



# ENEMIES TO ALLIES

COLD WAR GERMANY  
AND AMERICAN MEMORY

BRIAN C. ETHERIDGE

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For Erica



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## Introduction

# Answering the German Question

In the United States today, visitors can find almost as many memorials dedicated to the two most visible symbols of recent German history—the Holocaust and the Berlin Wall—as in Germany itself. Although both events happened thousands of miles away and neither directly involved the United States, American public and private officials have dedicated museums to the Holocaust and memorialized sections of the Berlin Wall in places throughout the country. Major Holocaust sites can be found in several cities, including Los Angeles, Albuquerque, Buffalo, and Miami. The Berlin Wall has been enshrined in locales ranging from the George Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Texas, to the men’s bathroom at the Main Street Station Casino in Las Vegas. In many of these memorials, the Holocaust and the Berlin Wall reflect a positive narrative of the United States that affirms America’s mission, ideals, and values in the world.

These American monuments to the Berlin Wall and the Holocaust suggest the visibility and importance of German history to American society. For much of the second half of the twentieth century, the “German Question” was a widely debated issue in the United States. Often framed in terms of how Americans should assess and address Germany’s past, and thus its present and future, manifestations of the German Question saturated America’s mass media, appearing in newspapers, magazines, journals, history books, novels, films, and television shows. At a basic level, then, the answers offered through these numerous monuments to

the Berlin Wall and the Holocaust underscore a significant truth in postwar American history—for many Americans narratives of Germany have played an important role in defining domestic and international realities.

Although the proliferation of American monuments to Germany's past might seem natural and the meaning of them self-evident, this book argues that Germany's visibility in and significance to American life during the postwar period have been neither foreordained nor fixed. Since the end of World War II, various actors have tried to mobilize German representations for different ends. As a result, images of Germany have been manufactured, contested, and co-opted as rival narratives have competed for legitimacy and hegemony. In examining the history of German representations in America's mass media, this book tells the story of how these representations have been both produced by and subjected to different forms of diplomatic, political, social, and cultural power.

This book argues that the story of German representations in the United States is about far more than images of Nazis and Berliners in the American media. In its broadest telling, this work connects international and domestic, diplomatic and cultural, and German and American histories. It narrates not only the activities of American and West German government officials but also the efforts of journalists, public intellectuals, filmmakers, public relations experts, neo-Nazis, Jews, conservatives, and student radicals in shaping and articulating narratives of Germany's past and present. It also examines the fruits of their efforts in cultural products ranging from Fred Zinnemann's *The Search* to William Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, from CBS's *Hogan's Heroes* to George Lincoln Rockwell's *White Power*. This book ties these themes and more together to show that the story of German representations, conceived broadly, has been a central thread in the life of postwar America.

In contextualizing the cultural and political milieu in which these narratives were created and circulated, this book expands our understanding of the relationship between policymaking and meaning making.<sup>1</sup> Because most of the major works that have touched on the German Question are focused almost exclusively on foreign policy decisions, they have offered little beyond vague generalizations, citing the influence of events like the Berlin Blockade without consideration for how these events were shaped by interested actors or how they intersected with existing discourses about Germany. Often assuming that the beliefs of the American public simply

followed the same trajectory as the country's policymakers, they ignore the struggle over German representations in the mass media and thus fail to appreciate the complex nature of American attitudes toward Germany. Moreover, the story of this struggle not only complicates our understanding of how representations of Germany circulated in America's media in the postwar period but also sheds light on larger issues involving state power, public diplomacy, and cultural reception.<sup>2</sup>

To integrate these different stories, I deploy a concept called *memory diplomacy*, which draws from the study of both public memory and public diplomacy. For years, scholars of foreign relations have been interested in the role of individual memory in shaping foreign policy, but they have been slower to take on the study of public memory, most likely because its relevance for policymaking is less clear. As numerous scholars have pointed out, modern conceptions of memory frame remembering as a presentist act of reconstruction dependent on social affirmation for articulation and solidification. In this sense, modern studies emphasize that the study of "forgetting" memories is equally as important and interesting as the study of "remembering" them. Maurice Halbwachs's notion of collective memory, which theorizes that every memory is shared and reinforced by the larger community, has emerged as the dominant framework for understanding and exploring memory historically. Building on Halbwachs's work, a number of studies have been written on how societies construct and interact with their pasts through commemoration, rituals, ceremonies, popular culture, works of history, and monuments.<sup>3</sup>

