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Power in Portrayal:
An Exploration of the Evolving Cold War Relationship Between Germany and America through
Film

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in History

by
Kaleb Wentz
December 2022

Dr. Stephen G. Fritz, Chair
Dr. Henry Antkiewicz
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Keywords: Cold War, Germany, denazification, film review, foreign policy

ABSTRACT

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An Exploration of the Evolving Cold War Relationship Between Germany and America through

Film

by

Kaleb Wentz

The end of the Second World War brought many questions to the United States. One of the greatest among these was what to do with defeated Germany. Many clamored for the dissolution of the former Nazi State and the shameful humbling of its people while others recognized the value of a revitalized Germany as an ally against the looming threat of an emboldened and empowered postwar Soviet Union. Though retribution held sway immediately following the war, the Cold War consensus of an alliance with West Germany and a reimagining of the German people as victims rather than perpetrators won out as the years progressed. This work examines this evolving shift in perception by the United States and its people and how it can be tracked through several prominent films of the day.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	6
CHAPTER 2. RETRIBUTION AND REVENGE.....	15
CHAPTER 3. A NEW UNDERSTANDING.....	34
CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION.....	58
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	63
VITA.....	66

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Following the end of the Second World War, one could be forgiven for assuming the United States and the nation of Germany would be forever ensconced in their roles as adversaries and that the larger international community would write off Germany as a lost cause after placing the blame upon them – however questionably – for fomenting two world wars within the span of less than half a century. These two conflicts still stand today as the two bloodiest struggles our world has ever seen, yet in the years following the cessation of the Second World War, we quickly begin to see not only Germany being ingratiated back into America’s good standing and that of the larger world order but being lauded and praised as one of the staunchest outposts and allies of freedom in the global struggle to ensure its survival against the Red Menace. What brought about this stark and frankly startling turnaround? The redemption of Germany stems from a combination of two major factors – the recognition of German transgressions as not a distinctly German problem but rather a manifestation of totalitarian ideals in modern society and the necessity of building Germany into a viable ally for the looming Cold War with the Soviet Union who now bore the mantle of totalitarian opposition to democracy. The postwar years chronicle a remarkable shift in recontextualizing the Germans in the American consciousness. They began as deplorable villains worthy of blame for the horrors of the war and the atrocities committed but end up a few years later as victims in need of rehabilitation and valued allies to the cause of freedom and Western ideals. This change of opinion and perspective can be witnessed in the cultural products of the time and the political actions taken and decision made by the leaders of the day.

Fundamental to understanding this change in discourse is a basic understanding of the term totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is officially defined as a “form of government that

theoretically permits no individual freedom and that seeks to subordinate all aspects of individual life to the authority of the state.”¹ Though originally coined by Mussolini in Italy, the term had become synonymous by the start of the war with the sort of single-party, iron-fisted rule that began to cause trouble across the European and Asian continents. So too, as we shall see, the term played a central role in America’s understanding of the postwar landscape. Americans used the concept of totalitarianism to help make sense of the actions of Germany, the Soviet Union, and the way in which our relationship with both of these countries evolved and reversed in a relatively short time frame, geopolitically speaking. Totalitarianism represented the complete dominance of the state over all aspects of the life of its citizens, robbing them of their individuality, freedom, and decision making. In short, it was the antithesis of what the United States stood for.

Also key to understanding the study of this paper is a basic understanding of memory studies. The main focus of this paper is on the shifting nature of the portrayal of Germans in films during the Cold War. This changing and evolving depiction was both a reflection of the current understanding of German identity at the times of these film premieres and an active effort to shape and mold American memory of Germany. In order to change the German people into a population worth supporting, there had to be a collective effort to change the memory or understanding of America’s relationship with them. Something had to necessitate the change from antagonist to benefactor. The methodology of memory is quite extensive for such a recent field of study. Maurice Halbwachs was the progenitor of what we know as memory studies today.² His seminal work *On Collective Memory* argued that memory could only be understood

¹ “Totalitarianism,” *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed February 28, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/totalitarianism>.

² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.).

in the terms of a collective context. This collective context gave shape to the person and his perspectives, and therefore the shape of his memory framework itself. Different groups of people form unique, select collective memories originating from their shared experiences, perspectives, and behaviors. This collective memory, in turn, then shapes how their present is understood and acted upon. People act based on their and their peers' understanding of the past. This collective present then helps further cement the shared communal experience of the group, a self-fulfilling cycle. This work, published in 1925, has established the dominant framework for understanding and interpreting memory in historical studies. Frederick Bartlett continued the conversation on memory studies in 1932, showing that memory was an adaptable, fluid act that each member might shift to fit their understanding of reality. When individuals remember, they do so in accordance with certain schemes. This schema theory postulates that individuals may replace or change unfamiliar elements of their recollections with the more familiar. Memory is not an infallible chronicle of the past; it is, instead, an amorphous account by which the individual interprets the past through the lens of the present. This aligns with Halbwachs's theory of collective or social memory, showing that both individual and collective memories need not align entirely with the facts of history. Rather, they exist as a method to understand the past to align with and support the present. As the present changes, so too can memories.

In this regard, memory is then intrinsically tied to identity. This paper deals with the social aspect of memory rather than the individual. Namely, I am concerned with how America's collective memory of the Second World War and its participants changed as its identity and role on the world stage changed as well. To this end, modern scholars such as John Bodnar have commented on the existence of different narratives put forth by different sections of the populace and the government. Rather than an entire hegemonic memory for a nation state, he emphasizes

competing narratives put forth by the government, special interest groups and lobbies, and powerful, influential individuals and their followers. Marita Sturken argues that official history and memory are inextricably linked together, one affecting the other.³ Carol Gluck draws attention to the role that memory activists play in the formation and adaptation of memory. She classifies these activists as individuals or organizations that push and spin narratives to change the national conversation and memory formation to fit their desires and needs.⁴

John Bodnar brings these ideas together in his work *The Good War in American Memory*.⁵ In it, he outlines competing narratives of memory following the conclusion of the Second World War that vied for control of how the greatest conflict to date would be remembered. Controlling the way in which the nation remembered the Good War would dictate how the nation moved on from it. This narrative in effect would help shape public attitudes and opinion and official governmental policies concerning both domestic and foreign affairs. Here we see Sturken's concept of official history and memory entangling with each other as those forming how the war was remembered actively held the power to shape policy. Bodnar describes the World War Narrative which held on to the ideals and alliances of the previous conflict – particularly the vilification of Germany – versus the Cold War Narrative which sought to reevaluate global dynamics in light of the brewing conflict with Russia and incorporate Germany (or at least Western Germany) into the fold of the western powers. He incorporates Gluck's memory activists as well, showing how everyone from government officials and departments,

³ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁴ Carol Gluck, "Operations of Memory: 'Comfort Women' and the World," in *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, ed. Sheila Miyoski Jager and Rana Mitter (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁵ John E. Bodnar, *The "Good War" in American Memory*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

Hollywood film companies and directors, to special interest groups at the public level engaged in this debate for the post-war image.

Alison Landsberg brings this concept of memory studies into the digital mass media age by morphing collective memory into what she calls prosthetic memory.⁶ Modern technology, with its ability to disseminate information at large regardless of location or ethnicity, allows memory to divorce itself from national boundaries and communal and ethnic boundaries. Essentially, she argues that prosthetic memory allows other cultures or groups to experience and incorporate memories that traditionally would not be considered theirs. She gives the example of Holocaust memory and its impact belonging not only to the Jews or the Germans but to other outside nations as well, citing the United States' multiple and prominent memorials to the horrific genocide. Brian Etheridge takes this concept of prosthetic memory and ties it back to the study of the Second World War-Cold War transition in his work *Enemies to Allies: Cold War Germany and American Memory*.⁷ Etheridge claims that memory activists in both the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany successfully championed the Cold War Narrative of German reintegration as a western ally by employing prosthetic memories of German wartime hardships to garner sympathy from the American people. I continue this discussion in this paper by examining the shift in American opinion concerning German postwar identity and with it, in turn, America's identity in the new global dynamic.

The fact that America even involved itself in German occupation and rehabilitation efforts is in itself a remarkable change from initial expectations. Before we reach the discussion of Germany's rehabilitation, however, some important historical context concerning America

⁶ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁷ Brian C. Etheridge, *Enemies to Allies: Cold War Germany and American Memory* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016).

and its relationship with Germany and the world at large is necessary. America had long practiced a status quo in terms of foreign policy – isolationism. At the genesis of the country even, George Washington advised his cabinet and the nation at large to avoid getting involved in the affairs of the larger, more established European nations and the world beyond them. His farewell address advised the fledgling nation to mind itself and not overextend by reaching into outside conflicts, specifically those concerning the ever-warring clans of the European continent. The biggest departure from this strategy, of course, was the first World War which saw the United States really flex its muscles on the global stage for the first time. This global conflict saw the newly developing superpower stretch its influence – both physically and politically – across the globe unlike ever before.

However, in the roughly decade-and-a-half interim between the two World Wars, America reverted back to its old, familiar foreign policy – the policy of minding their own business. Isolationism once again took center stage. The U.S. had tasted the bitter throes of international, modern combat, and, despite its loss in the First World War being relatively minor compared to that of the European nations, it had had its fill. Even as the warning klaxons of oppressive regimes across the sea began to be heard by American policy and cultural decision makers, their cries for preemptive actions were met with criticism, struck down by the safety and security which isolationism and non-interventionism seemed to offer a people hesitant if not outright opposed to joining in another global bath of bloodshed. One of the greatest examples of this can be seen in President Roosevelt’s “Quarantine Speech” in 1937 given only a few short years before the nation would indeed become embroiled in the larger conflict. In this speech, the then President cited the growing oppressive regimes in the world and though none were directly named, he was understood to be referring to the soon to be Axis Powers of Germany, Italy, and

Japan. He cautioned that the American people should also share this concern and that action must be taken sooner rather than later. He referred to the regimes with language that labeled them as diseases infecting their populaces. These diseases must be contained. The nations that fostered them must be quarantined from the rest of the civilized world and encouraged to recant their perverted ideologies before they could be grafted back into the world at large. Roosevelt and those that shared his viewpoint called this the disease of totalitarianism, an antithetical opposite of freedom and democracy, an opposite that must be opposed before it threatened our very way of life.

Roosevelt's timing, however, was unfortunate. The bulk of the American people at the time were far more invested in staying out of brewing conflicts than standing up for the principles of freedom. The President's speech was shouted down and widely criticized by his opponents who thought that Europe should handle its own problems while America stayed out of it. After the war, however, Roosevelt's warnings would look quite apt in hindsight, especially in comparison to the appeasement strategies of Chamberlain and others which had failed so miserably to stem the tide of aggression that led to the Second World War. Roosevelt recognized early on that the disease of totalitarianism was antithetical to western ideals, an idea that would take prominent hold in American foreign policy only a decade later, but the American public was not ready to hear that.

