

7. The Continuity of Ambivalence. German Images of America, 1933–1945

Although research on the German image of America from 1933–1945 occupies only a modest place in the historiography of Hitler, National Socialism, and the Third Reich, and an overall account of the subject has been lacking until recently,¹ the individual studies that have been published do permit an attempt to present in systematic order some well-confirmed hypotheses about Germans' "images of America" from 1933–1945—about judgments, prejudices, clichés, stereotypes; about images of enemies and hatreds. This is the intention of the following essay, which the author was inspired to write by his study of Hitler's image of America.²

An overall chronological view of the years from 1933 to 1945 leads to the by no means surprising but, nevertheless, fundamental insight that published opinion on the policies of the United States and of the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the Nazi system of rule, which was characterized by press control, censorship, and propaganda, was primarily a function of Nazi foreign policy. In the early years of the Nazi regime, moreover, coverage of the New Deal served to legitimize Hitler's rule. The overriding foreign policy interest that Hitler and the National Socialists had in America also resulted in the major turning point in the production of images of America: from a benevolently neutral commentary on Roosevelt and American policy one finds until the second half of 1937, to a climate of opinion that became more hostile beginning in 1938/39. Whereas from 1938 onward, depending on tactical expediency, hostile propaganda toward Roosevelt and the

1 See Philipp Gassert, *America in the Third Reich. Ideology, Propaganda, and Popular Opinion 1933–1945* (Stuttgart, 1997).

2 Detlef Junker, "Hitler's Perception of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the United States of America," *FDR and His Contemporaries: Foreign Perceptions of an American President*, ed. Cornelis A. van Minnen and John F. Sears (New York, 1991) 145–56, 233–36.

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United States was intensified or diminished, after the German declaration of war on the United States on December 11, 1941, it changed to open hatred. Although the number of publications on other aspects of the image of America, such as on economics, technology, and construction, architecture and culture, on everyday American life, and the leisure behavior of Americans, on Hollywood and the American “moneyed aristocracy,” also depends on other factors—for example, the relative prosperity of the years from 1936 to 1938 seems to have led to an “American boom”—an anti-American turn can also be detected in these areas from 1939 onward.³

The Great Depression, along with American “isolationism” and neutrality legislation, led to a rapid decline in America’s importance to Germany. From 1933 to 1936, the United States and Nazi Germany were an ocean apart. When Hitler became chancellor, he considered U.S. goodwill helpful but also relatively insignificant. Hitler ignored the United States completely until the signing of the Munich Agreement, with this hardly changing until the German invasion of Poland. None of his foreign policy decisions during these years show any consideration of American interests. In important documents, such as the Four-Year Plan and the Hossbach Memorandum, America is not even mentioned.

In the period from 1933 to 1936, Roosevelt, the New Deal, and the U.S. in general are treated kindly by Hitler and the National Socialist

3 This general assessment is derived from Hans-Jürgen Schröder, *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten 1933–1939* (Wiesbaden, 1970); Harald Frisch, “Das deutsche Rooseveltbild 1933–1941” (Diss., Berlin, 1967); Josef Roidl, “Das Amerikabild der Zwischenkriegszeit in der Berliner Illustrierten Zeitung” (M.A. Thesis, Regensburg, 1987); Günter Moltmann, “Nationalklischees und Demagogie: Die deutsche Amerikapropaganda im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in *Das Unrechtsregime. Internationale Forschung über den Nationalsozialismus*, vol. 1: *Ideologie – Herrschaftssystem – Wirkung in Europa*, ed. Ursula Büttner (Hamburg, 1986) 217–42. See also *German Publications on the United States 1933 to 1945*, compiled by Hans Hainebach, The New York Public Library (New York, 1948) 3: “It will surprise no one to learn that the great majority of the items listed here reflect the ideology of the government then in power, taking a rather negative view of America as compared to Germany. Still, up to 1938, a certain measure of objectivity—attempted or achieved—can be found in many German writings, while hostile attitudes toward the United States are often confined to attacks on the anti-Nazi groups in America. After 1938, anti-Americanism becomes much more outspoken, but is still restrained as long as there seems to be any hope for continued American neutrality. An openly hostile attitude toward everything American is evident in most writings after 1941. Thus, the year of publication can give some indication of the degree of objectivity or aggressiveness to be expected in a specific item.”

press—despite massive and growing criticism in the American media about the incipient terror in Germany.⁴ To Louis P. Lochner of the Associated Press on February 24, 1933, Hitler described his government's attitude toward the United States as "sincere friendship."⁵ Hitler's response to Roosevelt's May 16, 1933, call for disarmament was couched in friendly platitudes.⁶ On March 14, Hitler sent a message to Roosevelt through Ambassador William E. Dodd congratulating him on his "heroic efforts in the interests of the American people." The German people, he said, were watching the President's successful struggle against the economic crisis with interest and admiration. What follows can be understood as the official interpretation of Roosevelt and the New Deal in the early years of Nazi rule: "Reich Chancellor agrees with President that the virtues of duty, sacrifice, and discipline must govern the entire nation. This moral demand, which the President made of each individual citizen, is also the quintessence of the German concept of the state with its motto "The common interest before self-interest."⁷

If one follows the German press during these years, Roosevelt faced similar revolutionary challenges as Hitler and Mussolini; he too was a kind of "Führer," using dictatorial measures to intervene in economic affairs; he too had understood that the days of unfettered individualism and parliamentarism were over. Parallels were drawn between the personalities of Hitler and Roosevelt and between the tasks they faced. Roosevelt's book *Looking Forward* appeared in German translation only a few months after its publication in the United States in 1933 and was well received by Nazi Germany. The Nazi party organ, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, wrote that many of the statements could also have come from National Socialists and that Roosevelt had a good deal of insight into National Socialist thought.⁸

A study of the image of Roosevelt and American politics in the largest European illustrated journal of its time, the *Berliner Illustrierten Zeitung* (BIZ), comes to the same conclusion for the years 1933–1936. The illustrated journal, which belonged to the Ullstein publishing

4 See Schröder, *Germany and the United States*, 95–119; Frisch, "The German Roosevelt Picture," 31–44.

5 Schröder, *Germany and the United States*, 98.

6 U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1933* (Washington, D.C., 1950) 1: 143–45 (cited as FRUS); *Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik, Serie C: 1933–1937* (Göttingen, 1971) 1: 445–50 (cited as ADAP).