As Jérôme Bourdon has noted, the emphasis on "collective" has concentrated attention on "political-territorial entities, at the level of nation and below." Within whatever collectivity is being examined—nation-state, city, ethnic group—many studies focus on how different memory narratives vie for dominance. Some, such as John Bodnar, juxtapose "official" memories, narratives sanctioned by the state, with "vernacular" memories, stories or narratives nurtured and maintained by common people. Others, such as Marita Sturken, conceive of official history and memory as "entangled," with the distinctions between the two often blurred. Carol Gluck has developed the notion of "memory activists" to describe those individuals and organizations involved in pushing or spinning various narratives. Regardless of approach, however, all scholars of collective memory recognize and support the notion that collective memory

is about more than the past: rather, building on the work of Benedict Anderson, they argue that the collective memory of an entity is directly tied to its identity or subjectivity.<sup>4</sup>

Diplomatic historians who have ventured into the study of public memory have contributed to the study of collective memory of war, exploring, for example, how specific narratives of World War II and Vietnam have played out in American collective memory. While these works demonstrate that foreign relations historians can do memory work as well as those trained in cultural history, they build upon existing work that examines how the various actors have sought to use memory narratives to foster support for or opposition to the state. In this sense, their work reinforces the dominant conceptualization of memory as a domestic phenomenon, in that they study *American* actors wrangling over *American* memories. Conceiving of memory in such a way prevents memory from connecting to the growing movement to internationalize foreign relations history and American history more broadly.<sup>5</sup>

But recent theorizing of memory offers ways in which international history, both in content and in practice, can be integrated in the study of memory. Some scholars have argued that, in the age of electronic mass media, the relationship between memory and the collective has become more complicated as traditional ways of passing on memory have been disrupted. “Instead of relating to the past through a shared sense of place or ancestry,” George Lipsitz argues, “consumers of electronic mass media can experience a common heritage with a people they have never seen; they can acquire memories of a past to which they have no geographical or biological connection.” For this reason, Alison Landsberg, in what is the most important work on this phenomenon, eschews the term *collective memory* for the twentieth century, opting instead for *prosthetic memory* in an effort to highlight the often fabricated or artificial nature of memory narratives. For Landsberg, modern technologies “can structure ‘imagined communities’ that are not necessarily geographically or nationally bounded and that do not presume any kind of affinity among community members.” In an age of mass culture, “memories of the Holocaust do not belong only to Jews, nor do memories of slavery belong solely to African Americans.” Prosthetic memories encourage subjects to adopt these “foreign” memories through mediated representations that collapse time and position viewers to identify with “others” from the past. Memories thus

can be prosthetic and “transportable”; identities and subjectivities become more fluid.<sup>6</sup>

While Landsberg focuses primarily on the transformation of memory as a result of technological change and the onset of modernity, this book stresses how the notion of “prosthetic memory” opens up the study of memory in new ways for historians of foreign relations. Memory theorized as “collective” suggests an exclusively domestic focus; but memory conceived as prosthetic opens the realm for narratives and actors not “organically” tied to the community. Despite the oft-heard contention that no memory narrative is more historically accurate than another, the term *collective memory* still conveys some measure of authenticity on domestic narratives and actors because it conceives of memory work as an almost exclusively indigenous enterprise. Prosthetic memory implicitly moves these narratives away from the authenticity associated with their originators and thus fully liberates both the narratives and their activists from “authentic” trappings of nationality, blood, or ethnicity. Any actor can fashion and promote a memory narrative in a society; there is no requirement that the actor or the narrative have an organic relationship with the community.