Soon, however, the infamous day of Pearl Harbor and the subsequent declarations of war on the Axis Powers would draw America directly into the fray. Roosevelt's warnings would ring loud and true as the full force of the domestic industry and cultural machines began to outfit the people for war. In this paper, we will examine changing and evolving perception of and relation with Germany and its people during the conflict and in its aftermath. The Germany portrayed

during the Cold War is nearly unrecognizable from the Germany at the start of the Second World War. This change took place in one of the most crucial moments in our history as a nation. With the victory in the greatest conflict ever just secured and the Cold War just materializing on the horizon, the United States found itself on a greater stage than ever before in this new world. Following the victory over the Axis powers, the USA stood as the preeminent power in the Western world. As such, the responsibility of shepherding the future of Western values and civilization fell on its shoulders. This position not only afforded the nation with more power and prestige than it had ever enjoyed but with an opportunity to define for itself a new identity as leader of the free world. Its relationship with and actions concerning Germany would play a major role in this process. As Brian C. Etheridge claims, Germany had played a key role in America's quest of self-discovery and identity politics throughout their shared history by occupying the role of the "other" by which the United States could compare and contrast itself. Speaking of the two nations' historical relationship, he writes:

From the first waves of German settlement in British North America in the late seventeenth century to the Allied Invasion of Germany almost 350 years later, narratives about Germans, Germany, and Germanness (*Deutschtum*) played a crucial role in the formation and evaluation of American identity. More specifically, Germans often functioned as the "other," a people upon whom Anglos and later Americans projected both their fears and their ambitions.⁸

Here again, Germany was placed in an opportune position for America to define its new position and place in the world order. Deutschland's defeat propelled the US into this current state, and now deciding its fate would help to shape the nation's future. By casting Germany as its monolithic opposite, America was able to create an image of its own cultural homogeneity as a

⁸ Etheridge, *Enemies to Allies*, 17.

counter thus providing valuable unity and public support for a wide swath of programs and efforts.⁹

We see the origin of this image of an antagonistic Germany at the start of the war. America began to concern itself with facing the Axis Powers and chief among them was the German Nazi threat. As such, it was important to catch the populace up to speed with the necessary information about who it is they would be waging war against. An image of Germany conducive to the war must be formed in the American public consciousness, and the cultural producers of the time set about that very task. In the upcoming chapter, we will examine how Germany was portrayed throughout the timeframe of the war and its conclusion.

⁹ Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945 - 1949* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2003), 20.

CHAPTER 2. RETRIBUTION AND REVENGE

The sleeping giant had awoken; it needed a target. Germany and the Axis Powers provided that target. To be sure, the conflict with Japan carried a more personal weight for a vast majority of Americans due to their personal attack on US soil, but on the European front, Germany became the figurehead of the enemy opposition and Hitler and his Wehrmacht would capture the sick fascination of Americans of the time and for generations to come. Hitler and Nazi Germany personified the opposite of American ideals with their strongman leadership and state overreach into personal liberties and control. Oppression of Jews and other minority groups provided a moral high ground from which to launch the vilification of German forces (though such treatment of minorities by Germans differed little from that of the treatment of blacks in the American south and in fact took inspiration from Jim Crow laws). Following Pearl Harbor, the Axis Powers now found themselves not only in the crosshairs of America's military forces but in that of its cultural machine as well. Analyzing the way that the enemy nations and Germany in particular were portrayed affords great insight into how America would grow to fight and then support the Germans in such a short time frame. Chief among the voices in the new war conversation was Frank Capra and his *Why We Fight* films. These films laid out in plain terms for the American people who they were fighting and what they were fighting for in the Second World War. Capra saw these films as his answer to the Nazi propaganda films, believing that his series of films could equal and even surpass those promotional materials.¹⁰ Here we see the attributing of anti-American ideals to the nation's enemies.

¹⁰ Peter C. Rollins, "Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* Film Series and Our American Dream," *Journal of American Culture* 19, no. 4 (1996): ProQuest One Academic, 82.

The first film of the *Why We Fight* series “Prelude to War” sets the stage for what American soldiers and civilians needed to know for the upcoming conflict. It opens very emphatically with a quote by George C. Marshall stating that “victory could only come with the utter defeat of the war machines of Germany and Japan.”¹¹ From the very onset, the film equates the National Socialist regime in Germany with the Imperialist one in Japan that had just launched such a heinous attack directly on America at Pearl Harbor. Capra’s film acknowledges the bombing and its part in drawing the United States into the conflict, but its goal is to recontextualize the war into a war of ideals, not of vengeance. It claimed there were two worlds vying for supremacy – a free world and a slave world.¹² The free world consisted of America and other democratic free nations founded upon western ideals. The slave world was formed by nations such as Germany, Japan, and Italy which were led by power-hungry tyrants. These tyrants first seized power at home and now sought to garner it abroad, placing the world at risk. “Prelude to War” spends a significant amount of its time juxtaposing the stark differences between our world and theirs and our people and theirs. Americans are referred to as “Johnny Q’s” who loved and cherished their individuality, their families, their safety, and their morals. By contrast, the citizens of these autocratic states are characterized as stooges and patsies who gave up on thinking and vying for a better world in order to ride the coattails of a despotic strongman to victory and a promise of a better world built on the backs of others.¹³

The portrayals in both this film and the second in the series, “The Nazis Strike,” continue to define the distinction between Nazi Germans and Americans. Here Capra and his crew attempt to give necessary background context for who and what the Nazis were and their place in this

¹¹ *Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, directed by Frank Capra (United States Army Signal Corps, 1942), YouTube, accessed January 3, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcAsIWfk_z4.

¹² *Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, minute 5:04.

¹³ *Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, minute 27:18.

greater threat the nation now sought to vanquish. It is relayed to the American viewer that German desire for world domination goes back years before and is embedded in a long historic run of forcefully expansionist German leaders. “Office of War Information guidelines required filmmakers to focus blame on the political elites in the Axis countries, so Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo are constantly vilified. But *WWF (Why We Fight)* went beyond that narrow critique to blame the peoples.”¹⁴ The Germans themselves are revealed to possess “an inborn national love of regimentation and harsh discipline” and are naturally suited for the militaristic ideals of Adolf Hitler and his ilk.¹⁵ The viewing audience is informed that Hitler’s goals are to invade an enemy’s culture and weaken it from within before striking out with a physical attack and that such forces are already at work in the United States and Great Britain.¹⁶ Book burning montages are shown with the somber warning that next it could be our books, our children, our people who were infected and led astray with Nazi ideals.

Both of these films attempt to illustrate to the American public and the soldiers preparing to fight that this threat they now meet is one of grave importance. They mix in documentary footage, global maps, and statistics to try and convince their audience that the world as they know it is at risk and will be lost if something is not done. Appeals are made for the people of the free world to not give in to the temptation of isolationism and its supposed safety and security, and the film calls for the United States to take on a greater, global role like it never has before.¹⁷ This, the film claims, is the only true way to secure peace and security for our way of life. It equated the Allied western cause with just, moral, holy values. The opening monologue of

¹⁴ Rollins, “Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* Series,” 83

¹⁵ *Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, minute 8:53.

¹⁶ *Why We Fight: The Nazis Strike*, directed by Frank Capra (United States Army Signal Corps, 1943), YouTube, accessed January 23, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-y_oz06_cQ..

¹⁷ *Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, minute 25:24.

the first film places the current conflict in the long, historical struggle for righteous equality, stating that this cause was the same that Lincoln, Washington, Moses, Mohammed, and Christ sought.¹⁸ Footage showed the Axis Powers eliminating churches and religious freedom in their erasure of free will in their countries. These scenes were then countered by shots of a children's choir in an American cathedral singing "Onward Christian Soldiers."¹⁹ Roosevelt's earlier warnings now were being brought to life. The Axis Powers and their ideology represented a fundamental challenge to the American way of life. Isolation would no longer be good enough. Action must be taken to stop Germany and its allies.

Action was taken and war was waged. Across the country, men and women sacrificed to the war effort while overseas soldiers gave their life and limb to the cause. Isolationism was firmly in the rearview now. "The Good War" was being fought, and it would be won. The countryside of Germany began to fall in the latter part of 1944 and by the end of 1945, the nation itself would surrender. Advancing US troops switched roles from military combatants to an occupying police force. One of the biggest questions facing both the policy makers in Washington and the military officials themselves was what this occupation would look like. "The German Question" thus came to the forefront of the national discussion. Understandably, there was a large amount of trepidation about the German people and uneasiness about if they could be trusted. The German Question itself was not just a matter of what to do with Germany, but "circumscribed the problem of guaranteeing its (Europe's) security against Germany."²⁰ It

¹⁸ *Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, minute 5:20.

¹⁹ *Why We Fight: Prelude to War*, minute 27:40.

²⁰ Peter Alter, "Germany in the Cold War," in *The German Question and Europe: A History* (London: Arnold, 2000), p. 112.

needed to decide “how Americans should assess and address Germany’s past, and thus its present and future.”²¹

The German Question was quite literally a question of what to do with the Germans now that they were at the mercy of their victors. The goal of the occupation of Germany was to “make the Germans submit absolutely to the victorious powers, to deny them their sovereign statehood and to subject them to Allied military government. The purpose behind all this was to “establish political conditions in Central Europe that would effectively remove the danger of a new war emanating once again from German soil.”²² For some – like Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau Jr. – the Germans were beyond the point of redemption. His proposal – aptly named the Morgenthau Plan – “suggested that the necessary radical transformation of Germany’s economy and society must begin with the return to an agricultural society.”²³ They had proven their flawed and dangerous status too many times already to be given another shot, and he advocated that they be set back to an agrarian society and stripped of their ability to forge modern industrial equipment and consequently wage modern warfare. To him and those who also supported this viewpoint, Germany was flawed at its very core. They proposed “the destruction of the economic and industrial capacity of Germany for making war by a ruthless and thorough demolition of what was left of it after the war.”²⁴ They traced German aggression and quest for conquest back to its days as the Prussian state. To them, “the rise of National Socialism in Germany was the consequence rather than the source of Germany’s will to war” and that Nazism’s “roots had to lie in Germany’s culture and society.”²⁵ They espoused that the reason

²¹ Etheridge, *Enemies to Allies*, 1.

²² Alter, “Germany in the Cold War,” 113.

²³ Goedde, *GIs and Germans*, 11.

²⁴ Nicholas Pronay, “To Stamp Out the Whole Tradition...” in *The Political Re-Education of Germany and Her Allies: After World War II*, ed. Nicholas Pronay and Keith Wilson (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1985), 1.

²⁵ Goedde, *GIs and Germans*, 5.

for the German problem lay within the heart of the German people themselves. Nazism was not an aberration, they argued; rather, it was a natural development of the German ideal and framework – the logical endpoint for the course their culture set themselves on. This aligned with the very same portrayal of Germany Americans had been shown in the *Why We Fight* series and wartime propaganda. As such, the only real solution to “The German Question” was to punish them and instill such punitive, restrictive measures to ensure that they were never able to rise to the level of a society able to wage war again. Eradication and strict enforcement would ensure the world’s safety from the German problem.