7 Hitler's Message, ADAP CII, 1, p. 515, no. 325.

8 *Völkischer Beobachter*, June 7, 1933; quoted in Schröder, *Germany and the United States*, 102.

house, had to be sold at Hitler's express wish to the Eher publishing house—the NSDAP party publishing house where *Mein Kampf* was also printed—far below its market value; the Jewish editors then being dismissed. The mass-circulation newspaper was able to increase its appeal again after a considerable drop in sales during the Great Depression, not least because it combined readers' need for apolitical entertainment with subtle propaganda.

President Roosevelt was portrayed in the illustrated and text articles as a strong-willed leader who had overcome the affliction of polio. Numerous photos showed a likeable president fishing, playing cards, entertaining children in the White House, or in the company of his family. While U.S. foreign policy is hardly discussed in the BIZ, the alleged parallels between Roosevelt and Hitler, the New Deal and Nazi economic policy are among the leitmotifs of the mass-circulation paper. In 1934, for example, the BIZ wrote that Roosevelt was trying to “transform the capitalist economy of North America into a planned economy”; in 1936, it said that the president was on his way to “combine a fragmented economic system into a unified organization.”⁹

Obviously, such a description of the New Deal had the function of justifying one's own economic policy, with the increasingly numerous photo reports from 1937 onward on labor disputes, strikes, and violence between police and demonstrators conveying the (still) unspoken message that the National Socialists were more successful than the Americans in combating economic hardship. The BIZ' turn toward coverage hostile to Roosevelt and American policy begins abruptly in 1939, in accordance with Goebbels' instruction to the press of February 9, 1939: “The tone against Roosevelt cannot be sharp enough.”¹⁰

For Hitler himself, but also for Goebbels, for example, Roosevelt's famous quarantine speech in Chicago on October 5, 1937, seems to have been a turning point. The speech caused a sensation—and not only in the U.S.—because it completely contradicted the spirit of isolationism and impartial neutrality laws. It seemed to announce active U.S. involvement in quarantining the “present reign of terror and international lawlessness.”¹¹ According to the notes of Hitler's aide, Nikolaus

9 Roidl, “Amerikabild der Zwischenkriegszeit,” 7, 19, 33–34, 53–54, 74; the quotation is from p. 75.

10 Frisch, “Das deutsche Rooseveltbild,” 94; Roidl, “Amerikabild der Zwischenkriegszeit,” 76.

11 Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 4, 1937 (New York, 1941), 406–11.

von Below, Hitler took this speech “very seriously.” Hitler was particularly incensed by Roosevelt’s claim that 90 percent of humanity was threatened by 10 percent. This, he declared, was proof that Roosevelt no longer counted the Russians as aggressors. Hitler saw the reason for Roosevelt’s “turnaround,” Below said, in the alarming decline of the American economy and the precipitous increase in unemployment.¹² In Goebbels’ diaries, too, the mood against Roosevelt shifts after the quarantine speech. While the few entries about Roosevelt since 1933 are kept in a tone of neutral condescension,¹³ on October 6, 1937, he writes: “Roosevelt made a mean speech. With hidden attacks against Japan, Italy, and Germany. As stupid as it was underhanded. Great global sensation. We want to place it in the press as small and incidental...”¹⁴

The quarantine speech as a watershed of America’s reception in the National Socialist leadership could also explain why, so far, no negative statements by Hitler about the USA have become known for the period from 1933 to 1936—if one disregards the dubious recollections of an Ernst (“Putzi”) Hanfstaengel or Hermann Rauschning. Especially Rauschning’s alleged conversations with Hitler should no longer be used as a source.¹⁵

A systematic complete overview of the years from 1933–1945 leads to the—possibly also unsurprising—insight that the traditional ambivalence of the German image of America changed little during these years as well. In part, this consisted of repeating judgments and prejudices that had been part of German admiration and criticism of America

12 Nikolaus von Below, *Als Hitlers Adjutant* (Mainz, 1980), 47.

13 The diaries of Josef Goebbels. *Sämtliche Fragmente*. Edited by Elke Fröhlich on behalf of the Institute of Contemporary History and in conjunction with the Federal Archives (Munich, 1987) vol. 2, 1931–1936: 716 (entry of November 5, 1936); vol. 3, 1937–1939: 11 (entry of January 15, 1937), 36 (entry of February 7, 1937), 99 (entry of April 4, 1937), 211 (entry of July 24, 1937).

