

The United States and Germany: on the 'magic of freedom' and the ambiguities of the American freedom crusade

Besier, Gerhard

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitarismusforschung e.V. an der TU Dresden

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Besier, G. (2006). The United States and Germany: on the 'magic of freedom' and the ambiguities of the American freedom crusade. *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, 3(2), 231-245. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-310590>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

The United States and Germany – On the “Magic of Freedom“ and the Ambiguities of the American Freedom Crusade

Gerhard Besier



Prof. Dr. Dr. Gerhard Besier, Direktor des Hannah-Arendt-Instituts für Totalitarismusforschung, o. Prof. an der TU Dresden, geb. 1947 in Wiesbaden, 1972 Erstes theol. Examen, 1975 Promotion zum Dr. theol. in Tübingen, 1978 Dipl.-Psych. in Tübingen, 1982 Habilitation im Fach Kirchengeschichte in Bielefeld, 1986 Promotion zum Dr. phil. in Geschichtswissenschaften an der FU Berlin, 1972–1979 Assistent am Lehrstuhl Klaus Scholder (Tübingen), 1979/80 Wiss. Mitarbeiter an der Pädagogischen Hochschule Ludwigsburg, 1980–1986 Rektor des Religionspädagogischen Instituts Loccum, 1987–1992 Lehrstuhl für Neuere und Neueste Kirchengeschichte an der Kirchlichen Hochschule Berlin, 1997 Forschungspreis des Historischen Kollegs im Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft (München), 1992–2003 Lehrstuhl für Historische Theologie und Konfessionskunde an der Universität Heidelberg.

Abstract

Seit dem Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges ist das Verhältnis zwischen den Vereinigten Staaten und Deutschland durch einen einseitigen Kultur- und Politiktransfer bestimmt. Zweimal suchten die USA den demokratischen Verfassungsstaat in Deutschland zu implementieren, das zweite Mal erfolgreich. Dabei verfuhr sie im Blick auf die in Europa verankerten Traditionen oft relativ sorglos. Der amerikanische Anspruch, die Welt zu demokratisieren, wird immer wieder konterkariert durch die Verhältnisse in den USA selbst und durch das außenpolitische Agieren der USA. Es ist oft diese Glaubwürdigkeitslücke, die das an sich positive Anliegen ins Zwielicht rückt und die amerikanische „Mission“ behindert.

After November 1918 Germany was heading towards an uncertain future that did not solely depend on the German people after the collapse of the authoritarian state, which the Empire most certainly was.* Especially one of the victorious powers, the United States, conjoined its peace programme with clear ideological-political convictions. Just after entering the war the American president, Woodrow Wilson, established a “Committee on Public Information” (CPI) to explain to the Americans the reasons that their country had taken up arms to de-

* Cf. Gerhard Besier/Gerhard Lindemann, Im Namen der Freiheit. Die amerikanische Mission, Göttingen 2006.

defend its freedom and the free institutions.¹ The “common principles” of the French-British-American alliance were to be explained to the people using mass media. From historical perspective it was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oliver Cromwell and Thomas Jefferson, who played the main roles. This was admittedly war propaganda, but at the same time it was the attempt to ensure the basis of a parliamentary democracy and a free society. This democracy was internally completed by the proclamation of a new social order and externally President Wilson conceptualised the vision of a world society of free, sovereign peoples.² The German autocracy with its Kaiser and homogenous concept of nation and people was stylised as the opposite of Wilson’s project to defend social democracy and freedom on a world scale.

But was the German Empire the autocratic regime the Wilson administration made it out to be? It is possible, therefore, to speak of a “split constitutional reality”.³ On the one hand, the parliament (*Reichstag*) increased its influence through its inter-party committee (*Interfraktioneller Ausschuss*) and on the other hand, the supreme army command claimed the highest power through the emperor. However, Wilson’s interpretation of the German constitution left no room for such details.⁴ To the American president, who saw himself as defender of Europe’s freedom, a “re-education of the Germans towards democracy”⁵ was essential. The pre-requisite to be able to do this was an internal *coup d’état*. In the Allies’ war propaganda Wilhelm II, Hindenburg and Ludendorff had already been described as war criminals, thus a ceasefire could not be negotiated with them. Ludendorff was flexible enough to demand a reform of the constitution in order to improve the terms of negotiations. Although he deeply despised the parliamentary-democratic system, he wanted to use it as an instrument. If a demo-

