available. However, many soldiers, significantly, seem to have been instinctive reeducators, using sports as a way of engaging with German youth for reasons that they could articulate with conviction when interviewed by reporters. As occupationaires they became exemplars of American citizenship and the embodiment of US sporting virtues; qualities implanted upon the gridiron and diamond and then shared with German youth through demonstration became a medium for proselytizing for the “American way.” Thus these young Americans led by example, “show[ing] the youth our way of life through sports.”¹¹⁵ The voluntary initiatives undertaken by individual GIs in 1945 and 1946, before they were subsumed into the official GYA program, were motivated primarily by goodwill; sometimes, it seems, despite recent enmity, they were inspired by compassion, forgiveness, pity and/or sympathy. After all, “American doughboys” were reputed to be “undoubtedly the most soft-hearted fighting men in the world.”¹¹⁶

It also seems possible that these “Doughs,” having been advised that the children and youths that they would meet were ideologically contaminated and potentially dangerous, saw them instead as victims. As noted during the war, “the American GI was not proving to be a good hater.”¹¹⁷ “I saw kids in the streets picking up cigaret [*sic*] butts and begging. They all looked hungry, backward, scared,” explained one GI, Moriarity, on first encountering

¹¹³ Lightfoot, “Teaching German Youth to Take Hold,” 24.

¹¹⁴ Frederick Opper, “Sport on the Brain – *Puck*’s American Phrenological Chart for the Season of 1887,” *Puck*, 1 June 1887.

¹¹⁵ Kasischke, *Gastonia Daily Gazette*, 9 Sept. 1946, 4.

¹¹⁶ Middleton, “Germans Today,” 10.

¹¹⁷ Carl J. Friedrich in Carl J. Friedrich et al., *American Experiences in Military Government in World War II* (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1948), 232.

boys in Bremen. “You know, they got an awfully dirty deal in this war; never had anything to look forward to,” he added reflectively.¹¹⁸ Though Petra Goedde has argued that occupation GIs were motivated by paternal instincts and became “Ersatz-fathers” to German children, the soldiers tended to see themselves as big brothers.¹¹⁹ Another GI (Huff) made this point explicitly, observing that “[German kids] like the friendly, big-brother attitude of our soldiers.”¹²⁰ Overall, it seems more likely that the informal interaction that occurred was primarily motivated by humane impulses arising from the grim realities of the situation in which the GIs and the children they befriended found themselves in 1945 and 1946, especially as fraternization was explicitly prohibited in the early occupation phase. Although media output tended to explain the phenomenon with reference to the wider agenda of inculcating democracy via reeducation, these were spontaneous human connections between bewildered children and war-scarred combat soldiers seeking solace and relief.

Moreover, a GI’s personal experience might easily supply a rationale for reaching out to German youth to which no US policymaker was likely to object. For Moriarity, using sports to reeducate was a way of “preventing World War III” and preserving lasting peace for which others had made the ultimate sacrifice: “Me, I lost a redheaded kid brother, and I looked at these kids and at our job over here, and, by God, I don’t ever want to think he died in vain. So I decided to do something.”¹²¹ American occupationaires naturally drew on their experiences of war in different ways. Memories of battle, the loss of “buddies” and revelations of Nazi atrocities were not easily set aside, and exposure to orientation materials designed to erase “any vestige of a sporting attitude toward the enemy” also must be taken into account.¹²² These experiences, however, could become part of a rhetoric which underpinned the use of sports as a component of reeducation. Matt Mann, a coach at the European Theater Athletic Staff School in Stuttgart, argued that sports could “teach German kids how to take a beating and to how to give a beating.”¹²³ This was interesting given that Germany had just taken a “beating” in the war, and there were those who considered that defeat itself would be the most powerful lesson of all.¹²⁴ If, however, GIs chose to

¹¹⁸ “Democracy at Work,” *Time*, 7 Oct. 1946, 28.

¹¹⁹ Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945–1949* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 128.

¹²⁰ Kasischke, *Gastonia Daily Gazette*, 9 Sept. 1946, 4.

¹²¹ “Democracy at Work.”

¹²² Richard Kasischke, “Yanks Want to Know How to Treat German People,” *Miami Daily News Record*, 14 Oct. 1946, 3; Drew Middleton, “Into Germany with the First Army,” *New York Times Magazine*, 8 Oct. 1944, 5.

¹²³ Quoted in Hauser, “The Germans Just Don’t Believe Us,” 84.