14 The Diaries of Josef Goebbels, vol. 3, 1937–1939: 291 (entry of October 6, 1937).

15 Ernst Hanfstaengel, *Zwischen Weißem und Braunem Haus. Erinnerungen eines politischen Außenseiters* (Munich, 1970); Hermann Rauschning, *Gespräche mit Hitler* (Zurich, 1940). On the problem of the reliability of Rauschning’s supposed “conversations” with Hitler, see Theodor Schieder, *Hermann Rauschning’s “Conversations with Hitler” as a Historical Source* (Opladen, 1972); Wolfgang Hänel, *Hermann Rauschning’s “Conversations with Hitler”—a Falsification of History* (Ingolstadt, 1984); Martin Broszat, “Enthüllung? The Rauschning Controversy,” in *After Hitler. Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte*, ed. Hermann Graml and Klaus-Dietmar Henke (Munich, 1986) 249–51. Hänel argues convincingly that Rauschning by no means spoke with Hitler a hundred times. He had had only four opportunities for conversation, and none of them were in private.

since the Romantic period¹⁶, and included topoi that had emerged since the Kaiserreich and the Weimar Republic—in the face of the hostility of World War I, the rise of the U.S. as a political, economic, and cultural world power, and the confrontation with “modernity” that the U.S. represented.¹⁷

At the same time, as in all historical processes, there was, in addition to continuity, unique exceptions. The special feature of the National Socialist production of images of America was that a marginal phenomenon of German criticism of America since the end of World War I, namely, the anti-Semitic racist anti-Americanism of the extreme German right, gradually became the dominant factor from 1938/39 onward. The racist component of National Socialist anti-Americanism initially receded completely into the background after the seizure of power for reasons of political expediency, presumably also because of the insignificance of the United States with regard to power-politics. It became an integral part of party and state ideology only at the moment when it became apparent to Hitler that Roosevelt and the so-called “internationalists” were denying the National Socialists a “free hand” to build a racial empire from the Atlantic to the Urals. As a reconstruction of his image of America in the 1920s shows, Hitler

16 Ernst Fraenkel, *Amerika im Spiegel des deutschen politischen Denkens. Äußerungen deutscher Staatsmänner und Staatsdenker über Staat und Gesellschaft in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika* (Cologne and Opladen, 1959); Manfred Henningsen, *Der Fall Amerika: Zur Sozial- und Bewußtseinsgeschichte einer Verdrängung* (Munich, 1974); Günter Moltmann, “Deutscher Anti-Amerikanismus heute und früher,” in *Vom Sinn der Geschichte*, ed. Otmar Franz (Stuttgart, 1976) 85–105; Rob Kroes and Marten van Rossem, eds, *Anti-Americanism in Europe* (Amsterdam, 1986); Hartmut Wasser, “Die Deutschen und Amerika,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, supplement to *Das Parlament*, B 26/76, 3–15; Walter Kühnel, “Towards the Tricentennial of Happy Misunderstandings: Intercultural Studies of America,” *Perceptions and Misperceptions: The United States and Germany*, eds. Lothar Bredella and Dietmar Haack (Tübingen, 1988) 177–202; Hildegard Meyer, *Nordamerika im Urteil des deutschen Schrifttums bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg, 1929).

17 Peter Berg, *Germany and America, 1918–1929* (Lübeck, 1963); Erich Angermann, “Die Auseinandersetzung mit der Moderne in Deutschland und den USA in den ‚Goldenen zwanziger Jahren.‘” *Internationales Jahrbuch für Geschichts- und Geographie-Unterricht* 11 (1967) 76–87; Klaus Schwabe, “Anti-Americanism within the German Right 1917–1933,” *Amerikastudien* 21 (1976): 89–107; Detlef J.K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik. Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne* (Frankfurt/M., 1981) 166–90; Frank Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion. American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919–1933* (Ithaca, 1984) 167–83; Manfred Berg, *Gustav Stresemann and the United States of America. Weltwirtschaftliche Verflechtung und Revisionspolitik 1907–1929* (Baden-Baden, 1990) 231–73.

himself embodied, both traditions, the continuity of ambivalence and anti-Semitic racist anti-Americanism.¹⁸

In the 1920s, Hitler's attitude toward the United States was ambivalent. Alternating between admiration and contempt, between "wonderland" and "madness," Hitler's views never formed a firm or realistic picture of the United States. Hitler's view of the United States was shaped by his ideological dogmatism and surpassed the ideological prejudice of such famous "armchair travelers" as Heinrich Heine, Karl Marx, or Karl May. In his role as an ideologue and programmatic thinker, Hitler declared that the competition of races and peoples for limited living space, based on war and violence, was the eternal law of world history. The fanatical autodidact absorbed only such information as fit his prejudices, so that they could never be questioned.

In addition to these limitations resulting from his dogmatic nature, however, there were also objective obstacles for Hitler to form a realistic picture of the United States. Hitler spoke no English, had never been to an Anglo-Saxon country, and he viewed all democratic tendencies as Jewish, internationalist traditions and crimes against humanity. His worldview was Eurocentric, fixated on the European theater and the power of armies. He never developed even a rudimentary understanding of Anglo-Saxon naval power. Moreover, Hitler hated the water and the sea. In 1928 he wrote that on land, he was a hero; at sea, a coward.¹⁹

18 On Hitler's view of the United States and Franklin D. Roosevelt see James V. Compton, *Hitler and the United States. The American Policy of the Third Reich and the Origins of World War II* (Oldenburg, 1968); Saul Friedländer, *Prelude to Downfall. Hitler and the United States 1939–1941* (Stuttgart, 1965); Joachim Remak, "Hitler's American Policy," *Aussenpolitik* 6 (1955): 706–14; Gerhard L. Weinberg, "Hitler's Image of the United States," *World in the Balance. Behind the Scenes of World War II*, ed. Gerhard L. Weinberg (Hanover, NH, 1981) 53–74; Andreas Hillgruber, "Der Faktor Amerika in Hitlers Strategie 1938–1941," in Andreas Hillgruber, *Deutsche Großmacht- und Weltpolitik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf, 1977) 197–222; *ibid.*, "Hitler and the United States 1933–1945," *Germany and the United States 1890–1985*, Heidelberg American Studies Background Paper no. 2, ed. Detlef Junker (Heidelberg, 1986) 27–41; Gordon A. Craig, "Roosevelt and Hitler: The Problem of Perception," *German Question and European Balance. Festschrift für A. Hillgruber*, ed. Klaus Hildebrand and Reiner Pommerin (Cologne, 1985) 169–94; Robert Edwin Herzstein, *Roosevelt and Hitler. Prelude to War* (New York, 1989); Junker, "Hitler's Perception of Franklin D. Roosevelt"; Frisch, "The German Image of Roosevelt," Gassert, *America*, 87–103.