When viewed in this light, it becomes apparent that the study of public diplomacy can serve as a model for analyzing and recognizing how prosthetic memories of other nations are promoted and understood. Alternately known as propaganda, cultural diplomacy, informational policy, and psychological warfare, public diplomacy denotes communication activities designed to shape, manipulate, or otherwise influence public opinion to achieve or facilitate the attainment of foreign policy objectives. Recent scholarship has expanded the concept of public diplomacy by emphasizing how private initiatives and actors can participate in, augment, and supplement state-sponsored public diplomacy initiatives. Building on these works, this book understands public diplomacy to involve any information work that targets the “public” for the purpose of affecting the “diplomacy,” or the foreign relations, of the host country. Conceiving of memory as prosthetic enables work in public diplomacy to highlight how foreign agents (in league with indigenous state and non-state actors) can circulate memory narratives of their nation to encourage target peoples to adopt prosthetic memories of their homeland and, in the process, position them to sympathize, identify with, and ultimately sup-

port their foreign policies. At its most basic level, then, this book uses the concept of “memory diplomacy” to show how the *means* of public diplomacy can be used to carry out the *ends* of public memory work.<sup>7</sup>

I argue that two broad memory narratives dominated American thinking about Germany in the Cold War period. Depicting the German people as dedicated democrats standing firm on the front line of the Cold War, the Cold War narrative sought to train American attention on the present heroism of the Germans in supporting the United States and the West during the period. Involving government and nongovernment officials on both sides of the Atlantic, the memory coalition supporting this narrative portrayed the German people as Western or “Americanized,” and thus facilitated the adoption of prosthetic memories of Germany by emphasizing the sameness of the two peoples. Memory actors routinely portrayed the East-West struggle as a war against totalitarianism, explicitly linking Nazi Germany with the Soviet Union. When addressing Germany’s past, members of this coalition built upon World War II understandings of the conflict that differentiated between Nazis and Germans, arguing that most Germans were not only innocent of the horrors of World War II but had been fighting the Nazis (and hence totalitarianism) with the Americans from the beginning. Most popular, however, was the invocation of Berlin as the symbol of the Cold War, which fostered the identity of West Berliners, and by extension all West Germans, as foot soldiers on the front line in this common struggle against totalitarianism.

Supporters of the world war narrative, on the other hand, urged Americans to reject this prosthetic memory, encouraging them instead to maintain more organic memories (American-centered) of the First and Second World Wars. Rooted in America’s experience with Germany in the first half of the decade, their narrative supported the notion of collective guilt and warned against German revanchism. Comprised primarily of liberals and Jews wary of a renewed Germany, this memory coalition depicted the German people as nascent Nazis still bent on world domination. Their strategy lay primarily in maintaining difference between Americans and Germans. They regularly drew attention to vestiges of Nazism in West German government and society, and often used terms like *Nazis* and *Pan-Germans* to refer to all Germans. Both were intended to recall Germany’s past aggression and encourage Americans to think of Germans as the “other.”

Just as scholars of public diplomacy have acknowledged that they must go beyond simply chronicling the activities of states in formulating and carrying out their policies, tracing and detailing the activities of these memory activists do not provide a complete picture. An equally important part of the study of memory diplomacy is looking at how “communities of memory” (to borrow from Stanley Fish’s notion of interpretive communities) formed around these narratives. Often disparate and hard-to-generalize groups of people came together around common understandings of the German people, and these communities of memory often interpreted the messages and narratives in unintended or unexpected ways.<sup>8</sup>

In exploring the memory diplomacy associated with Germany during the Cold War, I emphasize five themes. Above all, perhaps, the use of memory diplomacy shows how these conflicts over and through German representations serve as a window for understanding the changing nature of American identity and state power in the postwar world. This is the *first* theme—the evolving power of the American state in framing American identity during this period. I conceptualize foreign policy as more than just an effort to reconcile geopolitical aims and means. The articulation of foreign policy involves the mobilization of public opinion, and as such, intimately involves questions of national identity. Through the politics of affiliation and disaffiliation, a nation’s foreign policy defines friends and enemies, allies and adversaries, constructing what a people are for and what a people are against. Challenges to long-standing foreign policy traditions, such as the period right after World War II or during the Vietnam War, have necessitated a reorientation of public attitudes if the policy is to be supported. In this case, how the American government framed Germany in the early Cold War period, how these definitions later changed, and how effectively these framings were resisted or contested says much about who wields power and how it is exercised in American society.