- 1 Cf. Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, New York/London 1999, p. 169. See on the reasons for the USA’s entry into the war: Johannes Reiling, *Deutschland: Safe for Democracy?*, Stuttgart 1997, p. 300 ff.; Anne R. Pierce, *Woodrow Wilson and Harry Truman. Mission and Power in American Foreign Policy*, Westport/London 2003.
- 2 Cf. Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919. Six Months that Changed the World*, New York 2003, esp. p. 3–35.
- 3 Michael Salewski, *Der Erste Weltkrieg*, Paderborn 2004, 318. Also see: Thomas Kühne, *Demokratisierung und Parlamentarisierung: Neue Forschungen zur politischen Entwicklungsfähigkeit Deutschlands vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*. In: *GuG* 31 (2005), p. 293–316; Dennis Sweeney, *Reconsidering the Modernity Paradigm: reform movements, the social and the state in Wilhelmine Germany*. In: *Social History* 31 (2006), p. 405–434.
- 4 Cf. Detlef Junker, *Politik, Sicherheit, Wirtschaft, Kultur und Gesellschaft: Dimensionen transatlantischer Beziehungen*. In: idem (ed.), *Die USA und Deutschland im Zeitalter des Kalten Krieges. Ein Handbuch, Vol. 1: 1945–1968*, Stuttgart/Munich 2001, p. 17–56; here 19. Also see Klaus Schwabe, *Eine Neue Weltordnung? Der Beitrag Amerikas zur Lösung der Deutschlandfrage durch den Friedensschluss von Versailles*. In: Manfred Berg/Philipp Gassert (eds.), *Deutschland und die USA in der Internationalen Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Festschrift Detlef Junker*, Stuttgart 2004, p. 263–278.
- 5 Salewski, *Erster Weltkrieg* (note 3), p. 319.

cratically legitimised government acknowledged responsibility for the disastrous outcome of the war, it would thus compromise its own democratic system and exonerate the authoritarian one of the supreme military command. Thus, as a result of Ludendorff's solicitation the constitution was changed, the parliamentary principle established and Prince Max von Baden was nominated as the Reich chancellor.⁶ This first democratic government, in which the majority of parties were represented by state secretaries without portfolios, sent Wilson a first diplomatic note on October 3rd 1918. It named Wilson's Fourteen Points of January 8th 1918⁷ as the basis for peace negotiations. These Fourteen points included the withdrawal from all occupied territories, the establishment of an independent Polish state, the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France and the sovereignty of the peoples, but *not* a change of regime in Germany. This was about to change. Wilson wanted the German Empire to collapse. Already in his first reply on October 8th 1918 he asked Max von Baden whether he was only speaking on behalf of those powers of the Reich, who had been waging the war until then.⁸ The von Baden's answer on October 12th read: "The present German government, which carries the responsibility for this step towards peace, has been formed through negotiations and in accordance with the great majority of the parliament [*Reichstag*]. In every one of its actions, sustained by the will of the majority, the Reich chancellor speaks in the name of the German government and the German people."⁹ Thus, Max von Baden had eliminated the supreme military command and the emperor from the constitutional range, i.e. they were no longer constitutional organs. As if this clarification had not happened, Wilson stated in his second note on October 14th that for the governments associated against Germany, it was indispensable to unequivocally know with whom they were negotiating.¹⁰ In his third note on October 23rd Wilson once again stressed that they were not willing to negotiate with the representatives of the old system. Bruno Doehring, the emperor's last court preacher, perceived a "satanic idea" in Wilson's demand for the abdication of Wilhelm II. Doehring confessed: "The monarchy in Prussia is a thousand times more than a political question for us Protestants: For us, it is a question of faith."¹¹ Since the demand for a regime change came externally and the young parliamentary democracy was bound to

6 Cf. Erich Matthias/Rudolf Morsey (eds.), *Die Regierung des Prinzen Max von Baden*, Düsseldorf 1962.

7 Text: Herbert Schambeck/Helmut Widder/Marcus Bergmann (eds.), *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*, Berlin 1993, p. 436 ff.

8 Edmund Marhefka (ed.), *Der Waffenstillstand 1918/19. Das Dokumentarmaterial der Waffenstillstandsverhandlungen von Compiègne, Spa, Trier und Brüssel. Notenwechsel, Verhandlungsprotokolle, Verträge, Gesamttätigkeitsbericht*. Hg. im Auftrag der deutschen Waffenstillstandskommission, Vol. 1: *Der Waffenstillstandsvertrag von Compiègne und seine Verlängerungen nebst den finanziellen Beziehungen*, Berlin 1928, p. 11 f.