19 Quoted in Holger H. Herwig, *Politics of Frustration: The United States in German Naval Planning, 1889–1941* (Boston, 1976) 188.

Since Hitler regarded war simultaneously as the normal state of history and as the engine of progress, it is not surprising that war was also central to his thinking in relation to America. The most important theme of Hitler's not very numerous statements about the USA until 1924 are the causes of that country's entry into the First World War; from 1924 until the Great Depression, his assessment of America is dominated by the potential threat to Europe from the USA; he developed little interest in the weak America of the Great Depression and the Neutrality Acts; and from 1938 to 1945, his thinking about America again revolves around the war with the USA.

For America's entry into World War I, Hitler blamed the Jews, the Jewish race, the Jewish press, Jewish-dominated "international loan capital," the "capital and trust democracy." As their puppet, Hitler said, President Woodrow Wilson had driven the American people into war.²⁰ The alleged Jewish conspiracy was clearly the main motive of these early years, with the European platitude about American "materialism" being brought into close connection with the Jews: "The Americans put everything above business, money remains money, even if it is soaked in blood. With the Jew, the purse is the most sacred thing. America would have seized the opportunity with or without a submarine."²¹ It is noteworthy that he did not yet use his knowledge of American immigration laws in these early years to assert a dominance of the Germanic element in American society.²²

Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* and his Second Book from 1924–1930, when the strong economic and cultural presence of the United States in Germany, under the heading of "Americanism," triggered a new discussion about the importance of the United States, even on the far right. Hitler was forced to rethink and clarify his image of America. It is therefore no coincidence that longer passages about the USA only appeared in his *Second Book*.

If one searches *Mein Kampf* for statements about America, one finds that the U.S. plays no role in Hitler's Eurocentric program, nor in his thinking about possible allies for Germany. Agitations against the Dawes Plan do not occur, and the differences between National Socialist ideology and American democracy are either too obvious or too irrelevant to mention. The few mentions of the United States contain

20 Eberhard Jäckel and Axel Kuhn, eds., *Hitler. Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905–1924* (Stuttgart, 1980) 97, 135, 148, 198, 204, 235, 237, 257, 328, 372–73, 890–91.

21 *Ibid.*, 97.

22 *Ibid.*, 96, 717, 908.

expressions of admiration. Hitler believed that the Germanic race dominated America, thanks to a skillful racial and immigration policy, but was perpetually threatened by the Jewish bacillus. For Hitler, the United States was the model of a state organized on the principles of race and space. Because of the favorable ratio of population to space—the decisive criterion in Hitler’s ideology—the United States was the archetype of a world power, destined to replace the British Empire.²³

In his *Second Book*, these assumptions come even more to the fore. The U.S. appears here as the prototype of a world power characterized by sufficient living space, a proper racial policy, a large domestic market, high living standards, exceptional productivity, technical progress, mobility, and mass production.²⁴

One of the younger scholars who has studied Hitler, Rainer Zitelmann, has even hypothesized that Hitler’s goal was not an anti-modernist agrarian utopia but an American-style industrial society. Hitler may have despised American culture and society, Zitelmann writes, but he was fascinated by U.S. economic and technological development.²⁵ Jeffrey Herf has probably struck at the heart of the problem of linking Hitler’s fascination with American productivity and technology to the German tradition of “reactionary modernism”—a peculiar balancing of the irrational anti-Semitism of the “völkisch” tradition of the German right with modern technology—when he writes: “I have tried to show that the paradoxical combination of irrationalism and technics was fundamental to Hitler’s ideology and practices and to National Socialism ... Fulfillment of Nazi ideology and industrial advance reinforced one another until the former brought about the destruction and self-destruction of German society.”²⁶

However, the United States is presented in the *Second Book* not only as a prototype of a world power and a model for the National Socialist organization of living space, but also as a danger and challenge to Europe and Germany. Hitler criticized the incredible naiveté of bourgeois nationalists who believed that such a challenge could be met within the framework of an open world economy and free world

23 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (16th ed.; Munich, 1932) 1: 313–14, 2: 490, 2: 721–23.

24 Adolf Hitler, *Hitler’s Second Book. A Document from 1928*. Introduced and commented on by Gerhard L. Weinberg (Stuttgart, 1961) 120–32.

25 Rainer Zitelmann, *Hitler. Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs* (Hamburg, 1987) 320–24; see also Peter Krüger, “Zu Hitlers ‚nationalsozialistischen Wirtschafts-erkenntnissen,“ *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 6 (1980): 263–82.

26 Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984) 222. See also Gassert, *Amerika*, 12 ff.

trade. He also attacked the pan-European movement of his time, which was under the illusion that American hegemony could be countered by the formation of a United States of Europe. For him, the conflict with the United States was inevitable—a peaceful coexistence of rival states did not figure in his worldview—and could be effectively waged only by a thoroughly rejuvenated Europe under German leadership. Only a united Europe would be able to hold its own against North America. The task of the National Socialist movement was to prepare the Fatherland with its entire potential for this task.²⁷

The transformation of his image of America, astonishing at first glance but consistent within the framework of Hitler's racist worldview, lay in the realization, new to him, that the menacingly strong USA had risen to become a world power because it had retained a high racial value through a consistent immigration policy; in contrast, for example, to Russia, which for Hitler was incapable of becoming a world power because of its racial mixture and alleged domination by the Jews, although it could compete with the USA in terms of living space and population size.²⁸ While Hitler's overall judgment was shaped by the stereotypes of the German extreme right,²⁹ in 1928 he belonged to the faction that justified America's imperialism³⁰ not by the success of the Jews but by the victory of the Germanic, Anglo-Saxon elite in the intra-American power struggle.³¹ The anti-Semitic leitmotif did not return to Hitler until the next war with the USA became apparent.