¹²⁴ Debs Myer, “Re-education of Germany,” *Yank*, 20 July 1945, 11.

become on-the-ground ambassadors of democracy and the “American way of life” by introducing German “kids” to baseball and football, there were numerous ways in which they could justify their decision. It helped, no doubt, to look at the situation from the “kids” point of view. Much has been made of the lure of “Coke,” chocolate, and gum, but the lack of male company because of the war, both fathers and older siblings, may well explain why so many responded positively to GI initiatives. Neither should children’s need to play, enhanced perhaps by the misery of life in a devastated land, or simple curiosity, be discounted. Huff explained, “The kids are thirsty for it ... It’s been a long time since they’ve had the opportunity for competitive play.”¹²⁵

The idea that sports might be usefully deployed to ensure the compliance of youth more generally, rather than as a specific antidote to the poisonous legacy of the HJ, was persuasive among leadership in the early occupation and speaks to official motivations accentuated by the late opening of schools. An MG report in November 1945 recognized that organization of sporting activities in the Eastern and Western Military Districts had been “favorably received and was expected to relieve some of the restless tension among the lower age groups.”¹²⁶ This justified why a “wide program of supervised youth activities with emphasis on sports is part of MG’s solution to problems of juvenile delinquency and the appearance of such sporadic subversive elements as the Edelweiss Piraten.”¹²⁷ It was not only the Nazis, it seems, that regarded them as a problem. Indeed, this may have become more important following the success of Operation Nursery, a joint British–American counterintelligence initiative to weed out subversive youth groups in March 1946.¹²⁸ A later history, without specifically referencing sport, acknowledged that the GYA program had been broadened to “inculcating German youth with democratic ideas and practices in order to reduce their passive and active resistance to occupation measures.”¹²⁹ Generally, however, there appears to have been a growing sense that for the German population as a whole, the everyday reality of securing food, fuel and shelter rendered them less defiant towards the occupation than had been anticipated.¹³⁰ These factors impacted on German youth too. “Economic factors,” according to an MG report in October 1946, “continue to constitute the greatest hazard to the moral and social development of

¹²⁵ Kasischke, *Gastonia Daily Gazette*, 9 Sept. 1946, 4.

¹²⁶ *Monthly Report*, 4 (Nov. 1945), 6.

¹²⁷ *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 38 (22 April 1946), 5.

¹²⁸ The HJ’s Artur Axmann had already been arrested in December 1945 suspected of being the ringleader of underground efforts to re-Nazify Germany. His deputy, Willi Heidemann, was detained in this later raid.

¹²⁹ *US Armed Forces German Youth Activities Program*, 46.

¹³⁰ *Monthly Report*, 2 (Sept. 1945), 4.

young people.” On the positive side, youth activities, despite problems in securing equipment and facilities and the absence of local (German) leadership – an unintended consequence of the denazification program – promoted “a sense of personal worth, psychological security, and constructive direction.”¹³¹ For the MG, devising practical solutions to problems encountered in Germany became as important as reeducation by sport or any other means.

The MG’s generally positive view of the GYA program was at least partially dictated by the idea that it could be part of the solution to a variety of problems, not least keeping German youths occupied. “Finding themselves completely footloose,” it had been feared, “young people might soon become a menace to the public safety and a potential threat to Military Government.”¹³² It also supplied American army officers a response to the pressing problem of what to do with bored service personnel waiting to be redeployed or demobilized. GI homesickness, idleness, and frustrations about redeployment and slow demobilization had led to protests. In January 1946, for example, Gen. McNarney found himself dealing with two thousand angry GIs in Frankfurt-am-Main, an indication that sustaining morale in the occupying forces was likely to be problematic.¹³³ “As soon as the war ended,” Carruthers has noted, “commanding officers devoted considerable attention to distracting, rewarding, and cajoling combat soldiers who found themselves transformed, often against their will, into occupation troops.”¹³⁴ During the first year of the occupation, morale was low and leaders were increasingly concerned about discipline.¹³⁵ Involvement in GYA was viewed as part of the solution to the problem, as well as a contribution to reeducation for democracy. An emphasis on sports seemed to circumvent this difficulty in the short term at least, but the idea of building democracy on the playing fields of Germany was somewhat illusory.

PLAYING-FIELD DEMOCRATIZATION

Despite initial high hopes and enthusiasm, GYA programs, whether or not they included sports, achieved only modest success in terms of reeducation. A 1946 report, reflecting on a year of Allied occupation, highlighted “the lingering effects of Nazism” and saw German youth as characterized by “a general inability to shake off the effects of Nazi teachings and to adapt themselves to

¹³¹ *Monthly Report*, 16 (Oct. 1946), 10.

¹³² *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 6 (1 Sept. 1945), 23.

¹³³ “My Son, John,” *Time*, 21 Jan. 1946, 20–21.

¹³⁴ Susan L. Carruthers, *The Good Occupation: American Soldiers and the Hazards of Peace* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2016), 235.