The U.S. government was not the only actor interested in shaping narratives of Germany. The new Federal Republic of Germany had an even greater interest in mobilizing American public opinion on its behalf. Telling the story of West German public diplomacy in the United States, the *second* theme, illustrates the many benefits that can be gained from dislodging the privileged place of Americanization in the study of public diplomacy and intercultural relationships. Exploring the efforts of West

Germany in the United States enables students of intercultural relationships, and especially of America's place in the world, to revisit some of the assumptions that the study of Americanization has brought to the analysis of these cultural relations. More specifically, it complicates conventional understandings drawn from Americanization studies on the relationship between power and method, highlighting the different imperatives and strategies of states on the cultural periphery attempting to influence the cultural core. In this sense, West Germany's public diplomacy program in the United States was different in both degree and kind from the imperial strategies of the United States in West Germany and of Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany in the United States. When compared with American public diplomacy in Germany and with previous German public diplomacy in America, West Germany's public diplomacy efforts in the United States show how and why such efforts from the cultural margins matter to the study of intercultural relationships.

Both governments found themselves joined by other, nonstate actors interested in shaping narratives of Germany in the United States, such as the Society for the Prevention of World War III (SPWWIII), the American Council on Germany (ACG), and a number of Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the American Jewish Congress (AJ Congress), the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL), and the Jewish War Veterans (JWV). The political relations among these state and nonstate actors reveals the different strategies and tactics pursued in the formulation and execution of effective public relations campaigns. More important, the story of their interaction, the *third* theme, highlights the evolving ability of the American state in coercing consent and containing dissent among national organizations.

Because of their unique relationship with Germany's past, the positions of Jewish organizations and their constituents are especially noteworthy. Unlike the positions of the SPWWIII, which was implacably opposed to the German people, and the ACG, which was founded to propagandize on behalf of the new West German government, those of Jewish organizations were neither clear-cut nor uniform. This intra-Jewish conflict and its significance for the growth of Holocaust consciousness in the United States represent the *fourth* theme. During the 1940s and 1950s, all Jewish organizations worried about developments in Germany and viewed the Federal Republic against the backdrop of the Third

Reich and the Holocaust. But while an overwhelming majority of Jews favored a hard peace for the German people in the postwar period, Jewish organizations did not agree on the extent to which this should be supported, as some Jewish leaders worried that a vengeful approach would place them outside the developing Cold War consensus. Also, local Jewish officials and members often disagreed with national Jewish organizations that sought to accommodate the American state, continuing, in several instances, to criticize Germans and Germany despite admonitions and instructions against such behavior. These incidents of resistance suggest an oppositional Jewish “community of memory” that provided validation for contesting state-sponsored narratives.

The multiplicity of meanings for Germany and the Holocaust in the Jewish community underscores the importance of exploring how these narratives circulated in American society. Examining narratives of Germany in the mainstream and underground media show how these narratives were replicated, contested, and rejected. This story of cultural circulation, the *fifth* theme, is especially important because it illuminates another realm of conflict. Whereas the study of institutional interactions tells of the political struggle among national and international organizations, the study of representations in American culture examines how that same conflict continued in entertainment, informational, and political discourse—sometimes with unexpected results. Studying the circulation of these media texts is also important because it demonstrates that many policymakers and opinion makers often misunderstood or mischaracterized the impact of their efforts to shape public opinion. In these ways, I argue that examining the diplomatic, political, and cultural aspects of German representations in the United States offers both a more complicated and a more complete picture of the exercise of and the resistance to different forms of state power.