The loss of importance of the U.S. during the Great Depression, foreign policy isolationism, and American neutrality laws, official benevolence toward the New Deal, and the mindset of "reactionary modernism" led to the toleration of a journalistic freedom by the National Socialists that made it possible for the ambivalent image of America prevalent in the Weimar Republic to persist during the peacetime years of 1933–1939. The United States was present in the everyday life of the Third Reich in a variety of ways. The National Socialists obviously saw no reason to change this as long as the racial dogma was not touched. The debate about the U.S. as a symbol of modernity, about "Americanism" evaluated positively or negatively, continued, albeit with diminished intensity. The old leitmotifs of the perception

27 Hitler, *Hitler's Second Book*, 122, 130.

28 Ibid, 128–32.

29 Klaus Schwabe, "Anti-Americanism," 96 ff.

30 See Otto Bonhard, *Jüdische Weltherrschaft?* (Berlin, 1928).

31 See Alexander Graf Brockdorff, *American World Domination?* (Berlin, 1929).

of America from the Weimar Republic, such as technology, rationality, and productivity, the media and commodity world of America, mass consumption, mass entertainment and the leisure industry, sports, and the cult of the body, did not disappear from published opinion. Nor did the traditional stereotypes of cultural criticism, such as accusations of materialism and culturelessness, continue to apply. This plurality and ambivalence in the production of images of America did not change until the start of the war, when propaganda directed hate campaigns against the United States and only negative images of America were allowed to be published.

Systematic research on “Americanism” during the peacetime years of the Third Reich is still in its infancy. So far, there are only a few individual studies, on the results of which the following remarks are based.³²

The ambivalent relationship of the Nazi dictatorship to the United States is a mirror of its ambivalent relationship to modernity. The National Socialists were not luddites, but they claimed to establish the true synthesis of technology and “spirit.” Their fascination with technology, production, rationalization, automation, and mass consumption not only attracted Hitler’s gaze to the United States; their rebellion against the Enlightenment and “soulless” modernity of the West, as well as their claim to marry technology and production with “Aryan-German spirit,” with “German soul,” “German blood,” “völkisch

32 See especially the works of Gassert, *America*, 148–82, and Hans Dieter Schäfer, *Das gespaltene Bewußtsein. Deutsche Kultur und Lebenswirklichkeit 1933–1945* (3rd ed.; Munich, 1983) 114–46; idem, “Amerikanismus im Dritten Reich,” *Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung*, eds. Michael Prinz and Rainer Zitelmann (Darmstadt, 1991) 199–215; “Bekenntnisse zur Neuen Welt. USA-Kult vor dem 2. Weltkrieg,” Deutscher Werkbund e.V. and Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, eds, *Shock and Creation. Jugendästhetik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt, 1986) 383–88. On the specific problem of jazz and swing, see Michael H. Kater, “Forbidden Fruit: Jazz and the Third Reich” *American Historical Review* 94 (1989): 11–43; idem, *Different Drummers. Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 1992); Horst H. Lange, “Jazz: an Oasis of Desire,” *Shock and Creation*, 320–323; idem, *Jazz in Germany. Die deutsche Jazz-Chronik 1900–1960* (Berlin, 1966); Thorsten Müller, “Furcht vor der SS im Alsterpavillon,” *Shock and Creation*, 324–25. See also Roidl, “Amerikabilid der Zwischenkriegszeit,” passim; Christian H. Freitag, “Die Entwicklung der Amerikastudien in Berlin bis 1945” (diss., Free University of Berlin, 1977) 131–244; and the Marxist interpretation of Wolfgang Röll, “Die USA – das entartete Europa. Zu einigen ideologischen Komponenten des ‚Amerikabilides‘ des deutschen Faschismus 1933–1945,” *Jenaer Beiträge zur Parteigeschichte* 47 (November 1984): 70–88.

aesthetics,” and the National Socialist special relationship to Providence,³³ drove them at the same time into the traditional patterns of America criticism.

Nor were the National Socialists anti-capitalists or socialists of the Marxian type. But capital was to be withdrawn from “international Jewry” and the “plutocrats”; was to be nationalized—not socialized—; was to serve the development of a war industry and a self-sufficient large economic area of Europe; and, at the same time, was to help satisfy the consumer needs of the “Volksgemeinschaft.” While they admired the ability of the large American market to produce consumer goods for the masses, by no means demonizing the ideas of competition and rivalry, the decoupling from the world market established an economic and trade policy opposition to the USA.³⁴ Moreover, Hitler and the National Socialists always defended the primacy of war and the military over the constraints of the market and the needs of a bourgeois acquisitive society. Hitler was a warrior, not a merchant: “The very ultimate decision on the outcome of the struggle for the world market will lie with force and not with the economy itself ... For finally the economy, as a purely secondary matter in the life of nations, is bound to the primary existence of a powerful state. Before the plow must stand the sword, and before the economy an army.”³⁵

Although the Nazi state gradually usurped powers of control over the economy after 1933, and the Four-Year Plan of 1936 had the task of preparing for war in peace, a private-sector, largely nonpartisan space of competition survived; a market in which American corporations remained visible and American products and American culture remained consumable by Germans. Subsidiaries of American companies continued to have a presence in the German market. They did not hesitate to participate in German rearmament. Opel (General Motors) had a 50 percent share of the German car market in 1935 and by 1939 was the largest producer of tanks in Germany, along with Ford.³⁶ It is unknown what images of America existed in the minds of Opel and

33 Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, 189–216.