¹³⁵ Frederiksen, *The American Military Occupation of Germany*, 99.

the consequences of defeat and the exigencies of social change.”¹³⁶ According to numerous observers within and without the MG, young Germans were suspicious of any kind of ideological instruction. Moreover, survey evidence indicated that children were more interested in sports than in “more sedentary or ‘educational’ activities,” so programs emphasizing “non-ideological” sports should have been more likely to prove successful.¹³⁷ There were, however, limits to what could be achieved. To have compelled young Germans to register for GYA programs would have been counterproductive for the selling of democracy, but take-up was by no means universal. Clay reported in June 1947 that of 2,299,507 youths in the US Zone only 890,416 had joined youth groups, and of these 31 percent (around 300,000) were involved in sports.¹³⁸ A survey undertaken in the same year suggested that 45 percent of youths had not heard of GYA and that, of those who participated, more had been attracted by the food and candy on offer (40 percent) than by sports and games (26 percent), or by learning more about democracy (22 percent).¹³⁹ Indeed, concerns relating to slow absorption of ideas about democracy later prompted GYA to inaugurate cultural and educational programs rather than sports activities which had dominated in 1946.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, by the end of 1947, with waning number of volunteers willing to give up their free time, Army Assistance’s chief concluded that “the novelty of GYA has worn off,” even among GIs themselves.¹⁴¹ The most damning assessment came from a survey conducted towards the end of the occupation period, in 1950, which concluded that some of the most high-profile features of the program “such as American-sponsored games, parties, etc. had the least amount of influence on democratic reorientation.”¹⁴²

With particular reference to sports, it is important to note that the spontaneous initiatives undertaken informally by GIs seem to have been in some ways more successful than the top-down, ideologically motivated programs that supplanted them, certainly in the short term. A noted observer of German attitudes pointed out that “whenever our troops organized games for German kids, the latter showed themselves to be enthusiastic participants,” but, as formalization occurred, games’ reeducative potential was limited as they were suspicious “of anything that smacks of politics and are leary of organizations and organized movements. They have had too much of this sort of thing under

¹³⁶ Kellermann, *The Present Status of German Youth*, 3.

¹³⁷ “German Children Appraise the Youth Program,” 26 April 1947, in Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merritt, eds., *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany: The OMGUS Surveys, 1945–1949* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 155–57, 156.

¹³⁸ Lynn Heinzerling, “Clay Says German Youth Has Not Absorbed Much Democracy,” *Biloxi Daily Herald*, 17 June 1947, 1. ¹³⁹ Merritt and Merritt, 155–56. ¹⁴⁰ Heinzerling,

¹⁴¹ Robert C. Hall, “The Army’s Role in GYA,” *Weekly Information Bulletin*, 117 (3 Nov. 1947), 5. ¹⁴² *US Armed Forces German Youth Activities Program*, 48.

Hitler.”¹⁴³ Nazified sport therefore had an unpredicted legacy in American hopes for organized sports’ role in Germany’s reeducation. Personal – often passionate – commitment, an essential ingredient in the improvised schemes, was also lost when the voluntary principle was eroded, and formalization killed the spirit of the enterprise. This was problematic not least because it reflected ethnocentric cultural naivety in relation to the Germans and their sports. Germany had a strong tradition of military-related physical culture based on the *turnen* movement, which pre-dated Hitler, and by the 1930s soccer had come to occupy the cultural space available for team sports. Although, in one respect, West Germans did come to realize that sport was a way back into the “team of the United Nations” – hence the widely recognized significance of winning FIFA’s World Cup in 1954 – they could never have won the World Series.¹⁴⁴ There were, in short, significant cultural barriers to be surmounted in introducing American sports in Germany and these were more likely to be overcome by genuine enthusiasts rather than by soldiers lacking personal motivation who had been pressed into action by officers anxious to keep them out of trouble. Reflecting on the first two years of occupation in 1947, the influential political commentator Franz Neumann concluded, “It is difficult to educate; it is more difficult to re-educate; it is well-nigh impossible to re-educate a foreign nation. To attempt to re-educate Germans by military government action is to attempt the impossible.”¹⁴⁵ It certainly proved impossible to achieve democratization through “playing-field” reeducation in US-occupied Germany in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Nonetheless, these episodes provide emphatic evidence of the centrality of sports in American identity and understandings of democracy in the 1940s, and an important insight into belief in their allegedly universal applicability.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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¹⁴³ Saul K. Padover, “The Failure of the Reeducation of Germany,” in Julia E. Johnsen, comp., *The Dilemma of Postwar Germany* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1948), 180–92, 190.

¹⁴⁴ It was reported in December 1946 that “AMG feels that if in the ideological rebuilding of the nation a fondness for teamwork results, then the Germans can be fitted into the team of the United Nations.” John La Cerda, “Sports Win Reich Youth,” *Arizona Republic*, 5 Dec. 1946, 11.

¹⁴⁵ Franz L. Neumann, “Re-educating the Germans: The Dilemma of Reconstruction,” *Commentary*, 6 (June 1947), 517–25, 517.