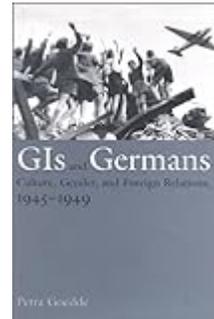


Petra Goedde. *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender and Foreign Relations, 1945-1949.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. xxiii + 210 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-09022-2.



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Petra Goedde, a historian of American foreign relations, offers a reading of the American occupation in Germany that links the social interactions between American GIs and German civilians to the history of American foreign policy. In doing so, Goedde argues that the interactions of American GIs with German civilians, most especially women, were crucial in bringing about the reconciliation between Americans and Germans even before the onset of the Cold War. Because American soldiers encountered a defeated and devastated Germany with a predominantly female population, they developed a feminized image of Germany that stood in stark contrast to the wartime images of Nazi men. Goedde suggests that the GIs' experience of Germany as a "feminized" country reverberated all the way to Washington, and influenced how policy makers treated the defeated enemy. In Goedde's reading, the Cold War with the Soviet Union became possible not because the Soviets appeared more of a threat by 1947, but because Americans regarded Germans as less of a threat. Goedde concludes that the Cold War was "as much a consequence as a cause of the improved relationships between Germany and the United States" (p. xxiii). With that argument she aims to refute one of the key assumptions of German-American relations after 1945, namely that those relations became conciliatory as a result of the Cold War.

American views on Germany were hardly homogeneous during the war, but even at their most severe, they lacked the vitriolic and racist elements that marked American propaganda on Japan. Goedde shows that the dominant wartime view of German history and culture as America's radical "other" was always counter-balanced by a group of critics who explained Nazism as a problem of Western civilization rather than as a peculiar development in German history. Thus, throughout the war, those critics could invoke the "good Germany" that stood at the ready after the defeat of Nazism. Goedde argues that these critics of the official view assured that the long-standing cultural affinity between Germans and Americans was never completely erased in American consciousness, even as America's punitive treatment of post-war Germany was based on the assumption of collective guilt. The U.S. policy of non-fraternization that was to impress the notion of collective guilt on the Germans by forbidding even handshakes and greetings failed miserably, despite extensive propaganda and educational efforts. Goedde claims that, once American GIs encountered the utter destruction and the widespread suffering, the wartime propaganda image of the Nazi storm trooper quickly gave way to a much more "feminized" view of Germany. Because millions of German men had been killed in the war and because most *Wehrmacht* soldiers had not returned from POW camps, GIs experienced Ger-

many as a land of women. American soldiers, Goedde argues, refused to equate the children and women they encountered with Nazism and the atrocities committed by Germany. American GIs passed Hershey bars to German children and American food rations ensured the survival of many a German *Truemmerfrau* and her family. Americans had come to Germany to punish the Nazis, but in no time, Goedde argues, Americans turned into providers and protectors of a broken people.

Goedde rejects the prevailing view that it was the inability of military commanders to enforce the fraternization ban that led to its gradual demise by October 1945 (the ban on marriages with German women was to last until December 1946). Goedde argues instead that the widespread fraternization of enlisted men and officers with the German population led American occupation officials to abandon their policy of collective guilt, and thus made possible a more collaborative working relationship with the Germans that transformed the goals of the occupation. By December 1945, long before irreconcilable tensions with the Soviets emerged, a serious rethinking of occupation policy was already underway. Byron Pryce, sent by Truman as a special envoy to study the relationship between Germans and occupiers concluded that America's punitive policy had disillusioned those Germans who had greeted the Americans as liberators. Pointing out how the GIs's informal fraternization had made friends among German youngsters, Pryce called the soldiers America's most effective ambassadors of democracy. Far from discouraging fraternization with the Germans, the military should encourage it. He also pointed to the abysmal food and housing situation which could only be resolved if America allowed economic reconstruction of the devastated country. For Pryce, Germans were victims who needed material aid and positive encouragement, not punishment. Privately financed CARE packages (1946), the government-financed Marshall plan, and finally the 1948 Berlin Airlift became the mirror development of the soldiers's informal role of protectors and providers. Goedde concludes that by 1947 Americans had accepted that Germans were in need of "protection and guardianship" and that they "no longer posed a threat to their European neighbors" (p. 126). This shift allowed both Germans and Americans to avoid confronting Germany's Nazi past.