Their opposition believed Germany was in need of a firm, guiding hand back into the norms of the modern western world, not a crushing fist to shatter its industrial and commercial willpower and ability. People in this camp saw Nazism not so much as a uniquely German condition born out of the nation’s particular cultural and historical milieu but rather as a deviation of modern capitalistic society as a whole. Thus, the National Socialist scourge could befall any of the vaunted Western powers given the right circumstances. They felt the fight was not against the German menace but rather “to liberate Germany, and by extension western civilization, from the Nazi menace.”²⁶ These thinkers believed there were consequently many important lessons to be learned from the rise of Hitler and his followers in Germany to prevent this plague from germinating in other societies as well. This view also shaped how they felt German people should be treated as well. They were not the progenitors of National Socialism; they were the victims of it. The German populace had had their cherished homeland hijacked by Hitler and his cronies, abducting it as a vehicle for their totalitarian and territorial aims. In this

²⁶ Goedde, *GIs and Germans* , 10.

view, Hitler and his legion should be blamed for the majority of Germany's sins, and the US should now attempt to reeducate and rehabilitate the molested German *volk*.

Regardless of their ideological positions on "The German Question," policy and military officials both agreed on the need for a change to be implemented on the German nation. They may have disagreed on the causation and ramifications of the Nazi rule, but they agreed it could not be allowed to resurrect and must be eliminated from the nation's populace and its consciousness. Winning the war was one thing; winning the peace, however, would be another entirely. The goal of victory was not a land or power acquisition like most conflicts fought in human history. Rather, the aim of this war effort and the subsequent occupation had much more in common, as Constantine Fitzgibbon argues, with that of a civil war or religious struggle. The Allied forces now sought to fundamentally change and realign the beliefs and values of German society. America was determined to not let the mistakes of the years following the First World War to reoccur now in the aftermath of the second. A third global conflict must be prohibited, and poisonous, oppressive ideas like National Socialism must be stamped out with all prejudice. This brought about an interesting proposition though. Winning a war – while in no way easy or uncomplicated – had significantly more straightforward rules and requirements than the task that now lay before them. In war, your forces must defeat the enemy's forces and continue to do so until a level of surrender has been reached. It is a matter of force, logistics, and tactics. How to defeat men is understood; how though were they to defeat an idea? An idea is not a tangible opponent like tanks, infantry, or aircraft. An idea lives in the hearts and minds of those who hold it and, as such, can be hard to exorcise. To this end, the Potsdam Conference set up five main tenets for the reformation of postwar Germany – demilitarization, denazification,

deindustrialization, collective guilt, and nonfraternization.²⁷ Time would show that the Allies and America chief among them wavered on each one of these points, but still the stage was set. This was the challenge that lay ahead of the Allied forces and the Americans in particular.²⁸

One of the main tools the occupation forces employed in this fight on totalitarian ideals was the method of denazification. Denazification – as the name might suggest – entails the process of ridding the ideas and principles of the National Socialist party from the German people during the occupation by the Allied forces. Each allied zone – the American, British, French, and Soviet – took different approaches to denazification and followed through with them to different levels of intensity. The Americans began by trying to eliminate any and all remaining vestiges of the Nazi influence from their territory. Central to this approach however is the difficult question of specifically defining Nazism and setting rules for what party involvement would be judged.²⁹ By reviewing the records of the Nazi Party membership, they began to dispose of any individuals who previously aligned themselves with Hitler’s party. These disposed individuals would then be stripped of whatever title or influence they held and prohibited from acquiring any more. Of especial import to the denazification councils were anyone who held sway or influence in the remaining society. Teachers were targeted for their influence over the young minds which would shape the future of this new Germany. Judges were focused on for their control and enforcement of the law which would be key to shaping this newly reformed land. However, over time, the principle of denazification was found to be lacking. Rather than yield a righteous purging as the Allies might have hoped, it left the land

²⁷ David Culbert, “American Film Policy in the Re-education of Germany after 1945,” in *The Political Re-Education of Germany and Her Allies: After World War II*, ed. Nicholas Pronay and Keith Wilson (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1985), 174-175

²⁸ Constantine FitzGibbon, *Denazification* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1969), 13-33.

²⁹ FitzGibbon, *Denazification*, 31.

which would become the Federal Republic of Germany devoid of many of its intellectuals and authority figures.³⁰ Re-education and denazification were policies formed in the vengeful thoughts of war time and its immediate end when the horrors of German atrocity were still fresh and still being uncovered.³¹ The further into occupation the Americans ventured, however, the attitudes and necessities shifted from vengeance to aid. It also succeeded in alienating and angering the German populace as it focused on the collective guilt imbued on them even as they sought to rebuild and stripped of them of the very key members that were needed to complete said rebuild.³² Along with these setbacks, the very process of denazification became a sort of legal and logistical nightmare for the Allied forces to carry out. Someone's name on a roll did not necessarily indicate their allegiance to the party, and carrying out de facto trials for the vast number of people on that roll was a considerable burden of manpower and paperwork to overcome. Many felt the need to enroll in the Nazi Party simply to protect themselves, their families, and their livelihoods. These were the "Nazis by necessity."³³ At the same time, a shift in thinking about the rehabilitation of the Germans and the answer of the German problem was beginning to take place which would conflict directly with the fundamentally punitive nature of the denazification approach. With the Cold War looming in the future, a revitalized Germany was viewed as necessity and denazification hindered that effort.³⁴

Whether the Germans were to be punished or rehabilitated was not left for them to decide. Policy leaders and army officials tasked the soldiers already marching into Germany as

³⁰ FitzGibbon, *Denazification*, 82-83, 87.

³¹ James F. Tent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 254.

³² Tom Bower, *The Pledge Betrayed: America and Britain and the Denazification of Postwar Germany* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982), 139-140.

³³ FitzGibbon, *Denazification*, 39-41.

³⁴ FitzGibbon, *Denazification*, 93.

the footmen to implement their plans and be the conduit for American interaction with the *volk*. Their leaders tried to prepare their men with the official narrative via pamphlets and booklets which described what the soldiers could expect to find as they marched in to occupy German soil. *The Pocket Guide to Germany* was given to soldiers as they entered the country and portrayed Germany as “a monolithic militaristic society” culturally and morally flawed to produce such products as National Socialism. This was engineered to preemptively sever any connections and affinity the men may feel towards the German people.³⁵ They prepared them to encounter a staunchly resistant populace bowing their backs against the new command of the Allied forces. The information given to soldiers warned that the Germans they would find could not be trusted. They may appear weak and cowed by the onslaught of the war effort that had reached their lands in the last years of the war, but they were a duplicitous, treacherous people who would capitulate to their new leaders only so long as they had no other options. Many leaders preached that the German culture had led them to be subservient to their masters. They had done so under Hitler, and they would now do so under the Allies. However, the German threat was still very much alive and to be guarded against until it could be properly dealt with.

The reality that welcomed the entering American soldiers, however, was starkly different than the bleak, despondent picture painted by the preparational material. Rather than being faced with a stiff-necked, stubborn populace fighting for every inch against Allied control, soldiers were often received with either exasperated, defeated faces or outright welcomed as benevolent benefactors, especially when compared to the Soviets in the east. The end of the war brought extreme hardship to the German people and their country. Unlike in the end of the First World War where no enemy forces crossed the borders into Germany territory, the end of this conflict

³⁵ Goedde, *GIs and Germans*, 46-47.

saw destruction rage across the Germanic landscape. The Second World War was total warfare – warfare that included civilians and their cities beyond just the combatants themselves. The interwar years had brought fire-bombing to many key cities, stifled supply lines causing food and material shortages, and increased poverty and desolation. These symptoms only escalated as the war drew to a close in the final years. The German people found themselves tired of war. They were disillusioned with Hitler’s glorious purpose, and his propaganda of Aryan superiority over the Allied horde rang on deaf ears as they scrambled for basic needs to be met for themselves and their family.

This is the Germany the Allied soldiers entered. This was not a rebellious nation fighting the war to the last man, woman, and child; it was a broken people that – whether they believed in the cause or not – longed for the hell of war to cease and afford their loved ones a modicum of peace. The men had been prepared to face resistance, not open arms or ambivalence. Not only was the attitude of the populace that greeted the soldiers different than they expected; the actual makeup of that populace was noticeably changed. War is selective. It is a contest of strength and will, and consequently, it enlists the best and the fittest of a society to fight it. Anti-German pamphlets and propaganda-filled war films depicted the evils of the *Wehrmacht* – cruel men bent on domination for Hitler’s cause. The Allied soldiers, however, found few men when they arrived. The war had taken them. The ones remaining were either old, enfeebled, or emasculated. “The condition of that country, in the summer of 1945, was awful to behold: its cities in ruin, almost all its youthful and middle-aged men dead or in prisoner-of-war camps, its civilians close to starvation.”³⁶ They had lost. In their place, the soldiers found women and children.

³⁶ FitzGibbon, *Denazification*, 9.

The instructions of the military command were clear as the men entered Germany. There was to be no contact with the German people outside of officially sanctioned business matters. Such contact would be in direct violation of the mandates and intentions of the new military government and would be punishable as such. Regardless, proximity bred opportunity and comfort, and the contact inevitably began to happen and on a regular basis. This contact would come to be known as fraternization and would play an extremely important role in helping to change the perception of the Germans in not only the GIs' eyes but those of the Americans back home as well. American soldiers may have held intentions of remaining stalwart and disconnected against the Germans, but those intentions melted when faced with the starving faces of pleading children or the smiling faces of lonely women. The Germans they encountered contrasted greatly from the Germans they had been taught to expect from wartime propaganda, occupation packets and pamphlets, and even their own wartime experiences. Compounding this, many of the soldiers now occupying Germany had never been in actual combat with the Axis soldiers; they simply had cycled into their tour of duty, replacing those who had seen actual battles. These soldiers had no personal reason to hold a grudge against the German people. They were, though, presented day after day with many reasons to have sympathy for them and interact with them. Those that did remain from wartime were likely nearing the end of their tour of duty and, as such, had little incentive to care for or fear the orders from on high.

Fraternization generally refers to the interaction between GIs and German women in the context of a sexual relationship. Everywhere these young men looked, they saw German *Fräuleins* smiling back at them. There were still men around, but those interactions usually were under official and sanctioned circumstances. Experiences with women fell into a sort of gray area in the GI's opinion. These were not the defined interactions with the Nazi leftovers that

must be so safely guarded against; these were dates with women who had no substantial male presence left in their life and in their society. For the GIs, these encounters fell outside of their professional obligations as occupants; these encounters were on personal time with personal individuals and were therefore exceptions to the greater plan to separate and abstain. They saw no cognitive dissonance in believing in the collective guilt of the German people as a whole but having intimate relationships with their particular Germans. These men stepped in to fill a gap left by the now absent and quite likely deceased or captured German men. These were not the Nazi aggressors or cunning spies they had been warned against; they were women who had been driven into poverty by the defiant march of the Nazi regime. Nazi policy relegated the women to the home. It stressed that they were to be homemakers and child-rearing caretakers. GIs saw this as evidence that the German women could not be held responsible for the horrors of war committed on the battlefield by the Nazis nor the policy decisions which had fomented war across the European continent. At this time, the horrors of the Nazi atrocities of the concentration camps and Jewish ghettos were not yet fully discovered. The Nazi regime had seduced them and their men with promises of *Lebensraum*, material wealth, and security. Instead, it had introduced them to the toils of war, stripped their land and materials to support the war effort, and left them now subjected to the power of foreign troops. German women were the victims. "In fact, by casting postwar Germany in feminine terms, Americans and Germans avoided confronting the Nazi past. Postwar Germany shed its aggressive masculine identity and took on the new, if temporary, identity of a feminized, victimized, and most importantly pacific, client state."³⁷

Army officials saw this quite differently. For them, fraternization was one of the biggest issues facing the freshly formed occupation effort. Perhaps chief of all, they worried what the

³⁷ Goedde, *GIs and Germans*, xxiii.

ramifications would be on the public perception back on the home front of the continental United States. They may have seen firsthand the vast hardships and trials to which the German people have been subjected, but the average American citizen – and even the American politician – knew only the image of the Nazi foes which had been propagated so thoroughly by the government narrative during the war. Films like *Why We Fight* and art like the paintings of *The Four Freedoms* showed America as fighting an almost holy war for the principles of freedom against evil totalitarian foes, and the American people wanted to see that mission carried out now in the time of peace. The last image they wanted to see was that of an American GI and a German woman out for a lovely dinner date or picnic. That would be a breach of the very values they had fought and sacrificed for, an ethical and moral degradation. Military officials feared this backlash and realized they would need the full support of the American people behind their occupation efforts if they were to succeed.