34 See Detlef Junker in: *Der unteilbare Weltmarkt. Das ökonomische Interesse in der Außenpolitik der USA 1933–1941* (Stuttgart, 1975) 93–116.

35 Hitler, *Hitler's Second Book*, 123–24.

36 Junker, *Der unteilbare Weltmarkt*, 103; Gabriel Kolko, “American Business and Germany, 1930–1941,” *Western Political Quarterly* 15 (1962): 713–28; Gerhart Hass, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor. Zur Geschichte der deutsch-amerikanischen Beziehungen 1938–1941* (Berlin-Ost, 1965) 52–63. On the Ford companies, see also Johannes Reiling, *Germany: Safe for Democracy?* (Stuttgart, 1997).

Ford employees; how they reacted when Ford pledged in 1938 to produce only with “German workers and German materials,”³⁷ whether Berliners even thought of Ford as an American company when they walked past Berlin’s Europahaus and gazed at two fifty-meter-long neon banners from the Ford plant. Analogous problems apply to the Coca-Cola corporation, which expanded rapidly during the Third Reich, was present at major sporting events, and not just from the walls of the Sports Palace, where Goebbels gave his speech, urged Germans to drink “Coca-Cola ice cold.”³⁸

The car enthusiasm, indeed the car cult of the 1930s, was also partly based on the U.S. model. The German Automobile Club organized its trade journal *Motorwelt* along American lines. Hitler himself had already been impressed by motorization in the U.S. and especially by Henry Ford in the 1920s. After seizing power, he pushed Germany’s motorization and highway construction. When he called on manufacturers to produce inexpensive cars at the opening of the International Motor Show in 1936, he declared that the German people had the same needs as the American people.³⁹ As late as September 1941, during the undeclared naval war in the Atlantic, Hitler asserted, “Undemandingness is the enemy of progress. In this we resemble the Americans, that we are exacting.”⁴⁰ Included in these demands were the raising of the standard of living for the mass of “Volksgenossen” and the production of durable consumer goods based on the U.S. model: Electric stoves, electric refrigerators, electric coffee makers, grills, radios, caravans, and tents. Production of these goods began in Germany in parallel with the armaments boom. When the Blaupunkt company launched an overseas receiver in 1937 for the “spoiled critical listener,” it advertised with the New York Statue of Liberty and the promise of “pleasurable reception from the ‘New World.’”⁴¹

Other evidence also suggests that Americans were among the Germans’ “favorite foreigners” before World War II. Promoted by the shipping lines, there was a remarkable amount of travel activity by tourists, professional associations, and National Socialist organizations

37 Ford Almanac (Cologne, 1938) 6; “Ford Works in Germany,” in: *Motor-Kritik* 15 (1935): 711, quoted in Schäfer, “Amerikanismus im Dritten Reich,” 207.

38 Ibid, 205; Schäfer, *Das gespaltene Bewußtsein*, 118. 39 *ibid.*, 119.

39 Ibid, 119.

40 Adolf Hitler, *Monologues at the Führer’s Headquarters 1941–44*, ed. Werner Jochmann (Hamburg 1980).

41 Illustration in Schäfer, *Das gespaltene Bewußtsein*, Annex. 42.

to the United States, especially in the years from 1936 to 1939. In addition to traditional tourist destinations, Germans studied American automobile factories, department stores, and prisons. They surveyed American road construction and American crime fighting methods. German tourism to the U.S. was supported by new travel books—also yet to be researched—that produced images of America.⁴² The “Carl Schurz Association,” which came under the control of the Ministry of Propaganda in 1933, organized trips to the United States for professors, pupils, and students.⁴³

Even the import of popular American culture, which had reached an initial peak in the mid-1920s, was channeled, not stopped by the Nazis during the peacetime years, because the regime tolerated the private-sector dynamic within limits. Hollywood film, as well as jazz and swing, were popular, and their toleration increased approval of the system. The means of prohibition and censorship were generally used only when racial dogma was involved. Attempts to counteract the “Americanism” of popular culture through writing and words, for example, to dismiss American film as superficial, trivial, vulgar, lacking in culture and art, remained half-hearted and probably also unsuccessful.

Despite import restrictions and foreign exchange controls, the imported films from Hollywood exceeded the success of all German pre-war productions. The American films ran in the big cities for up to four months, and in the cities it was also possible to see a Hollywood film in the original version or dubbed every week until 1940. The Hollywood stars belonged as a matter of course to the star cult of the 1930s, which was promoted at special film weeks or in magazines.⁴⁴ They included Clark Gable, Robert Taylor, Joan Crawford, Vivien Leigh, Shirley Temple, Katherine Hepburn, Fred Astaire, and Ginger Rogers, but above all Greta Garbo and ... Marlene Dietrich, although in 1935 a press campaign was staged against her. The Germans’ imagination was ignited more by the erotic charisma of the dangerous “vamp” than by the homespun charm of a Paula Wessely or Marianne Hoppe.⁴⁵

Among the best researched areas of popular U.S. culture during the Third Reich are jazz and its polished and tamed variant, swing.⁴⁶ Jazz and swing were frowned upon as “nigger and Jew music” according to