I begin by establishing how Germans, in many ways, have served as America’s “other” since the founding of the English colonies in the seventeenth century; they were a people upon whom Americans projected both their fears about and their aspirations for themselves and their society. For the first half of American history, Americans largely interpreted Germany and Germanness through the waves of German settlers coming to the New World. As the largest non-Anglo ethnic group before the Great War, German Americans served as a convenient point of contrast

for understanding Americans and Americanism. During the colonial period, Anglos admired the work ethic of their German neighbors but feared their clannishness and potential for subversion. After the founding of the American Republic, German Americans became part of the larger story of the American democratic experiment, as Americans unfavorably contrasted a perceived lack of restraint and potential for self-government among Germans with an American propensity for liberty. After the establishment of the German empire, mainstream Americans looked to the German nation for a better understanding of Germans and Germanness and were impressed with German culture, education, efficiency, and productivity during much of this time period. At the same time, however, as the emerging foil against the United States in both world wars, the German nation furthered America's continued conception of itself as the defender of freedom against militarism and authoritarianism. I show how the arrogant public diplomacy of the Wilhelmine and Nazi regimes failed to capitalize on the former impressions and often reinforced the latter. Still, the ongoing debate during the Second World War as to the nature of the German people failed to arrive at a clear consensus by the end of the war.

With the disruption of long-standing foreign policy traditions, the immediate post-World War II era represented a moment of malleability for the American government. At the center of this important moment lay Germany. After the war ended, the Truman administration settled on an occupation policy that sought to rehabilitate Germany for a variety of reasons, including historical understandings of Germany within the administration itself. Once decided upon this course of action, the American government in the early Cold War period had a vested interest in promoting a specific narrative of Germany that legitimized America's struggle against the Soviet Union. American officials relied heavily on the notion of totalitarianism to frame both World War II and the Cold War—with Germany as the critical linchpin. In this sense, then, the American state sought to utilize both Nazis *and* Berliners in its representation of Germany's past to justify American foreign and domestic policies.

The state aggressively leveraged its power to promote this narrative and manufacture consent at various levels of American society. With the prestige and stature that the American government enjoyed after victory in World War II, the dawning of a new ideological struggle with the Soviet Union, and a widespread fear of communist subversion, an era of

consensus settled in that discouraged dissent. While some actors, such as the Federal Republic of Germany and the American Council on Germany, promoted a different Cold War narrative based on their respective self-interests, major Jewish groups like the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League offered their support, or at least refused to dissent, out of fear of being labeled as anti-American or sympathetic to Bolshevism. The only organization that remained faithful to the world war narrative and resolved to stand against the power of the state was the Society for the Prevention of World War III. It was marginalized in the larger society and abandoned by its erstwhile allies.

The hegemony of the Cold War narrative was replicated in the mainstream American media. In a time of consensus, government endorsement naturalized the Cold War narrative and gave it the veneer of common-sense reality. Mainstream discourse reproduced the Cold War narrative in both content and form. Conventional publications not only absolved most ordinary Germans from responsibility for the Third Reich and praised postwar progress in West Germany but did so by “Americanizing” Germans—and thus positioned Americans to adopt prosthetic memories of the German people. The hegemony of the Cold War narrative contributed to the state’s larger aims of including the Federal Republic of Germany in the Western world and employing Germany to differentiate between the East and West. In the process, the Cold War narrative legitimated American domestic and foreign policy in the era by trumpeting the superiority of American civilization.

Americans also spontaneously endorsed this narrative because it both reflected and contributed to the emerging consensus on the Cold War in general. The Cold War, the clash between the United States and the Soviet Union in Germany, and particularly the struggle in Berlin, helped Americans conceive of Germany as a battleground between capitalism and communism, a place where these different systems could be contrasted for the rest of the world to see. The concept of totalitarianism, and Nazi Germany’s pivotal role in that concept, encouraged many Americans to view the Cold War as a conflict of ideologies, a struggle between democracy and totalitarianism, a struggle that Americans had been engaged in for centuries. Postwar images of a German landscape dominated by rubble and *fräuleins* furthered the notion that the Nazis, and not the German people, were responsible for the Third Reich.