Beyond the image problem of fraternization, military command did indeed worry about the psychological impact it would have on their men. Many viewed this occupation's goal as one of punishment and reprimanding, and that goal was significantly undermined by the soft spot men were fostering for their German love interests. They feared that increased liaisons would weaken the resolve of the men who were supposed to be taking up the task of rooting out Nazism and totalitarian tendencies and reeducating the German people, and they were correct. Their dreaded outcome could be seen at work within the very first weeks of occupation in the Western zones. Soldiers had been in hard, lonely, male-dominated combat for months on end which made them especially susceptible to their natural desires when entering a surprisingly friendly German territory. As men began to have encounters with the German women – whether explicitly sexual or not – with greater and greater frequency, their resolve to hold the Germans' feet to the fire for

their crimes before and during the war waned considerably. They took on the role of the caregiver, the confidant, and the protector. The threat of starvation was an ever-present concern for many of the women and their families in postwar Germany, but American soldiers were able to share their considerable rations with the women they were going out with. Soldiers naturally cared for the women they were dating, and their morph into the protective role along with and ultimately in place of their schoolmaster role would foreshadow the turn the nation itself would make towards Germany in the years following.

In the meantime, the official position was that fraternization was hurtful and harmful to the American cause, and those in power were determined to control the narrative to reinforce that position. One such prominent example of this is the film *A Foreign Affair* starring Jean Arthur, Marlene Dietrich, and John Lund and directed by the brilliant expatriate Austrian film-maker Billy Wilder.³⁸ The very opening of the film introduces to the audience a group of senators flying into Berlin to address the “moral malaria” that had reportedly befallen the brave men serving in the occupying forces of the city. The flight begins to descend, and several of the senators begin to peer out the windows at the once great city now reduced to rubble by the Allied assault. Just as they began to form feelings of pity or sympathy for the plight of the Germans living below, they – and we as the audience with them – are admonished to stay focused on the task at hand and not forget the wiles of the German people by Jean Arthur’s Congresswoman Phoebe Frost’s harsh remarks. Her character, replete with that era’s typical stereotype of the career woman – hard-working and efficient, yet humorless and naïve – is like a bloodhound with a scent, and she is determined to ferret out all moral and ethical sins being committed by the boys on the ground.³⁹

³⁸ *A Foreign Affair*, directed by Billy Wilder (Paramount Pictures, 1948), DVD

³⁹ Emily S. Rosenberg, "Foreign Affairs" after World War II: Connecting Sexual and International Politics," *Diplomatic History*, 18, #1 (Winter 1994), 61.

This motivation holds true as we see her agape with horror at the multiple instances of fraternization between American men and German women that she sees on the senators' jeep tour around the city. Unlike many contemporary publications and news reports at the time, this film made no effort to hide the existence of fraternization or paint the military men as saints of freedom in uniform. These scenes blatantly show the reality of international couples in the occupied zone; however, all these dalliances are portrayed through a negative light by the horror and disapproval of the senator.

The film's plot centers around the love triangle Congresswoman Frost unknowingly finds herself manipulated into with Captain John Pringle and his German mistress Erika Von Schlütow – played by John Lund and Marlene Dietrich respectively. Captain Pringle begins the film as the poster boy for the moral corruption which has befallen the occupying soldiers. He transacts on the black market for profit and material pleasures. He then brings that material wealth to his secret trysts with Schlütow in her partially destroyed, tattered apartment in one of the rubble-dotted buildings of the city. Once Frost learns that Schlütow is having an affair with one of the higher-ranking soldiers, she enlists Pringle to help her track down the deviant, never suspecting that it was he himself. Over the course of the film, Frost begins to fall for the captain's charm as he attempts to divert her attention away from himself and his mistress. Meanwhile, Schlütow is shown to be a sultry, worldly woman who begs her beloved Johnny to ignore the doe-eyed Congresswoman to spend more time with her. Despite his hesitancy, Captain Pringle ultimately finds himself softened by and attracted to the Congresswoman's earnestness, just as the Congresswoman rediscovers her femininity as she falls for the captain. As the film historian Gerd Gemünden has observed, "The morally upright but sexually repressed American with the telling name Frost is a symbol for stability and steadfastness including puritan virtues and

political incorruptibility, but also simplemindedness, provincialism, and naivete, while the worldly but cynical von Schlütow represents a defeated yet resilient urban culture where...food comes before morals.”⁴⁰ Schlütow is ultimately revealed as the manipulative temptress of the film with her explicit Nazi ties revealed in the film’s climactic moments. In the end, as Emily Rosenberg points out, “Pringle will leave Berlin, corruption, and the foreign affair behind; he will come home to the American heartland and to a refeminized woman who will please him by being both attractive and understanding.”⁴¹ Thus, one woman, representing postwar America, who has rediscovered her feminine essence triumphs over the corrupt, nazified foreign woman.

Looking back on this film, it is easy to decry it as an oversimplification of American values. Congresswoman Frost is supposed to be earnest and effeminate as she warms to the captain’s advances, but to a modern sensibility, this can come across as naivety and gullibility especially when compared to the shrewd, world-wise personality exhibited by Schlütow. However, at the time, this film served as an emblematic reaffirmation of the narrative that many wanted to put forth post-World War II. Indeed, the film garnered praise from important film critics. Bosley Crowther, the long-time influential film critic for *The New York Times*, judged it “a dandy entertainment which has some shrewd and realistic things to say,” things that Congress and the Department of the Army might find embarrassing and uncomfortable (the film was, in fact, vigorously attacked from the floor of congress and in a statement released by the Defense Department). Crowther also noted the serious undertones of the film, lurking just beneath the superficial romantic tale, in which the realistic scenes of rubble-strewn Berlin and the persistence of Nazi adherents illustrated the challenging problem of “repairing the ravages of war.” Erika Von Schlütow simultaneously showed the weakness and guile of Germany in its current state,

⁴⁰ Gerd Gemünden, *A Foreign Affair: Billy Wilder's American Films* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 69.

⁴¹ Rosenberg, “Foreign Affairs,” 62.

showing “the Germans as having the lessons of Nazism too deeply ingrained in them to promise betterment in the near future.”⁴² As in *A Foreign Affair*, the depiction of Germans in film and popular culture was often associated with women. In the very gendered terminology of the era, Germany had become a feminized nation – weakened and in need of protection.

Conversely, many feared that the women back in the states were in danger of losing their femininity as they were afforded new agency in the workplace as the absence of men due to the war effort brought them out of the home – many for the first time. Influencers in society were not comfortable with this shakeup of the status quo and wanted it to return to the prewar normal. Congresswoman Phoebe Frost’s character epitomizes this desire through her character arc in the film. She starts out as a determined career woman doggedly chasing her mission, but she ends the film transformed into an almost unrecognizable character. She morphs into the picture-perfect housewife enraptured by the love of a good, strong man after spending some time with the suave Captain Pringle. On the topic of Captain Pringle, his arc reaffirms the true moral strength and fortitude of the American soldier while simultaneously warning of the dangers of fraternization. The liaisons with a German *Fräulein* in clear defiance of the army regulations in the beginning of the film had unknowingly entangled him with a former Nazi thus compromising his moral integrity. A renewal of his love for American values and purpose – clearly represented by Frost and her journey – realigns his moral compass, allowing him to cast away the German temptress into the hands of the authorities where she belongs to be reprimanded for her sins.

Going into the German Occupation after the close of the war, there was an understandable amount of distrust levied at the Germans. The blame for two world wars –

⁴² Bosley Crowther, “Jean Arthur, Marlene Dietrich and John Land a Triangle in ‘A Foreign Affair’”, *The New York Times*, July 1, 1948; David Bathrick, “Billy Wilder’s Cold War Berlin,” *New German Critique*, 37, #2 (Summer 2010), 36; Gemünden, *A Foreign Affair*, 66. “A Foreign Affair” is now generally regarded by critics as one of Wilder’s great ‘forgotten’ films, one that captured precisely the mood of postwar Berlin.

whether rightfully or not – rested upon their shoulders in the minds of many Americans and of, perhaps more importantly, many in positions of leadership and cultural significance. This unease and malice was beginning to be tempered, though, as more and more GIs had direct interactions with the German populace. Seeing the embattled conditions they lived in in postwar Germany pulled on the compassionate nature of many of the men even as German women appealed to their more base desires after years of hardship and lack of companionship during the war.

Simultaneously, denazification sounded great on paper, but the implementation on a day-to-day basis proved significantly harder to enact. Once again, the people the occupation force were meeting were not the hardened Nazis stiffening their necks against the rod of reeducation.

Reeducation was supposed to answer the question of what to do with the German Nazis; the problem was these Germans did not seem like Nazis at all.

CHAPTER 3. A NEW UNDERSTANDING

We have now seen how the image of Germans in the U.S. increasingly did not match that which was portrayed during the war. Now, it is important to understand how they became our allies. Ultimately, these direct interactions with the German people allowed the more compassionate approach to the German occupation to win out. The Germans the occupying GIs encountered were not the same Germans shown to them in the newsreels and propaganda of the war. A clear distinction began to grow in the minds of the American soldiers - and through them the American people - between a Nazi and a German. What we see beginning to occur is a depiction of Hitler and his cronies becoming the villains, not the Germans themselves. The groundwork for this distinction had been laid again back in the *Why We Fight* series of films but at that time the language concerned the Soviets.

In the interwar years between the first and second World Wars, the Soviet Union became a significantly controversial topic for the United States. Several supported and admired this new revolutionary form of government, but these opinions were outweighed by those who were wary of the Soviets. Many saw them as an outright threat to America's way of life itself. We have spoken earlier in this paper of Germany's position as America's "other" – a contemporary that is often in opposition or contradiction to a nation's essence and status by which it can define itself. In this period leading up to the Second World War, the Soviet Union took upon the role of an "other" for the United States. America began to grow increasingly aware of and concerned with frighteningly aggressive foreign ideals festering overseas even as it pursued its own policy of isolationism, and Soviet communism was the poster child for this fear. This fear was seemingly confirmed for many when the Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany signed a pact of non-aggression after the National Socialist's began their march for *Lebensraum*. Though America

had not joined the war yet, the military movements of Germany and Italy across continental Europe were a cause for concern, especially given the number of US allies in the region. Soviet Russia's truce with the expansionist powers firmly validated the mistrust they had garnered in the minds of many Americans.