42 Ibid, 206.

43 Friday, “Development of American Studies,” 149–57.

44 Roidl, “Images of America in the Interwar Period,” 113–18.

45 Schäfer, *The Split Consciousness*, 128–33.

46 See footnote 32, the works of Kater, Lange, Schäfer, and Müller.

the National Socialist worldview; they were considered undesirable, but a general ban on this music was not imposed during the peacetime years. From 1935 there was a ban on broadcasting jazz on the radio, and it was not until the outbreak of war in 1939 that “English music” was first banned, and from the end of 1941 “American” music as well. In reality, however, during the peacetime years, and in a considerably more limited way during the war years as well, the maxim of the fans applied: “Jazz is where you find it.” Anyone who wanted to was able to buy jazz records in Germany’s cities; both imported original records from the USA and German products. Privately or in “hot clubs” and “jazz clubs,” jazz fans enjoyed the big names: Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Louis Armstrong, Gene Krupa, Wingy Manone, Jimmie Lunceford, Count Basie, Nat Gonella, Harry Roy, Bert Ambrose, also the first records by Glenn Miller and Harry James. The jazz fans, usually from the educated middle classes, set themselves apart from the somewhat more ordinary “swing hunks,” who danced (“hotten”) with passion to jazz and swing music, occasionally greeted each other with “Swing Heil,” and so displeased the National Socialists that on October 11, 1938, “swing dancing” was banned. Nevertheless, people continued to dance, and swing music also continued to be produced and heard under imaginative camouflage.

The followers of jazz and swing formed loose groups that demonstrated nonconformist behavior without offering political resistance. It was an indirect protest against the intellectual-cultural *Gleichschaltung*; an opposition through lifestyle. These groups were increasingly observed by the Gestapo after the start of the war and their basic Anglophile tendencies were considered “subversive.” In January 1942, Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler ordered ringleaders of the Hamburg Swing Youth to be committed to a concentration camp for two to three years, to be beaten up, and to be put to forced labor.⁴⁷

While much remains to be done in the difficult study of the ambivalent “Americanism” in the Third Reich, the stereotypes of enemy propaganda in World War II are well known.⁴⁸ A problem that is difficult

47 Müller, “Fear of the SS in the Alster Pavilion,” 324.

48 See especially the excellent contribution by Günter Moltmann, “Nationalklischees und Demagogie” in: Detlef Junker (ed.), *Kampf um die Weltmacht*, 157–64; Willi A. Boelcke, *Die Macht des Radios. Weltgeschichte und Auslandsrundfunk 1924–1976* (Frankfurt/M., 1977) 379–89; Peter Longerich, *Propagandisten im Krieg. Die Presseabteilung des Auswärtigen Amtes unter Ribbentrop* (Munich, 1987) 81–85; Karl-Dietrich Abel, *Presselenkung im NS-Staat* (Berlin, 1968) 132–33; *Kriegspropaganda*

to overcome in terms of research methodology, however, is answering the question of how successful Nazi propaganda was in World War II and what Germans actually thought and felt about America. There is some evidence that propaganda received a great response only during the terror bombardment of Allied air raids, but otherwise remained limited in its impact.⁴⁹ Anyone who reads the tirades of Hitler and Goebbels, especially in non-public speech and diary entries, might conclude that the Nazi leadership became a victim of its own propaganda through autosuggestion.

Almost all negative images of enemy propaganda were leitmotifs of Hitler's public and non-public statements about the USA and Roosevelt from the quarantine speech to the declaration of war on December 11, 1941.⁵⁰ Only the stereotype of American lack of culture became more prominent after the U.S. entry into the war.

The overriding theme of propaganda against the U.S. was Hitler's basic conviction that Roosevelt was not acting independently but as an agent of international Jewry, of Jewish capitalism, of the Jewish world conspiracy that encompassed the U.S., England, and the Soviet Union, and had driven the American people into war against Germany. When Hitler confronted Goebbels on May 3, 1943, demanding "more powerful anti-Semitic propaganda," he seems to have been satisfied with Goebbels' response that anti-Semitic propaganda accounted for 70 to 80 percent of foreign broadcasts anyway.⁵¹ During World War II, Hitler returned to the conception of America from his early years: his interpretation of the American entry into World War I and of Woodrow Wilson's motives.

This anti-Semitism runs like a thread through all his public and private statements from 1937 to his so-called "political testament" of 1945. It is well known,⁵² that in Hitler's dogmatic, Manichaeic teleology, the element of complete negation, the satanic, and evil itself is embodied by the Jews, since they—a people, without a "living space" for 2000 years—threatened the course of history. As Hitler saw his own vocation as leader of the Germanic race and of the German people in the decisive battle against the Jews in the context of world history, any nation that denied him this claim to power, any politician who

1939–1941. *Geheime Ministerkonferenzen im Reichspropagandaministerium*, edited and introduced by Willi A. Boelcke (Stuttgart, 1966) 693–94, 703–704.

49 Moltmann, "National Clichés and Demagogy," 236–38.

50 Junker, "Hitler's Perception," 151–55.

51 Boelcke, *The Power of Radio*, 384.

52 See Junker, *Kampf um die Weltmacht*, 39–42.

opposed him, was ipso facto an agent of “international Jewry.” The fact that the United States was pursuing anti-German policies was obvious proof to Hitler that the Germanic element in the United States had been poisoned and corrupted by the Jews. To support this statement, a few sentences from his December 11 war speech will suffice: it must be borne in mind, Hitler said, “that it is the intention of the Jews and their Franklin Roosevelt to destroy one state after another. We know what force is behind Roosevelt. It is that eternal Jew who considers his time has come to carry out also on us what we, shuddering, all had to see and experience in Soviet Russia.”⁵³

Goebbels’ diaries are also full of hate speech against Roosevelt, whom he calls a “Jew’s servant and a slave of capital democracy” and the “evil spirit of American politics.”⁵⁴ In his war speech, Hitler calls Roosevelt a hypocrite, a faker, and a warmonger. He continues: “That he calls me a gangster is all the more indifferent since this term probably originated not in Europe but in the USA for lack of such subjects. But apart from that, I cannot be offended at all by Mr. Roosevelt, for I consider him, as Woodrow Wilson once did, to be insane as well.”⁵⁵