9 Text: loc.cit., p. 12.

10 Text: loc.cit., p. 13 f.

11 Quoted according to Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany. The Long Road West*, Vol. I: 1789–1933, Oxford 2006, p. 337.

execute it, democracy fell into discredit. German honour seemed tarnished. The harsh conditions of the ceasefire and the Treaty of Versailles contributed to compromise the parliamentary-democratic system in the population's eyes. Wilson's noble democratic aims, such as the sovereignty of the nations, obviously did not apply to the German-speaking countries. So, for example, the Entente powers disregarded the provisional national assembly's decision from Vienna on November 12th 1918 to integrate German Austria into the Empire. Additionally it was not the old autocratic powers but the social democrats, who were in favour of a greater German national state.¹²

It was not only the deep chasm between Wilson's Fourteen Points on the one hand and a rearrangement of Europe on the other hand, which compromised the American nation's democratic ideals of freedom and peace. It was also the living conditions within the United States, which had hardly kept up with the standards proclaimed in Europe. In truth the ideological debate with the Central European powers encouraged Wilson to take pains for a similar democratisation in his own country. In 1916 he cautiously greeted the women's rights movement. At that time in only twelve of the 48 states did women have the right to vote.¹³ Also African Americans, who did not have the right to vote and were forced to live in segregation from the white population, pinned their hopes on their president's freedom programme. Most black leaders saw the United States' engagement in the First World War as a chance to realise the freedom, which had been promised for everybody including African Americans. As a result of the war immigration from Europe was stagnating, thus thousands of African Americans streamed from the South to the North, in order to find employment in the industry and flee the repression in the Southern states. During the last year of the war an orgy of violence erupted in the country. Alone in May 1918 the state of Georgia recorded 11 lynch murders.

Wilson's principle of sovereignty was intended to be valid all over the world, but only for whites. Imperialism was still the ruling force in Asia and Africa, while the USA's democratic allies, France and Great Britain, were sharing the German and Turkish colonies among themselves.

At the beginning of 1918, the publisher Walter Lippmann (1889-1974) declared that the battle for democracy could not be over after the defeat of Prussian autocracy. America must also rivet on its own tyrannies as well on the coal mines of Colorado, the autocratic steel industry, clothing shops and the slums.¹⁴ During the 1919/20 great steel workers' strike 365,000 workers took part in the walkout and thus America was caught up by its own freedom proclamations. Yet, it was not progress that triumphed, instead a restrictive conglomerate of laws, which were passed during the war, lead to one of the most conservative decades in American history. Several thousand American citizens were

12 Cf. loc.cit., p. 340.

13 Cf. Foner, *American Freedom*, loc.cit. (note 1), p. 171.

14 Quoted from loc.cit., p. 175.

sentenced to long term imprisonment because they had spoken out against the war. Social unrest was also violently suppressed. "Almost dictatorial measures"¹⁵ were taken in order to reconvert the American economy to a war industry.

Wilson's claim to democratise the whole world and to install an international peace order¹⁶ was contradicted by the circumstances existing in his own country. Nevertheless, this claim was tantamount to the will of the US administration to be acknowledged as the leading ideological world power. When considering the period, in which Wilson proclaimed his Fourteen Points that were basically a guideline for world peace, then it becomes obvious that the United States hereby once more underlined her claim for leadership. The Fourteen Points from January 8th 1918 were the answer to the peace negotiations of Brest-Litovsk, which had begun on December 22nd 1917 and which Wilson essentially nullified in his speech. In further speeches, the last one given on September 27th 1918,¹⁷ Wilson affirmed his principles, which also clearly opposed Soviet Russia's ideological basis.¹⁸ The American-Soviet antagonism began at that point, not in 1945.

If all German hopes were initially pinned on Wilson and the United States because they could hardly expect a just peace from Great Britain and France, then after the peace treaty they regarded him as responsible for their desperate situation.¹⁹ Wilson had given in to the Allies and had not defended for his own principles.