This meant that the cultural producers and government officials had their work cut out for them when it came time to convince the people to support the Soviets' shift in alignment after German forces broke the non-aggression pact and attacked Russia. They needed to change the image of Russia in the public consciousness from an antagonist to an ally in need of support. They accomplished this by selling the people on the virtue of the Russian people, not that of the Soviet leaders. The goal was to stress to the American public and armed forces that the Russian people were not unlike they themselves. Any problem they may have with Russia had to do with the Soviet regime, not their citizens. Here we see a clear distinction being made between the ruling class as the progenitors, supporters, and propagators of the anti-American ideals and the common citizens as victimized recipients of the consequences of their actions. The idea of totalitarianism comes to bear here as well. If a system is indeed totalitarian, then it would follow that its people would have little choice in the matter or agency to affect their national politics. America was a government of the people; totalitarianism was its opposite. This distinction is crucial because it allows sympathy and support to be able to be directed towards a nation in the form of its people without compromising the moral stance against its leaders or their ideologies.

This shift in representation can be seen in the *Why We Fight* film focused on the conflict in Russia "The Battle of Russia." The film opens with sweeping, soaring endorsements of the courage and virtue of the Russian people. It focuses extensively on their proud heritage. This proud heritage translates into an understandable love and pride for their country as the film

depicts the multi-ethnic, diversified people of the now USSR.⁴³ Montages are designed to show the strength and resiliency of the Russian people. It takes special care to attribute to the Russians several values that its American viewing audience would identify with and hold dear themselves. The Russian men and women are depicted as having an intense love of family and of country. These films seek to show *Why We Fight*, and here it is made abundantly clear that the Russians were fighting to secure the safety and continuation of their loved ones and their land. There is nary a mention of the Nazi-Soviet pact or of questionable communist policies. Instead, significant time is devoted to the violence of the evil Nazi soldiers and the great injustice they had done to this proud historic, land and its people. “The Battle of Russia” shows the Nazis mercilessly and cruelly driving these Russians from their homes and stripping them of their resources. It also shows the unfathomable grief that the victims of Nazism had to endure after many Russians were slaughtered and left to freeze and rot in the open, not even given the decency of a proper burial. Lingering clips crystalize this grief in the Russian experience as the camera hovers on their beleaguered faces as the heartache hardens into resolve.⁴⁴

This resolve would not go fruitless, for “The Battle of Russia” is quick to show that the Russians possess another admirable trait besides their love of family and country – bravery, bravery enough to turn the tide of the indomitable German war machine. The beginning of the film extolls the immense sacrifice of the Russian people. Multiple times the German Wehrmacht is referenced as seemingly unstoppable and unbeatable, yet the Russians did what no one else in Europe had seemed to be able to do. They turned back the Blitzkrieg. They stymied the German war advance. They outlasted the Germans, absorbing every blow until they were able to

⁴³ *Why We Fight: The Battle of Russia*, directed by Frank Capra (United States Army Signal Corps, 1943), Youtube, accessed March 17, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrkDBFJoo2w>.

⁴⁴ *Why We Fight: The Battle of Russia*, minute 45:56.

recompense in kind. Here the film even goes so far as to not only paint the Russians as similar to the American audience, it also encourages Americans to learn from the Russian stance and take inspiration from it. If they could do it, so could we. Throughout all of this, Stalin is rarely mentioned. When he does appear, it is to read off a stirring, albeit generic, platitude extolling the Russian men and women to persevere in their fight.⁴⁵ Compare this portrayal of the Soviets to that of the Germans in the films we have already previously discussed. Germans are ascribed inherent traits that led to the creation of Nazism while the Russians are brave and virtuous in spite of what beliefs their leaders themselves might hold.

That was during the war, however; now the conflict with Germany was over. A new, vaguer battlefield was emerging against the Soviets. The same tactics that were employed to delineate between the Russian people and the Soviets now must be used to distinguish between the Germans and the Nazis. As can be seen in *A Foreign Affair*, postwar American understanding of the German question relied heavily upon the city of Berlin. Berlin as the German Capital in many ways stood symbolically for the entirety of Germany. As goes the capital, so goes the country. During the war, Berlin stood as the center of Hitler's Nazi regime, and he presented it to the world as a shining example of what his German utopia could be. Postwar, however, found the city and its identity severely changed. If the Germans were to be reconstructed as allies, then the city of Berlin must be reconstructed as well. We have already established how the idea of the dastardly German threat melted away when occupying forces actually met the people themselves. General John J. Maginnis, a member of the local military government, noted in his diary on December 2, 1945, "I could sit in my office and say with conviction that these Germans, who had caused so much harm and destruction in the world, had some suffering coming to them

⁴⁵ *Why We Fight: The Battle of Russia*, minute 37:26

but out here in the Grunewald, talking with people individually, I was saddened by their plight. It was the difference between generalizing on the faceless crowd and looking into one human face.”⁴⁶ The films we have discussed took great care to include the city of Berlin as a character in their narrative by filming on location for many of their shots. These scenes show block after block of crumbling infrastructure and dilapidated, bombed-out buildings where Germans are forced to huddle. Filming on-site gave the projects that all-important authenticity that Hollywood craves, and it conveyed to the audience the dire straits the city and its residents (and in a larger sense, Germany as a whole) found themselves in.

As such, many were quite receptive to Berliners becoming allies of freedom rather than a conquered opposing force. The villain of the postwar world was not Germany; it was Russia. On the precipice of the Cold War, Americans needed allies and strongholds against the Soviets. In Berlin, they found both. Here was a city that – due to its location and the unique divided status bestowed upon it by the agreements at Potsdam – could shine forth as a beacon of the superiority of western democratic capitalism directly in the face of the imposing Iron Curtain. Berlin was promoted as a polyglot city full of culture and fortitude even in these trying times. Though this stood in contrast to the Nazi capital it was only years before, promoters of the city looked to the city’s Weimar past, treating the Nazi years as an aberration rather than the norm. Now Berlin was returning to its status as “the most American city” in Europe. Core American values and metaphors began to be attributed to it. US-commandant General Maxwell D. Taylor described the city in terms of the old American frontier. This comparison evoked the idea of Manifest Destiny in which it was the God-given mission of the United States to expand its way of life to

⁴⁶ Diary entry of December 2, 1945, in: John J. Maginnis, *Military Government Journal. Normandy to Berlin*, ed. by Robert A. Hart (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1971), 319, quoted in Stefanie Eisenhuth and Scott H Krause, “Inventing the ‘Outpost of Freedom.’ Transatlantic Narratives and the Historical Actors Crafting West Berlin’s Postwar Political Culture.” *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 11, no. 2 (2014), 188.

the lands beyond. This gelled nicely with the “Good War” mentality that pervaded the understanding of the Second World War. Berlin was referred to as a “city on a hill” and an “island of freedom.” Its people were lauded as welcoming and receptive and stalwart adversaries of the Soviet threat. Tania Long, the respected European correspondent of *The New York Times*, commended their efforts to make the occupying powers feel at home by translating their shop and nightclub artists in the name of the languages of their new allies.⁴⁷ Adopting Berlin as a sterling beacon of freedom was beneficial for both the occupying forces and the Berliners themselves.

Germans no longer could be viewed as the enemy; they were potential allies that must be won over. In the war, the Germans were enemies who threatened the principle of democracy. In the Cold War, they were naïve students to be educated on the wonderful concepts of the western world. One such potent example of this is the film *The Big Lift*.⁴⁸ This film chronicles the development and the cultural impact of the Berlin Airlift on two major elements of postwar Germany – the political reeducation and realignment of the German people themselves and the competition for dominance with the Soviet Union. Perhaps most revealing in terms of the film’s ultimate message, the opening credits of the film disclose only two American stars (Montgomery Clift and Paul Douglas) who would have been recognizable to domestic film-goers. While they portray the two main military characters in the film, the credits also make sure to note that real soldiers and real backgrounds from Berlin were used in the making of this film; in fact, except for Clift and Douglas, all military roles were filled by actual military personnel stationed in

⁴⁷ Tania Long, “This is Berlin – Without Hitler. An eyewitness account of life today,” in: *The New York Times*, July 22, 1945, 77.

⁴⁸ *The Big Lift*, directed by George Seaton (20th Century Fox, 1950), Format (i.e. VHS, DVD, etc.). YouTube, accessed March 9, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_O94G8Qbpo&t=213s

Germany. In that respect, it tries to convey elements of a documentary style production along with the more fictional plot elements in the story. This sets a clear statement from the very onset that this film is to be regarded with an air of authority and veracity. It intended to make definitive points about the German people, the Soviet opposition, the bravery of our men and women, and the situation developing in Germany that plays host to all of this political drama. The film needed the audience to take its position seriously and the use of real military men and actual backgrounds from the war-torn cityscapes of Germany give the credence needed to back up its arguments. That the film's writer and director, George Seaton, managed to pull this off was evidenced by the reaction of contemporary film critics, who praised the film for its "many vividly realistic scenes," with the airlift scenes "finely pictured" and "taut and exciting," while largely dismissing the love story as contrived, artificial, and heavy-handed.⁴⁹

The film follows two main American servicemen stationed in Berlin. One is stationed in the city helping to man the impressive radar technology that helps safely land the hundreds of planes taking part in this massive operation, and the other is a crew member on one of those planes himself. Many of the early statements in the film are a judgement on the state of the German people and their character. Viewers are introduced to the character of Kowalski, the serviceman stationed within the city, and his character reeks of hatred and distrust of the Germans. Within minutes of meeting him, he rants on how much he dislikes Germans and the city of Berlin. When another character tries to elicit sympathy for the Germans as victims by stating that the city "got hit pretty hard, eh?," Kowalski retorts that it wasn't hard enough and

⁴⁹ Bosley Crowther, "The Screen In Review". *The New York Times*, April 27, 1950, 47; "The Big Lift," *Variety*, April 12, 1950, 6; Richard L. Coe, "Operation Vittles Scores at Palace," *The Washington Post*, May 15, 1950; "'The Big Lift' with Montgomery Clift and Paul Douglas," *Harrison's Reports*, 59 (April 15, 1950); John McCarten, "The Current Cinema". *The New Yorker*, April 29, 1950, 96; "The Big Lift," *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, 17, #196 (April-May 1950), 59.

that the US should have used the A-bomb on them. This sort of thinking championed the familiar narrative of remembrance John Bodnar called the World War narrative which found the most prominent footing immediately following the war. The narrative celebrated the American victory as a moral and just outcome, and it vilified and degraded the Germans. Kowalski's demeanor at the start of the film highlights this thought process in his reactions to the Germans and their postwar condition. He shows little to no sympathy though their cities lie in ruins, and they find themselves impoverished by the ravages of war with their quality of life in tatters. This punishment – and with it any other horrors inflicted upon the Germans such as the Dresden Fire Bombing and other such measures – were only appropriate retaliations for the extremely aggressive actions and tremendous horrors visited upon the European continent by the Nazi expansion. We have seen this narrative previously portrayed as the correct perspective by which to view the German Question, yet here we see it being flipped. Kowalski's character comes off as loud and vengeful. He is played as unsympathizing and lacking mercy. The film will go on to show that these Germans were worthy of his compassion.