Hitler’s negative, hateful perception of Roosevelt, especially his characterization of the American president as a puppet of Jewish capitalism, allowed him to answer a question he had posed to himself and to the German people in his war speech: Why had Roosevelt, like Wilson before him, become a fanatical enemy of Germany? Even on the day Hitler declared war on the United States, he repeated his view that there was no real conflict of interests between the United States and Germany. Germany was the only great power, Hitler said, that had never possessed colonies in North or South America, the United States had only benefited from the millions of German immigrants, and Germany had never taken a hostile attitude toward the United States. Regarding the outbreak of World War I, Hitler drew attention to the

53 Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen* 1804, 1807–808; see Hitler’s speech on January 30, 1939, in Detlef Junker et al, *Deutsche Parlamentsdebatten*, vol. 2, 1919–1933 (Frankfurt/M., 1970–1971) 288–95. Hitler reacted similarly to the Lend-Lease Act. See Hildegard von Kotze, ed., *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler 1938–1943. Aufzeichnungen des Major Engel* (Stuttgart, 1974) 99.

54 Entries of June 22 and August 23, 1940. See entries of November 18, 20, 24, 1938; December 17, 1938; January 24, 1939; November 12, 1939; June 17, 1940; September 5, 1940; October 8, 1940; February 1, 1941; March 17, 1941; April 27, 1941; June 8, 1941, in Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1924–1945*, vol. 3 and 4, ed. Ralf Georg Reuth (Munich, 1992).

55 Domarus, *Hitler. Speeches and Proclamations*, 1807.

findings of the Nye Committee that economic interests had prompted U.S. entry into the war. Nor, he said, were there any territorial or political conflicts that threatened U.S. interests, let alone existence. There were differences in the structure of the respective states, but this was, according to Hitler, not yet a reason for hostility as long as a state did not attempt to move outside its natural sphere of influence.⁵⁶

If one compares Hitler's remarks about Roosevelt and the United States in the period from 1937 to 1941 with his monologues at the Fuehrer's headquarters from 1941 to 1944 and the astonishingly detailed remarks about the United States in his political will of 1945, one finds that there were no changes or developments in his thinking in the years from 1941 to 1945. Only his hatred of Roosevelt grew: when the president was mentioned, it was always as a lunatic, a criminal, or a stooge of the Jews. But criticism of American culture and the "American way of life" also came more to the fore. A remark by Hitler on January 7, 1942, is particularly revealing: "Ancient Rome was a colossal serious state. It was great ideas that animated the Romans. It is not so in England today. Nevertheless, I prefer an Englishman a thousand times more than an American. We have no internal relations with the Japanese. They are too foreign to us in culture and way of life. But I have a hatred and aversion of the deepest kind against Americanism. Every European state is closer to us. America, in its whole spiritual attitude, is a half-Jewish and negro society."⁵⁷ On February 24, 1945, Hitler revisited the central idea of his war speech, while holding fast to his racist worldview and anti-Semitic obsessions. The war with America, Hitler dictated for posterity, was a tragic concatenation of circumstances, senseless and against all logic. An unfortunate historical coincidence would have it that his rise to power coincided with the moment when "the chosen one of world Jewry, Roosevelt, took the helm in the White House." For Hitler, the war was pointless because "Germany makes no demand on the United States and the latter has not the least to fear from Germany. All the conditions for peaceful coexistence, each to his own, are present. But everything is spoiled

⁵⁶ Ibid, 1801–802.

⁵⁷ Hitler, *Monologues*, 184. A documentation of Hitler's most important statements about Roosevelt and the United States from 1942 to 1945 in Junker, *Kampf um die Weltmacht*, 157–64.

by the Jew, who has chosen the United States as his most powerful bulwark. This and only this disturbs and poisons everything.”⁵⁸

Grouped around this anti-Semitism were the three other major topoi of World War II propaganda against America. First, Roosevelt’s foreign policy was a domestically motivated flight to war, a way out of Roosevelt’s inability to get the unemployed off the streets and stop the decline of the American economy. Newsreels and films showed labor struggles, police action against protesters, slums, and pauperization to demonstrate the decline of the American economy. Of course, the Germans learned nothing of the achievements of the American war economy. Second, Roosevelt was an arrogant hypocrite who preached peace but serially violated international law, falsely accused the German people of striving for world domination, while he was bringing the British Empire under control and wanted to impose American world domination himself. Thirdly, Goebbels deliberately instrumentalized what were probably the oldest German and European stereotypes about the USA: America was a country without culture and far inferior to Europe; a country of materialism, egalitarianism, superficial lifestyle, tinsel-culture, and sham civilization, dominated by gangsters, old, degenerate and morally bankrupt.

However, Goebbels was dissatisfied with the results of this propaganda in the last days of the Third Reich. While propaganda against the Bolsheviks had helped stabilize the front in the East, it had failed to harden the German people against the Anglo-Americans and fill them with hatred. In his diary on March 31, 1945, Goebbels attributed the lack of defensive readiness in the West and the fact that so many German soldiers surrendered in the West to the fact “that the Anglo-Americans are considered more humane by the German people than the Soviets.”⁵⁹ However ambivalent the Germans may have been toward the United States in the years since 1933 and at the end of the war, in 1944/45, for the second time in this century, the hopes of many Germans rested on the United States, whose campaign in Germany was at the same time the beginning of a moral conquest.⁶⁰

58 *Hitler’s Political Testament. The Bormann Dictates of February and April 1945*. With an essay by Hugh R. Trevor-Roper and an afterword by Andre Francois-Poncet (Hamburg, 1981) 103 ff.

59 *The Diaries of Joseph Goebbels*, 5: 2180–81.

60 Klaus-Dietmar Henke, *The American Occupation of Germany* (Munich, 1995).