Goedde is to be commended for alerting us to the reconciliation that took place between individual Germans and Americans before Cold War objectives shifted the U.S. agenda. But she may be overstating to what degree the personal relationships of the troops on the

ground rather than the Cold War or hard-nosed policy decisions transformed the agenda of Washington policy makers and occupation officials. As Rebecca Boehling has shown, the military's emphasis on efficiency, a desire to cut the number of troops and the spiraling cost of the occupation, as well as pressure from U.S. business interests, created a tremendous dynamic for a more cooperative approach with the Germans.[1] John Willoughby's argument that U.S. foreign policy and the "institutions of occupation" were transformed by the "more mundane problems of social control and organizational capability" also offers an intriguing new reading of the period.[2] The chaotic social and economic conditions in Germany, and the need to focus on reigning in the endemic disciplinary problems of occupation troops forced the military government to abandon the most punitive aspects of occupation policy, and to turn to German actors well before policy makers in Washington supported this shift. Just as importantly, occupation policy toward Germany evolved not only because of developments on the ground, but also because of pressure from observers in the United States. By focusing foremost on events in Germany, Goedde does not give enough credit to the wartime critics of U.S. policy that she describes so eloquently in her first chapter. Those critics denounced the U.S. policy of collective guilt and non-fraternization as soon as the war was over and long before images of a "feminized" Germany made their way back to the United States. Just four weeks after cessations of hostilities, the *New York Times* already featured opponents of the fraternization ban under the headline, "Officers Oppose Fraternizing Ban" and "Senators Criticize Ban on Fraternizing." [3] I suspect that those critics gained more and more of a hearing among occupation officials in Germany eager to report to the U.S. taxpayers that the occupation was making progress. Had the occupation authorities continued to insist on the wartime propaganda image of Germany as a country full of unreconstructed Nazis, they would have been undermining their deeply held belief in the universal appeal and superiority of American values and their ability to convey those values to the Germans.

By focusing foremost on interactions that fostered rapprochement between Germans and Americans, Goedde gives short attention to the variety of impressions that occupation personnel formed about Germans and how these impressions found their way back to the United States. American soldiers might have perceived Germany as a country of women and children, but this was also a country where American GIs encountered the victims of Nazism on a daily basis. U.S. media might

have shown images of the suffering of German women and children, but the U.S. public also received a steady stream of information on the fate of hundreds of thousands of slave laborers and survivors of the Holocaust from Eastern Europe who had found refuge in the American zone.[4] American newspapers that showed images of GIs fraternizing with German women and handing candy to German children also covered the Nuremberg war crimes trials in great detail. Troop surveys conducted in those years revealed that attitudes toward the Germans, despite widespread fraternization, were far from uniformly positive. As Johannes Kleinschmidt has shown in his work, *“Do not fraternize”: Die schwierigen Anfänge deutsch-amerikanischer Freundschaft 1944-1949*, reconciliation between Germans and Americans was a much more difficult and drawn-out process, and American attitudes toward the Germans were much more conflicted than Goedde assumes. While troop information programs for occupation soldiers increasingly included positive aspects of German history and culture as the Cold War heated up, they also continued to educate occupation troops about the horrific atrocities committed by the Germans. Military indoctrination materials were so negative that the *Chicago Tribune* felt compelled to indict the U.S. army in September 1946 for “still preaching hatred toward the Germans.”[5]