The Germans depicted in *The Big Lift* were a different breed from the harsh depictions that would have warranted Kowalski's response. Gone was the cloak of evil that shrouded their nation during the war years to galvanize the support of the faithful public. In its place, the film presents woeful, pitiful beggars, ravaged hard by the toils of conflict and left destitute in the rubbles of a once prosperous land. These Germans looked up expectantly at the faces of the fit, healthy American soldiers which now controlled their lands. The relationship took on a definitive power dynamic strikingly different from that of the wartime and before. These were not equals sharing a land and resources, nor were they combatants violently squaring off for rights and strongholds. This was a dynamic of vast inequality. The Americans in the film held the power

and with it the resources. The Germans, inversely, were forced to beg for the scraps in their new lowly estate, left prone economically and socially. *The Big Lift* grafts this new reality of a dependent Germany directly into its plot.

Kowalski's original harsh perspective is countered by that of the other serviceman, his friend and the film's lead, Danny MacCullough. Danny is played by star actor Montgomery Clift, and it is his journey we as the audience follow most closely. He begins the film sharing much of Kowalski's hesitancy and resistance to the mission of German aid. His lack of enthusiasm comes from a different place, however. Danny is significantly younger than Kowalski, and the two officers represent two different generations. Those generations have very different perspectives concerning Germany. As Ralph Stern notes, "Hank and Danny are situated in the post-war dualism of liberator and occupier but are divided by generation. Hank, older, belongs to the WWII generation and is haunted by memories of Berlin and what it represented, memories of which Danny is free."⁵⁰ I touched on this earlier regarding the changing of the guard in Germany in the years following the end of the Second World War. Kowalski belonged to the previous generation that had actually spent time in Germany during the conflict and saw the horrors of German aggression – or at least the consequences of those actions – firsthand. *The Big Lift* does not go into exact specifics, but it is revealed through lines of dialogue that Kowalski was taken prisoner and tortured by the Germans during his stint in the war. In a later scene, he is given the chance to enact some revenge upon his German captor when he happens upon him in a bar, and only the timely intervention of Danny and their companions prevents him from killing the man. Kowalski's generation is portrayed as holding a deep-seated, albeit justified, anger towards the German people. Danny, though, shares none of this motivation. His

⁵⁰ Ralph Stern, "'The Big Lift' (1950): Image and Identity in Blockaded Berlin." *Cinema Journal*, 46, no. 2 (2007), 69.

resistance to the Berlin aid at the beginning of the film simply comes from the unappealing nature of the request. The film begins with the men stationed in Hawaii, viewing a newsreel of seductively clad women in a swimsuit competition. This pleasurable locale is interrupted by the orders for them to pack up and prepare for deployment. While these scenes help establish the large, nationwide scale of the Berlin assistance program, it is hard to blame Danny and the other men for not wanting to leave Hawaii for the rubbles of Germany.

In fact, Danny's demeanor remains that of a man just doing his job because he has no other option until he is introduced to the lovely Frederica, a Berlin woman. Danny's crew is honored for their service to the city with a ceremony staged on the airfield when they are refueling. An honor guard forms the corridor for them to walk to the stage and many thankful Germans and eager journalists gather around to capture this marking of the success of Operation Vittles. Frederica is brought on stage to present Danny with his portion of the gift, and at the prompting of one of the photographers, the pair kiss – a show of supreme gratitude from the women of Berlin suitable for the papers. Naturally, Danny is infatuated following this display and jumps at the chance to enter the city as a reporter wants him to accompany the food delivery as it makes its way to its destination. Here we see how Danny's approach to the German Question differs from that of Kowalski, mirroring the evolving and changing approach America as a whole was developing. Unhindered and unblemished by any lingering grievances with Germany, Danny enters the damaged cityscape with unbiased eyes, and we see his attitude towards Berlin and her people evolving in real time as he reacts to what he sees. Here Danny's engagement with Berlin stands in as the surrogate for America's relationship with Western Germany or at least the one that policy makers on both sides hoped to foster. He is enticed by Frederica and the prospect of a future with her, and he reacts both in horror and sympathy as he

sees the state in which Berliners are forced to subsist in their postwar reality. He engages those he encounters with kindness, doling out cigarettes and well wishes and making friendly small talk as he curiously endeavors to better understand Frederica's day-to-day world. He even speaks a little German, chastising Kowalski at one point for not making the effort. So, too, we see that leaders in both America and West Germany hoped that Americans would optimistically look forward to a future together. The woes of West Berliners and West Germans were powerful tools in eliciting a sympathetic response to their plight from the viewing public and voters. Images of the streets of the city reduced to rubble were powerful evidence in the court of public opinion. *The Big Lift* also makes use of this potent, dominant aspect of Berlin life. In terms of the film's construction, we have highlighted that it was shot on location in the city, and the wide camera shots carefully make sure to capture the hollowed skeletons of the buildings. Multiple times the shot lingers on a location to capture pieces of the structures actively falling off the framework and tumbling to the ground, adding to the disorder and destruction of the city.

On a more personal scale, Frederica herself is a *Trümmerfrau* or "rubble woman." The *Trümmerfrau* had become iconic symbols of German destitution in these early years of the burgeoning Cold War. Women bending low to pick their broken country up off the ground piece by piece contrasted quite poetically against the marching, boot-stomping male Wehrmacht soldiers that had so boldly characterized and represented Germany in the Second World War. As mentioned, this was not the time for Germany to assert masculine dominance in the world stage. Rather, as reflected in movies like *The Big Lift*, West Germany took on the feminine role of the nation in distress, capitalizing on the lopsided gender roles of the time. Allowing America to step in as the protector and savior against the advancing, oppressive Soviets was mutually beneficial for both parties. The Federal Republic got the financial and material support of the emerging

world superpower, and America got the stage of the divided – both politically and literally – Germany to assert its place and dominance in global politics against its enemy.

Though not nearly with the same amount of global stakes, this gendered national interplay was reflected in the romantic exploits of both the film's leads. Danny and Frederica, as discussed, were put together from the beginning to symbolize the relationship between the American armed forces and the Berlin populace. Danny immediately begins to court Frederica, buying her gifts and escorting her around. At the same time, she uses her street smarts and knowledge of the harsh Berlin reality to educate and guide him through the many pitfalls that mark the street, both literal and metaphorical. She is resourceful and cunning as are her fellow German citizens as they deftly navigate the fractured cityscape and avoid Russian oppression. We see some of the classically positive traits associated with Germans begin to reemerge. These Germans are hardworking, determined, and clever. Despite their diminished state, they bend, but they do not break.

This resolve is also shown in the film's other romantic pairing of Kowalski and his German love interest, Gerdy. Whereas Danny and Frederica are portrayed as enraptured new lovers, Kowalski and Gerdy bicker like an old married couple for much of the film. We are introduced to them with their relationship already fully formed. It is not explicitly stated how long they had been together, but clearly it has been for quite a while. Gerdy begins the film as much Kowalski's maid as his romantic partner, but this dynamic begins to shift over the course of the film. In Gerdy, Kowalski finds a target to vent some of the frustrations he has with the Germans. He chastises her for her people's willingness to follow and their part in the wartime atrocities. He cites the common German stereotype that they were in need of a father figure. First, there was their fathers, then Herr Hitler, and finally now it was the Allied occupying

powers. Gerdy promptly snaps back that Kowalski himself is doing the very same thing that those other German leaders did, snapping his fingers and expecting her to drop everything to service his whims. This leads to the shift in their ongoing dynamic for the rest of the film as Kowalski begins to educate her on the tenets of American democracy. She originally conflates communism and democracy and wonders what's the real difference as the two ideologies fought for her native land. Through Kowalski's, albeit harsh and prickly, guidance, Gerdy begins to understand more and more about the tenets of the Western and specifically American way of life. She spends her time reading texts such as the US constitution and the Declaration of Independence as if they were sacred scriptures. One particularly poignant moment on her road to enlightenment comes when she is discussing how Kowalski and the Americans could never possibly understand the tensions of so many ethnic groups and divided peoples crammed into one location. He retorts with the example of Manhattan, citing the sprawling metropolis as the greatest example of peaceful, productive daily interactions between disparate groups of people that end up making a greater whole. She ends the movie encouraging Danny with her newfound love of America and her concepts. Through her and Kowalski's relationship, the film champions the American way above all as the true and righteous path for our time. The US occupying forces stationed in Germany were charged with the task of denazifying and reeducating the German populace to the superiority of the American way. Here *The Big Lift* shows that dream made reality as the average German not only acknowledges the superiority of the American way but becomes its staunchest supporter once her arc is complete.

This is explicitly contrasted with the depiction of the Soviet influence in the film. There are no dedicated Russian characters in the film, but the impact of the Soviet occupation can be felt throughout. Soviet armed forces bully German subway passengers into snitching on one

another and giving up food items they try to smuggle into the eastern sector. Danny and Frederica must flee from Soviet forces at one point in the film and only manage to escape by orchestrating a conflict over land and jurisdiction between the Soviets and the western powers while they flee in the confusion. In fact, the entire premise of the film – Operation Vittles and the supply of isolated Berlin with necessary items – only exists because of the Soviet Union’s postwar political and territorial aggressiveness and uncooperativeness. The film makes deliberate efforts to show the Soviets as the morally corrupt villains and the Americans and their western allies as the morally upright heroes of the burgeoning Cold War. We also begin to see the first instances of the German people playing active roles in the Cold War politics as spies and instruments of the machinations of the larger superpowers. When Danny encounters Frederica’s neighbor, he learns that he is a spy for the Russians. His job is to watch the planes coming in and report their makes and number to the Soviets. Danny naturally asks why would there need to be spies when the number of planes is publicly reported. Naturally, the answer comes that the Soviet Union does not believe such reports, only what their spies tell them, yet the spy reports must not match the official reports even if correct for that would arouse suspicion as well. This mistrust leads to spies spying upon spies with yet even more spies – both American and Russian - monitoring those. This concept of the Germans’ being used as tools in the larger scale conflict will be examined further, but the Germans here have switched from serving Nazism to serving capitalism and communism.