Wilson received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1919, but the US Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles and as such rejected membership of the League of Nations. The convention of the Democratic Party nominated James Middleton Cox (1870–1957) instead of Wilson. However, America elected the Republican party's candidate, Warren G. Harding (1865–1923), as president and withdrew from the Old World, once more to Germany's disappointment.²⁰

Previously the Western Allies, lead by the USA, had more or less coercively democratized vast parts of Europe, including Germany.²¹ The German people had not chosen the republican constitution as the result of their own development. Instead, the Weimar Republic had come into existence as a consequence of the military defeat of the Empire. On August 24th/25th 1921 the USA conclud-

15 Reiling, *Deutschland*, loc.cit. (note 1), p. 307.

16 Cf. loc.cit., p. 304.

17 Cf. Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: United States foreign policy at home and abroad; 1750 to the present*, New York 1994, p. 291 f.

18 Cf. Kendrick A. Clements, *The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson*, Lawrence, Kans. 1992, p. 168.

19 Cf. Ernst Fraenkel, *Das deutsche Wilsonbild* (1960). In: idem., *Ges. Schriften*, Vol. 4, *Amerikastudien*, p. 374–440.

20 Cf. Fritz Stern, *Amerikanisch-deutsche Beziehungen*. In: Frank Trommler (ed.), *Amerika und die Deutschen. Bestandsaufnahme einer 300-jährigen Geschichte*, Opladen 1986, p. 131.

21 Cf. Gerhard Besier/Katarzyna Stokłosa, *Das Europa der Diktaturen. Eine neue Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, München 2006.

ed separate peace treaties with the German Empire and Austria, which made American-German relations appear better than those of Germany and the two other Western democracies, Great Britain and France. The quick start to good economic relations between the USA and Germany (“economic peace”) admittedly implied that a system of government, which was convenient for the USA²², was established in Germany. Furthermore, Germany was to be integrated in a new international economic and political order, which was primarily determined by the United States. Throughout the nineteen-twenties the American Government sought a peaceful exchange with Germany on an economic basis. Due to the interaction of government and business people the political and economic factors seemed so entangled with each other that both factors complemented each other. When France occasionally opposed this policy, the American Government in 1926 and in 1931 seriously considered forming a German-British-American block.²³ At the beginning of September 1930 the French foreign minister, Aristide Briand (1862–1932), supported by the German foreign minister Gustav Stresemann²⁴, submitted a plan for the “United States of Europe” i. e. a European customs and economy union, to the assembly of the League of Nations. This plan never progressed.

On the German part there was also a lively interest in the United States, which due to its prosperity and its lifestyle had an almost magical appeal for many Germans. The life and work of car manufacturer Henry Ford, who starting from nothing had reached incredible heights, was the personification of the American dream for many people. However, Ford’s anti-Semitism did not remain unnoticed and greatly impressed Baldur von Schirach, as the latter stated on record during the Nuremberg trials.²⁵

Thus, in the nineteen-twenties a new rapprochement between the USA and Germany took place. It took shape in form of international agreements and treaties, especially the Arbitral and Settlement Treaty of 1928, but also the renewing contacts in non-governmental areas.²⁶ However, this hopeful development was disturbed by the German Empire’s military revisionist intentions, especially during the Disarmament Conference of 1932. It became clear that a political and economic reinforcement not only mattered a great deal to Germany, but that the country also strived for a military power position. It was part of the maxims of American policy that the states should be willing to safeguard their interests on the basis of international law, by making use of diplomacy and international treaties, not by military means. “The old Prussian spirit is

22 Reiling, *Deutschland*, loc.cit. (note 1), p. 317.

23 Cf. loc.cit., p. 319.

24 Cf. Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann. Weimar’s Greatest Statesman*, Oxford 2004.

25 Cf. Reiling, *Deutschland*, loc.cit. (note 1), p. 322 f.; Neil Baldwin, *Henry Ford and the Jews: the mass production of hate*, New York 2003.

26 Cf. Werner Link, *Die amerikanische Stabilisierungspolitik in Deutschland 1921–32*, Düsseldorf 1970; Michael Wala, *Weimar und Amerika*, Stuttgart 2001.

coming up,” was the comment of the American Secretary of State for foreign affairs, Henry Lewis Stimson, on the deconstruction of the Parliament of the Weimar Republic. He went on to say, “And now we have a new very dangerous sore spot in the world.”²⁷ President Hoover tried in vain to induce the Reich Government to relinquish plans to build the Armoured Cruiser B. Hoover said that the American Government found it difficult to explain to the tax payers why the USA remitted Germany’s debts, while Germany was building battleships.²⁸ On the cultural level the Nazi’s protests against the anti-war movie “All Quiet on the Western Front” had already proven disastrous. The film, produced in the USA in 1930, was based on Erich Maria Remarque’s novel of the same name about the First World War and was welcomed as the manifesto of a democratic mentality. The advertising, mentioning its ban in the Soviet Union, claimed that “the democratic world [...] [perceives] a new, sublime sense in this book and movie”.²⁹ After the film was also prohibited in Germany in mid-December 1930, since it was considered to taint the reputation of the *Reichswehr*, the American public reacted with indignation.

