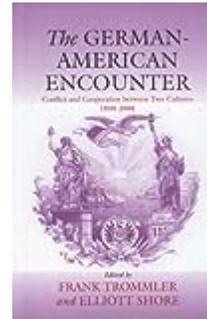




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New Perspectives in the Study of German-American Relations

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The editors of *The German-American Encounter*, Frank Trommler and Elliott Shore, set out to re-evaluate the history and the state of German-American relations at the threshold of a new millennium; they succeed admirably with their goal. Trommler and Shore have assembled articles on the history of German-Americans, on German-American political, cultural, and economic relations, on mutual influences, and on parallel developments in Germany and the United States. Thus, the volume should have a wide readership. The book is truly interdisciplinary in that its authors, mostly teaching in the United States, hail from History, American Studies, English Literature, German Literature, Education, and Political Science, along with a newspaper editor and a politician. The book presents the results of a conference on the future of German-American History that took place in April 1999; the conference celebrated the conclusion of a five-year project to restore and catalogue the library of the German Society of Pennsylvania, which, with its over 70,000 volumes, is the largest private German-American library

in the United States. The book is divided into three parts: the first deals with “The German Part of U.S. History” in the nineteenth century; the second covers “The American Part of Germany History” in the second half of the twentieth century; and the third, entitled “The New Transatlantic Predicament,” discusses the future of German and American Studies as well as German-American relations after the end of the Cold War.

In the first part, Kathleen Conzen seeks to rescue the discussion of German-American “contributions” to U.S. history from filiopietistic historiography by suggesting a parallel between the history of German-Americans and colonial studies; according to her, German migrants had a “colonizing vision” (p. 11) with which they influenced the United States—for example, in the form of Midwestern “heartland values” (p. 16) and the Progressive-era concepts of pluralism. James Bergquist and Hartmut Keil subsequently outline the adaptations of German 48ers and of German socialists after their emigration as well as their impact on the United States. After a slightly cursory article by Patricia Herminghouse comparing the feminist movements in Germany and the United States,

Gregg Roeber sketches the past and future impact of German religion on U.S. religious life in the areas of Catholicism, Peace Churches, and Mysticism/Antinomianism. Daniel Fallon then looks at the influences of German enlightenment and romantic ideas on the development of U.S. kindergartens and universities. The final two articles call for an inclusion of the study of German-American literature into German and/or American Studies. Brent Peterson analyzes a single German-American short story as a source for the history and mentality of nineteenth-century German-Americans while Werner Sollors points out the challenges that German-American literature presents to well-established theories on American literature, including the supposed non-existence of an American novel of manners, “certain assumptions of whiteness studies” (p. 108), and literary descriptions of lesbian relationships.

The second part starts with two articles on the U.S. impact on Germany after World War II. Michael Geyer shows how long anti-American sentiments endured and how the “German-American security bargain” (p. 141), which ended in 1989, became only popular after the Berlin Crisis in 1961. Volker Berghahn draws attention to the structural and cultural changes in Germany’s economy, which the United States tried to implement, and dismisses the concept of “Americanization” in favor of a model of a “blending of American imports with indigenous traditions” (p. 155). Just like Berghahn, Rudy Koshar argues against the “Americanization” model; he uses the first postwar U.S. travel book on Germany to posit a mutual influencing of the two countries in “intercultures” (p. 172) and pleads for more transcultural interchanges in the future. The next three articles deal with the role of the Holocaust and American Jewry in German-American relations. Lily Feldman analyzes the growing role of the American Jewish Committee in German-American relations since the 1980s and ventures predictions of the future Jewish role in relations between the two countries. Moshe Zuckermann compares the Holocaust discourses in Israel and Germany and ties in the United States with a short description of the “absorption of the Holocaust into popular culture” (p. 195). Manfred Henningsen concludes the section with a provocative piece arguing that the German Holocaust Memorial in Berlin should serve as a role model for a memorial to slavery on the Mall in Washington.

The last section is more about the future than about the past. Its first three articles deal with the state of German-American relations after 1989. Konrad Jarausch deplores the divergent intellectual interests of Germans

and Americans and calls for “a new curiosity on both sides that is ready to explore the differences arising out of the return to normalcy” (p. 230). Theo Sommer and Karsten Voigt point out areas of friction between the two countries but take a more optimistic view of the future “Atlantic Community” (p. 246). In the next two papers, Frank Trommler and Berndt Ostendorf discuss globalization and Americanization. Trommler argues for a “global town” instead of “global villages” (p. 265) and for a better knowledge of each other by strengthening the liberal arts in U.S. universities and American Studies programs in Germany. Ostendorf pleads for a more sophisticated and differentiated model than “Americanization.” After Elliott Shore has demonstrated how the spread of Hollywood movies is not a one-way street, especially with regard to the dubbing of U.S. movies in Germany, the last two articles turn to the future of German Studies in the United States and American Studies in Europe and America. While Russell Berman calls for a “critical reappropriation of tradition” (p. 297) to save German Studies in the undergraduate and graduate curriculum, G nter Lenz and John Rowe plead for an internationalization of American Studies and the creation of “contact zones” (p. 322).

Although the present volume covers a broad range of topics, some are missing, as happens frequently with conference volumes. Whereas political and cultural history are over represented, economic and gender history are underrepresented. Given the fact that two-thirds of the volume is dedicated to the twentieth century, one might also have expected one or two articles about the “encounter” of East Germany and the United States. Also, some contributions are richer in original research or ideas than others although, with one or two exceptions, all articles attain a remarkably even and high standard of scholarship and are well written. Finally, it would have been helpful for the reader if besides the short introductions to the volume’s three parts the editors had cross-referenced the various articles. Thus, for example, Rudy Koshar cites works by Volker Berghahn and Frank Trommler (pp. 167, 174) and G nter Lenz quotes Berndt Ostendorf (p. 319), but no reference is made to the articles by the three authors in the present volume, which cover similar topics.

All in all, however, *The German-American Encounter* is a valuable addition to the already aging literature on German-American relations; it offers interesting, fresh perspectives on the study of German-American relations after the end of the Cold War and of, as the editors put it, the traditional binary opposition between the United

States and Europe or, more specifically, Germany. The volume points to several blind spots in historiography and suggests new topics for research, ranging from the process of German worker immigrants “becoming white” and the inclusion of German-American literature into the research agenda to economic changes in postwar Germany and the relinquishment of the concept of “Americanization”. In addition, several authors demonstrate how modern, interdisciplinary theories can be used to great effect with “more traditional” German-American topics. Thus, the volume, on the one hand, shows how far research on German-American relations has come in the past twenty years and, on the other hand, points to venues for future research.[1] Because of the diversity of its articles, the volume addresses itself to historians, political scientists, American Studies scholars, German Studies specialists, and educationalists as well as an interested lay public; the volume would also be ideal for

classroom use.

Note

[1]. Compare, e.g., the collection of essays that resulted from another conference organized by Frank Trommler in Philadelphia, that time on the occasion of the tricentennial of the first German migration to the United States in 1983, cp. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

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