The warnings against more duplicitous German motives are not entirely absent from *The Big Lift* however. Much as in Billy Wilder’s *A Foreign Affair*, the German love interest holds alluring danger for the American lead. Gerdy’s arc remains pure and unsullied throughout the film, representing the hope and promise of western efforts of reeducation and rehabilitation of

the German folk in a post-Hitler world. This is offset, though, by the revelation that Frederica was not all that she seemed and has been playing Danny (and the viewers along with him) for the entire film. Previous scenes and dialogue had alluded to her late husband having been involved in the German war effort and being swept up in the Nazi machine. The final act reveals, however, that he is alive and well and living in the states in St. Louis. Frederica's correspondence with him via letter explains that her entire courtship with Danny has been a ploy to get to the states and eventually reunite with her previous lover after divorcing Danny. For all of the messages in this film espousing the pitiable estate of Germans, their willingness to learn and change, and the convincing nature of American themes to accomplish this transformation, *The Big Lift* cannot fully shake the lingering feelings of mistrust towards Germany that pervaded its time. Frederica's plot is only revealed through the snooping of her neighbor the spy, cementing the case that sometimes untoward methods such as spy craft are necessary in these murky times.

The Big Lift aimed to triumph the American cause in Berlin. Despite having slight reservations about German character, the film clearly makes the case for the American presence in Berlin. Showing the Germans as pitiable victims of both wartime degradation and erosion as well as now Soviet oppression and isolation effectively conveyed to the viewing audience that this was a people that needed their help. The film connects its narrative and message to familiar images like the Trümmerfrau and the crumbling cityscape that were becoming more ubiquitously associated with Germany rather than the wartime images of the stomping boots and atrocities. This furthered the narrative of Cold War rhetoric that the Germans were the victims – first of Hitler's Nazi Party, now of the postwar destruction and of aggression from the Soviet Union. Totalitarianism continued to wreak havoc just with a different face and under a new flag.

Inversely, the United States and its democratic way of life stood staunchly as the antithesis to Soviet totalitarian actions. American ingenuity found a way to supply the entire populace of its city when outside forces attempted to make the island nature of Berlin quite literal. *The Big Lift*, from the title on throughout the film, touts the supremacy of American virtue and dedication. This approach bears effective results as well, converting Gerdy into a sentinel of western values and wearing down Kowalski's hardened prejudices. Division and isolation were the ways of the Soviet Union; the United States broke through barriers, creating a new ally out of a former enemy.

By the 1950s, the Cold War was raging. The two superpowers stood locked in opposition against each other in their respective corners of the world. The two supremely powerful nations never engaged in outright direct conflict with each other, but their influence was felt in nearly every corner of the globe. The tension escalated into armed conflicts in satellite countries. Korea and Vietnam erupted into ideological and military struggles that would shape not only the outcome of the Cold War, but the future of those nations even until today. Germany continued to play a crucial role in the Cold War. The divided status of the country gave way to codified division with the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany from the western zones and the German Democratic Republic from the eastern. The two new nations that formerly comprised Germany quickly set about trying to gain international recognition and clout. Backed by their respective superpower benefactors, the German Question morphed from what would be done with Germany into which Germany would emerge superior over the other. Quickly, West Germany began to outclass its eastern counterpart as capitalistic industry revitalized it in ways the communist side could not keep up with. This presented the United States with a massive public win over the Soviet Union. Though years ago, the depiction in Capra's film of a free

world warring against the slave world remained apropos, and the dueling Germanies provided a side-by-side comparison. Nowhere was this struggle as evident as in Berlin. The city continued to feature prominently in American film and offered filmmakers the chance to succinctly comment on the dichotomy of the Cold War struggle due to its divided nature and the proximity of the two sides. The question of German character and destiny began to be absorbed into the greater struggle of the east versus the west. The Cold War was deathly serious, but films allowed for a palatable critique and expression of the times. “Even when a film’s ostensible subject has nothing to do with American–Soviet hostility, the culture that produced it was palpably tense and suspicious, and film comedies often reflected that jittery mentality. Nuclear annihilation was never far from people’s minds.”⁵¹ Through the camera lens, filmmakers could take a critical look at the tense political situation, finding merit, value, and even humor in the conflict. Billy Wilder’s *One, Two, Three* was a prime example of this.⁵²

One, Two, Three is a satirical comedy set in Berlin during the joint occupation period just before the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The plot centers on C.R. “Mac” MacNamara played by James Cagney. MacNamara is an upper-level executive for the Coca-Cola company and oversees the West Berlin division of the company. It is revealed that he bungled an assignment in the Middle East for the company some time back and has been relegated to this post as a demotion. As such, we quickly realize that he maintains a constantly sour demeanor, gripes about not being given what he is entitled, and thinks of himself as higher than this position and deserving more. Chiefly, he aims to secure the head of Western European Operations – a cushy job that would relocate him to London and afford him significantly more money and

⁵¹ Ed Sikov, “The Berlin Crisis? Piff!l!: Billy Wilder’s Cold War Comedy, *One, Two, Three*,” in *Cold War Film Genres*, ed. Homer B. Pettey, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 43.

⁵² *One, Two, Three*, directed by Billy Wilder (United Artists, 1961), Format (i.e. VHS, DVD, etc.). ***If viewed online, include the date of access and the URL***

boons. He will do anything necessary to get this. However, in the meantime, he chafes under the burden of being saddled with the undesirable West Berlin location, and his family too itches to be free of the German locale. His wife Phyllis, played by Arlene Francis, continuously threatens to take the children and leave for the States, especially after she finds out that her husband has been cheating with his attractive secretary. MacNamara hopes to solve all his problems when it is revealed that the head of the company's free-spirited daughter is coming to stay with them. Her extended stay, although originally seeming like a burden, presents MacNamara with an opportunity to win favor if he can show her the time of her life whilst keeping her under control.

Immediately, the Germany *One, Two, Three* presents to the audience is different from that of the previous depictions we have seen. Every German played in this film works for MacNamara and the Coca-Cola company. By the year this film had been released, West Germany or the Federal Republic of Germany had technically been an independent state for nearly twelve years, but the only representation the people of this nation get are as the subservient workforce of our enterprising American businessman. The two main German leads are his assistant Schlemmer, played by Hanns Lothar, and his secretary Ingeborg, played by Liselotte Pulver. Schlemmer spends nearly all of his time on screen hastily coming whenever his boss snaps his fingers and exasperatedly running around to accomplish his every whim – no matter how absurd or erratic. He does possess many of the admirable qualities for which Germans had been known for in times past such as efficiency, effectiveness, and an impressive work ethic, yet all of these positives are merely used in service of furthering MacNamara's goals. Schlemmer himself is given little to no agency or development, even being stooped so low as to be placed in a comical drag outfit to pass as MacNamara's secretary to fool some Russians in a later portion of the film.

Speaking of Ingeborg, the film gives her little more to do than to be presented as a sex object. It is true that we are presented with a bit more character development on her as we learn some of her desires and aspirations, but these only come as favors for which she barter herself and sexual favors with her boss. Many references are made to the “benefits” that this job presents her with. These include MacNamara buying her items and food in return for her instructing him on his German, amongst other things. Her main use in the story is to be traded as a bartering chip to some lusty Soviet officials to once again further the main American lead’s needs. “Under the paper-thin veneer of comedy, Wilder represents the Soviets as farcical nincompoops and the Germans as whores.”⁵³ Other auxiliary German characters appear in the film as it develops, but only to perform specific services or meet the need of the Americans. Phyllis and the children have German servants and housekeepers. MacNamara flaunts his power and wealth by summoning an army of store keeps to sample their wares, all of which scurry to his office in a matter of minutes no matter what they are doing. One of the most interesting and revealing characters comes in the form of Count Waldemar von Droste-Schattenburg played by Hubert von Meyerinck. Despite his seemingly impressive title, the Count enters the story being summoned from his lowly job manning the restrooms at a local store. The fact that a supposed member of nobility had been reduced to one of the lowest jobs imaginable is presented as a throwaway joke in the blistering pace of the film, but it speaks volumes to the dilapidated state of German history and culture in this current time. The Count shows a picture of his castle but laments that it actually sits in ruins after being bombed out during the war, and he trades away the integrity of his noble family name for a paltry sum of money.

⁵³ Sikov, “The Berlin Crisis?,” 55.

The Germans in *One, Two, Three* possess no value or pride in and of themselves. They only have value in what they can assist the Americans with or do for them. Schlemmer represents the good and faithful West German allies who are eager to help the United States further its goals and ambitions. Ingeborg mimics the similar approach we have seen in previous films of Germany as an alluring female presence, possessing a desirability for both the Americans and Soviets. Though she herself profits from their fawning and pining over her, her portrayal lacks the element of danger or betrayal we have seen in previous incarnations. The other Germans serve to acknowledge either the material resources and wealth that an alliance with Germany could possibly present or as a remembrance of the current pitiful state of German identity, especially when compared to what it once was in years gone by. West Germany here behaves not so much as a nation of its own, but rather as a colony or extension of the great American international presence.

Gone was any indication of a great, moral mission for the United States in its presence in Germany. No mention was made of denazification or reeducation of the populace. The Americans in this story were not seeking to outfit the men and women of the land with the tools to further their own democratic system nor were they educating them on the values of American tenets of the faith. We see no grand conversion of hardened hearts or imparting of unimpeachable lessons of the human condition. The American presence in *One, Two, Three* exudes an air of cynicism. Previous representations in film have focused on showing the democratic side of America; this America is starkly and distinctly capitalistic above all else. It is quite telling that whereas the other films we have discussed and many other films of the era chose the military occupation as the focal point of their story, *One, Two, Three* tells the story of another great, formidably powerful, bureaucratic organization – the Coca-Cola company. There

can be no more appropriate depiction of the modern version of American imperial aspirations than a mega-corporation like the timeless soda company. The film portrays MacNamara, the company, and by extension America as having a manifest destiny-like zeal to reach across the European continent. MacNamara himself alludes to this by having a map of the entire European continent across his wall and repeatedly boasting about how he would be the first to break through the Iron Curtain and introduce the soda to the Russian sector, bringing the product to millions of untapped customers unknowingly thirsting for enlightenment. The only acknowledgement of the previous Nazism of the German population comes from gags playing on their prior militarization. The entire office staff jumps to attention and snaps their heels together every time MacNamara enters the room, much to his chagrin. Such instances are played for laughs, however. The America of Wilder's film spreads product and seeks profit, not democracy and change.

This critique of American action and intention in Berlin, Germany, and Europe at large does not exclude the film from maintaining the status quo modus operandi of debasing the Soviet Union and its effect on its sphere of influence. The principal point of conflict for the plot comes when the daughter of the CEO Scarlett, played by Pamela Tiffin, falls head over heels for a Communist youth in the eastern sector and promptly marries him, unknown to and to the intense detriment of MacNamara's mental health. The new groom Otto Ludwig Piffl, played by Horst Buchholz, zealously believes in the party's doctrine and teaching and despises everything that America stands for. He admonishes Scarlett for her family's decadence and righteously promises that their children will not live in such material wealth while others suffer and are in want. Despite his protests seeming genuine at face value, he comes off as completely naïve both of the true workings of the Communist party and their methods and of the reality of the America that he

seems to despise so intensely. Scarlett herself displays great naivety as she is swept up in his rhetoric simply because he believes so strongly and passionately. She becomes fascinated with Communism despite any real understanding of the dogma she repeats, and Piffel toes the party line of denouncing everything American or comfortable while trumpeting the praises of the Soviet party he so wishes to join, though he really knows little about either system. This comes across as a strong critique and admonishment of the tendency of youth to blindly dive headfirst into a cause while the film admonishes the elders, such as MacNamara, for wielding the empty platitudes as political capital without truly believing them or acting in accordance.