The images of smiling and generous GIs handing chewing gum from their tanks and of American bombers dropping candy over Berlin have become a standard narrative of the occupation years in both Germany and the United States. But as John Willoughby and Johannes Kleinschmidt have shown, the day-to-day interactions between Germans and Americans were more varied than those images suggest. GIs acted not only as benevolent caregivers and protectors; they were also capitalist entrepreneurs who profited from the misery of the civilian population. GI involvement in the black market was widespread, and after family members arrived in 1946, they participated as well. In July 1945, the payroll for American GIs in Berlin was one million dollars, yet soldiers sent home some four million. During October of that year, an “extra” thirty-six million dollars from black market activities left the European Theater.[6] GI activities in the black market and the military’s inability to stop these acts may have saved many a German from starvation, but they hardly conveyed an image of GIs as caretakers of the German people. The first two years of the occupation were also marked by widespread disciplinary problems within the military, much of it involving violent and often humiliating acts against German civil-

ians. Military assessments regularly described Germans as helpless victims of undisciplined American soldiers, “who were simply ‘out to get a kraut.’”[7] GI behavior in Germany during the first two years of the occupation was so bad that *Newsweek* magazine, in May 1946, indicted the occupation for its “Conquerors’ Complex,” concluding that U.S. soldiers had not behaved this badly since the occupation of the South after the Civil War.[8]

I am not fully convinced that Goedde’s “gendering” of German-American relations of the early occupation tells the full story of the German-American encounter. In sheer numbers, as Goedde shows, more German men than women interacted with the Americans. Even more importantly, the Germans involved in the tough negotiations with occupation authorities over the country’s future were pre-dominantly men, not women. Men, and thus reminders of the wartime image of the male-dominated Germany, were hardly absent from American eyes. Despite widespread coverage of the suffering in Germany in the horrific winter of 1946/47, a stunning 58 percent of Americans believed in January 1947 that Germany would again become an aggressor nation and seek a new war.[9] Those numbers hardly suggest that Americans viewed Germany as a weak and feminized people. During the Berlin Airlift, American officials might have invoked the plight of German mothers and their babies to sway American public opinion, but those same officials also began thinking about West German rearmament because the expertise of former Wehrmacht soldiers was considered essential for the defense of the West. Goedde’s gender analysis, which depicts Germany as feminized while projecting America as the masculine protector, also makes little sense from the long-term perspective of German history. Going back to Weimar, Germans have contrasted “feminized” American culture to German *Kultur*. That strain of anti-Americanism was widespread in the immediate postwar years and dominated much of the debates on the dangers of Americanization during the 1950s.[10] Germans, both male and female, might have viewed American GIs as accomplished “jitterbugs” but they did not see them as competent, manly soldiers. Once the Cold War heated up, Germans consistently expressed doubt whether the United States was committed to the defense of Germany, and whether American soldiers could stand up to the Soviets.[11]

With *GIs and Germans*, Petra Goedde joins a recent and growing body of scholarship that foregrounds social history in explaining the transformation of U.S. occupation policies in Germany. To get a full grasp of

this fascinating but also complex period, any student of German-American relations will need to weigh Goedde's argument against the findings that other scholars of the American occupation have produced.

Notes:

[1]. Rebecca Boehling, *A Question of Priorities. Democratic Reform and Economic Recovery in Postwar Germany* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996), p. 270.

[2]. John Willoughby, *Remaking the Conquering Heroes. The Postwar American Occupation of Germany* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 3.

[3]. Johannes Kleinschmidt, 'Do not fraternize.' *Die schwierigen Anfaenge deutsch-amerikanischer Freundschaft 1944-1949* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1995), pp. 117-18.

[4]. See for example the important work by Atina Grossmann, "Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood: Germans and Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-Nazi Germany, 1945-49," *Archiv fuer Sozialgeschichte* 38 (1998): pp. 215-39.

[5]. Kleinschmidt, 'Do Not Fraternize', p. 210.

[6]. Willoughby, *Remaking the Conquering Heroes*, p. 21.

[7]. Kleinschmidt, 'Do not fraternize', p. 150.

[8]. "Overseas: Curbing a Conqueror's Complex," in *Newsweek*, May 6, 1946, cited in Kleinschmidt, 'Do not fraternize', p. 148.

[9]. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[10]. See especially Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock and Rebels. Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[11] Maria Hoehn, *GIs and Fraeuleins. The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 58.

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