Some highlights of the German-American interwar relations were the exchange of scholars, the record-setting navigation of the high-speed steamers *Bremen* and *Europa*, the reception of the crew of the Junkers plane *Bremen* and the journeys of the German airships *Graf Zeppelin* and *Do X*. Despite some irritation every now and then, Stresemann’s foreign policy strategy of being bound to the West and his appeasement policy produced a continuous improvement of American-German relations. Tensions only arose when, during Heinrich Brüning’s chancellorship, a policy of virtual confrontation was adopted. Not least because of the American credits in the area of 8 billion Marks did the Americans admittedly maintain a constant interest in the political developments in Germany. Their wishes centred on an “orderly constitutional state [...]”.³⁰ Due to German-Russian military collaboration³¹ it is often forgotten that the United States were the first nation ready to start a formal exchange programme with the German Reich.³² Regardless of scepticism the USA therefore continued their “policy of a peaceful change” towards Germany.³³ Only since Brüning’s fall and his substitution by Franz von Papen in June 1932 did a clear deterioration of the German-American relations occur.³⁴ The political radicalisation and the empha-

27 Quoted from Wala, Weimar, loc.cit., p. 278.

28 Cf. loc.cit., p. 281.

29 Loc.cit., p. 277; cf. Carmen Müller, Weimar im Blick der USA. Amerikanische Auslandskorrespondenten und öffentliche Meinung zwischen Perzeption und Realität, Münster 1997, p. 354 f.

30 Quoted from Wala, Weimar, loc.cit. (note 26), p. 281.

31 Cf. Heinrich August Winkler, Weimar 1918–1933. Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie, Munich 1993, p. 170.

32 Cf. Wala, Weimar, loc.cit. (note 26), p. 286.

33 Müller, Weimar, loc.cit. (note 29), p. 367.

34 Winkler wrote on the final cause for the collapse of the first German democracy: “If the collapse of the first German Republic can be traced back to a single root cause, it

sis of the military power in German politics caused growing concerns for the American diplomats.³⁵ Nevertheless, the American public mistakenly assumed that the Germans, like themselves, had a clear aversion of Fascism and Communism and thus played down the developments in Germany.³⁶ However, Hitler was often depicted in the American press as a mediocre and ridiculous personality, who was not to be taken seriously. Goebbels was given the belittling nickname “Wotan’s Mickey Mouse”.³⁷

The reversal in public opinion, which finally led to a unanimous rejection of the Third Reich, occurred very slowly.³⁸ This was not only due blunt misjudgements of the regime’s true aims, but also the Americans’ imperturbable belief in the superiority of liberal-democratic state and social orders.³⁹ However, in American business circles and against the backdrop of a decreasing economic trend and unemployment in the USA, the development of the new, National Socialist model of society and economy was observed with great curiosity.

The anti-Jewish excesses certainly caused a number of protest demonstrations. The most important demonstration took place on March 27th 1933 in Madison Square Garden. Between 55,000 and 60,000 people took part in this event, which was organised by the “American Jewish Committee”, the “American Jewish Congress” and “B’nai B’rith”. Admittedly, these protests had no great effect, just as the various calls to boycott German products were unsuccessful. This was to a certain extent the result of an anti-Semitic bias in the United States.⁴⁰ The climax of parliamentary protest was reached by the resolution of New York representative, William I. Sirowich, according to which all contracts with Germany should be annulled. The Congress did not pass this motion. On the other hand, the growing number of reports of riots in Germany managed to cause a continual decline in support for the Germans. In the long run all at-

lies in the long historical deferment of the question of liberty in the nineteenth century – or, to put it another way, in the non-simultaneity of Germany’s political modernisation: the early democratisation of suffrage and the late democratisation of the system of government.” Winkler, *Germany. The Long Road West*, Vol. 1, loc.cit. (note 11), p. 489.

35 Cf. Wala, Weimar, loc.cit. (note 26), p. 290 f.

36 Cf. Müller, Weimar, loc.cit. (note 29), p. 368.

37 Quoted from loc.cit., 392. Cf. also Benjamin L. Alpers, *Dictators, Democracy, & American Public Culture. Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s–1950s*, Chapel Hill/London 2003.