The film levels this same critical eye upon the firmly communist East Germany. Despite “all of Scarlett’s inanity, MacNamara’s cruelty, and the thoroughgoing prostitution of the West, Communism ultimately fares worse than capitalism in *One, Two, Three*.”⁵⁴ As mentioned, the film premiered the same year as the Berlin Wall began construction. This unfortunate juxtaposition between film and reality makes the absence of the Wall all the more prominently felt as MacNamara and company have to venture into East Germany in order to retrieve Piffel. He has been framed and put in jail as an American spy thanks to MacNamara’s plotting, but when it is revealed that Scarlett is pregnant, he must be retrieved for her child to have a father. This jaunt into the Soviet controlled area of the city stands in stark contrast with the previous scenes. West Germany boasts nice houses and sprawling, modern office spaces. The second the party goes through the Brandenburg Gate, however, they are greeted by police checkpoints, interrogation tactics, corrupt officials, and crumbling infrastructure. One of the most damning condemnations of the Soviet Union is brief yet impactful. During a rousing party thrown in hopes of bribing their way to Piffel’s return, the thumping revelry in the withering hotel causes a portrait of Nikita

⁵⁴ Sikov, “The Berlin Crisis?,” 56.

Khrushchev to fall revealing one of Stalin behind it. The leader may have changed, but at its core, the Soviet Union and all the areas under its influence remained the same corrupt, violent, oppressive regime. The film condemns and mocks the communists every chance it gets. Soviet interrogators coerce Piffel into a forced confession, indicting him as a spy for his contacts with the Americans. The Soviet's cars and buildings look broken down and old, lagging years behind their western counterparts. The main Soviets we meet in the film are three officials who might as well have been The Three Stooges. They constantly display incompetency, idiocy, and inefficiency and exist solely to provide MacNamara with comedic foils to one-up and outsmart. Their lack of commitment and fair-weather loyalty reveals itself as one defects to the American side towards the film's end in order to secure safety and security that the Eastern bloc simply could not provide. West Germany may serve at the beck and call of the Americans, but East Germany and its citizens actively suffer by the mismanagement of the Soviets.

One, Two, Three takes place in Germany, features some German characters, and uses the politics of Germany to move its plot forward. Unlike in *A Foreign Affair* or *The Big Lift*, however, these German elements hold little more weight than window dressing and setting, something that contemporary film critics understood. Behind the fast-paced delivery, the film delivered little in the way of serious commentary, preferring instead, as *Time* put it, a mocking satire of “of people's demockeracy (sic), Coca-Colonization, (and) peaceful noexistence (sic),” with the result that American audiences found the film witty but more than a little bewildering. Although not a box office success at the time, since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet empire in eastern Europe, *One, Two Three* has gained a new prominence among historians and film critics. It is now seen as prescient in its presentation of the Cold War as

political farce and its ridicule of political stereotypes and ideological rigidity.⁵⁵ The key significance, though, lies in the way *One, Two, Three* shifted focus away from Germans. Previously, directors pondered over the culpability of Germans, their reeducation in democracy versus falling prey to communism, and their pitifully overlooked state as victims of wartime horrors of destruction. This film replaces those philosophical elements and moves the focus squarely on the conflict and contrast between the United States and the Soviet Union. No more squabbles about the purpose or character of the Germans remained; they served as satellites of the east and west. The Federal Republic of Germany and the East German Democratic Republic existed solely, at least in the context of this film, as surrogate stand-ins for their respective superpower benefactors. Berlin provided the stage for political commentary due to the up-close and personal nature of its division, but this clash served the larger political aims of the two parental nations rather than any of the city's denizens themselves. The nom de plume of the city – the Outpost of Freedom – holds significant meaning here as the film treats Berlin not as an entity in and of itself but rather as an extension of the United States' struggle against the Soviet Union. Despite their official diplomatic status as nation-states, years of occupation, influence, policy, aid, and restructuring transformed Germany – whether East or West – into the front lines of their respective sides.

⁵⁵ "BeWildered Berlin," *Time*, December 8, 1961; Bathrick, *Billy Wilder's Cold War Berlin*, 42-43.

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to chronicle the change in the American people's perception of the Germans immediately following the Second World War into the Cold War. Conflict may have ceased with Germany in 1945, but this cessation failed to erase powerfully ingrained stigmas and mistrust of the German people that had built up during the Nazi era of aggression. These stigmas had been buoyed by official propaganda disparaging the Germans in the lead up to and during the war. Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* films taught the American armed forces and the public that the Germans were a people not to be trusted. They were intrinsically ingrained with despotic tendencies and desires to enforce their order and rule across the globe. In the eyes of the public, Germany held responsibility for causing both World Wars in the span of less than half a century. There was great cause for concern. In both print and film, people floated questions of whether they could be trusted and what should be done with them to ensure the horrors of the past never came to fruition again. The German Question, as this commonly became to be known, was a matter of national and global security.

Certain political influencers argued that the German's ability to make war should be abolished and their nation brought low into a permanently subservient role. This line of thought lost traction with popular opinion and policy shortly after the war concluded and opinion makers came face to face with the postwar reality. American occupying forces and later politicians confronted the harsh existence the Germans were now forced into. The intense bombing that had ransacked their cities and countryside left only a pitiful, hollowed-out husk that they had to subsist in. Occupying soldiers encountered not the hardened Wehrmacht soldiers they had faced for years on the battlefield but beleaguered, starving women, children, and emaciated men struggling to survive. Enforcing punitive measures such as denazification upon this populace

proved harder than planned, as many of the men took on protective roles as caretakers and beneficiaries for the women and their families. Often, these favors came along with a romantic or sexual relationship. This widespread practice known as fraternization became wildly known and associated with the occupation of Germany, and it did much to soften the perception of the German people.

This more amicable approach to the German occupation can be seen quite clearly in the first of the films I have broken down in this paper, *A Foreign Affair*. As the title suggests, the film centers around a romantic tryst as Captain Pringle is torn between his affection for the German vixen Erika Von Schlütow and the hard-nosed Congresswoman Frost. Fraternization is fully acknowledged in this film, but while attempts are made to show progress in rehabilitating Germans with teachings of democracy, ultimately this level of interaction proves to be a mistake as Schlütow betrays Pringle and reveals herself to be a Nazi. Meanwhile, Frost rediscovers her femininity and her and Pringle's love triumphs over adversity in a celebration of American values. There are elements that stressed the need for sympathy though. *A Foreign Affair* makes effective use of the destroyed background of Germany. Schlütow lives in a crumbling apartment building and the camera literally enters the frame for her scenes by going through the holes in the walls. She may have ultimately betrayed Pringle, but plenty of other American men are shown enjoying the company of Germans in a completely normal, consequence-free setting. German-American interpersonal relationships were the new norm at this point by necessity, and the film does a good job of showing that. The takeaway message though remains one of caution and mistrust as the allure of Germany proves to be more dangerous than it appears.

This role of caretaker extends from the actions of individual soldiers to national policy with the Berlin Airlift. Operation Vittles saw America and the other allied nations subsidize the

entire western portion of Berlin from afar after the Soviets isolated those sectors from receiving vital supplies. Because of the oppressive nature of the Soviets, Germans quickly moved forward in their transition from opposition to allies in need of support. The totalitarian ideals of Nazi Germany and the other Axis Powers found a new avatar in the Soviet Union. Russia and the United States may have been allied during the war, but now, in the aftermath with power up for grabs, the drastic differences in the two nations' ideals, policies, and actions brought them into an inevitable clash to determine the fate of the 20th century. Germany, with its location both physically and politically, found itself in the middle and center stage for some of the most intense duels between the two competing nations and ideologies.

The second film we examined – *The Big Lift* – takes this time period as its subject matter. Though premiering only two years after *A Foreign Affair*, the depictions of Germany feel vastly different. Some messages persist as once again the love interest betrays the lead by holding on to her ties of German love from years past, yet this film champions the need of American aid in Berlin in order for democracy to survive and thrive. For this people once under the oppression of the Nazis and now under the threat of the Soviets, the United States stands as a bulwark against the dark. Here we see the might of American ingenuity and bureaucracy as the airlift supports this entire population in spite of the opposition of the Russians. As well, we see the effectiveness of the American reeducation efforts. Gerdy, one of the two main German characters in the film, begins the film not understanding the difference between freedom and communism, but she ends the film as the biggest advocate for the Four Freedoms since Roosevelt. From film to film, Germans have transitioned from a people not to be trusted to one deserving of pity and support.

Over the next decade, the relationship between the United States and Germany, particularly West Germany, matured, as the conflict between the United States and the Soviet

Union deepened. The East German Uprising of 1953 gave both the Western Germans and the western powers proof that fires of democracy could be lit behind the Iron Curtain and that the fight must continue. The introduction of the Federal Republic into NATO and the Soviet response further demarcated the lines in the sand and where each party stood. By the advent of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the two Germanies existed as extensions of their respective benefactor. Berlin itself retained particular political capital due to its divided nature and its location in the heart of East Germany. The focus, however, had shifted entirely to the conflict between the two superpowers.

The final movie in our examination was *One, Two, Three*, and this film exhibits this shift in narrative quite well. The setting remains in Germany, German characters are present, and the story shifts between east and west. The focus itself, though, is on the political machinations between the two warring nations. Berlin is just the setting, much like Germany was just one of many settings across the world in which the Cold War struggle played out. The only weight MacNamara's German employees bear on the story is how fast they can accomplish his goals, and their subservience is played for laughs. The only real German character with any agency is his attractive secretary, but she exists as a bargaining chip or prize to be won. *A Foreign Affair* and *The Big Lift* both derided the Soviet position and framed them as the opposition for both German and American security in the area, but their purpose was more so to make a statement on the condition of Germany at the time and the reality of the German-American relationship. *One, Two, Three* purports no such statement on the German experience. Instead, its scathing critique of global politics chastises both America and Russia as flippantly treating Germany as a plaything or possession that they can barter with or do as they please. Surely not all that viewed the film agreed with that critical approach to the Cold War, but the film could only make that

statement because its audience firmly understood the position of the Germans by this point. They were not untrustworthy or the enemy; the Soviets were. The Federal Republic of Germany was a burgeoning part of the western world, and the German Democratic Republic was a victimized puppet state under the control of the Soviet Union, just as they had formerly been under Hitler.

A decade and a half passed between the end of the Second World War and the construction of the Berlin Wall. In the grand scheme of history, that amounts to very little time, yet within that span, the image of Germans to the American people managed a complete reversal. Their postwar plight and their willingness to turn from the swastika against the hammer and sickle won them the support of the American people. These films not only chronicle that evolution in their public image but played an active role in helping spur it forward. The entrenchment of the Berlin Wall and continued, increased Soviet oppression cemented it as the century drug on. Germans transformed from the other to an ally. Berlin was the capital of Hitler's Third Reich; now it was an important campaign stop. In 1943, *Why We Fight* warned of the innate evil within the German people. In 1963, John F. Kennedy could proudly proclaim, "Ich bin ein Berliner!" The German Question had been answered.

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