38 Cf. Herbert Sirois, *Zwischen Illusion und Krieg. Deutschland und die USA 1933–1941*, Paderborn 2000; Philipp Gassert, *Amerika im Dritten Reich. Ideologie, Propaganda und Volksmeinung 1933–1945*, Stuttgart 1997; Inge Marszolek, *Das Amerikabild im “Dritten Reich”. Ambivalenzen und Widersprüche*. In: Rudolf von Thadden/Alexander Escudier (eds.), *Amerika und Europa. Mars und Venus? Das Bild Amerikas in Europa*, Göttingen 2004, p. 49–64.

39 Cf. Müller, Weimar, loc.cit. (note 29), p. 373 f.

40 Cf. Gerhard Besier, *Contradiction to the Grassroots? The Stance of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ (FCC) towards the “Third Reich”*. In: *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift 2003*, p. 139–156.

tempts of placation could not hide that the desperate reports from Germany on the treatment of regime opponents and Jews were true.

Against the backdrop of the events in Germany, it may not be forgotten that the United States found itself in a desperate situation in the spring of 1933. At the end of 1932 the unemployment figure had risen to 13 million, which was more than a quarter of the potential working population.⁴¹ President Hoover declared helplessly: "Some kind of monstrous power has seized the system, it is temporarily out of order."⁴² When the new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was sworn into office on March 4th 1933, the crisis had reached its peak. Roosevelt, who always showed optimism, understood the psychological dimension of this economic depression. In a special session of Congress he stated: "We put our trust in the future of democracy. The people of the United States have not failed. In their trouble, they ask for direct, vigorous action. They ask for discipline and leadership."⁴³ Roosevelt created the "New Deal", an experiment-rich and sometimes confused programme of action, which nevertheless caused great optimism. These beginnings had, among other things, the consequence that ethnic, racial and religious minorities increasingly rose to the esteemed ranks of American society. Also according to this point of view, the New Deal was a victory of modern America over its own past. Politics, humanity, sense of justice, economic and social reforms merged to form a unity of action in the New Deal. After a transitory recovery of economy, the number of unemployed once again rose to 10 million in 1938. Only as a consequence of the outbreak of the war did the unemployment rate slowly sink, until in 1942 full employment was achieved.⁴⁴ The conservative Republicans were concerned about America's freedom and accused Roosevelt of following a socialist course.⁴⁵ In 1934 Herbert Hoover published a work with the meaningful title *The Challenge to Liberty*. While contemporary witnesses feared the slide into socialism, historians nowadays rather see certain parallels in the limitations of liberty to the emergency measures taken by the fascist regimes in Europe.⁴⁶

During this time, some influential political circles in the USA turned away from the outer world because they were of the erroneous conviction that these problems had been introduced from outside and it was possible to shut them out. This egocentric form of nationalism, called "isolationism", was to remain only an episode that finally lead to a system of collective security. However, they

41 Cf. Alan Posener, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1999, p. 59.

42 Loc.cit., p. 68.

43 Loc.cit., p. 71. See also Jonathan Alter, *The Defining Moment. FDR's Hundred Days and the Triumph of Hope*, New York/London/Toronto/Sydney 2006.

44 Cf. Erich Angermann, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika seit 1917*, Munich 9 1995, p. 148.

45 Cf. Walter Wieland, *Zwischen Freiheit und Sicherheit: amerikanische Sozialpolitik im Widerstreit der Interessengruppen (1935-54)*, Münster 1995. See also George Lakoff, *Whose Freedom? The Battle over America's Most Important Idea*, New York 2006.

46 Cf. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Entfernte Verwandte. Faschismus, Nationalsozialismus, New Deal*, Munich 2004.

initially wanted to a neutrality legislation in the mid-nineteen-thirties in order to avoid America once more becoming involved in a world conflict. In the case of war, the American president had to place an embargo on munitions-deliveries to the war-waging countries and to declare that the travel and goods transport of American citizens under the flag of war-waging countries would receive no American protection. Roosevelt dismissed all such isolationist ideas on April 14th 1939.⁴⁷ He asked for Hitler's and Mussolini's assurance that they would not attack 31 expressly named countries⁴⁸ and as such contradicted the officially neutrality course by repeatedly signalling his support of his partners on the "Old World".⁴⁹

In order to understand the further development and its stunning parallels with the constellations at the end of First World War one must take into account that Roosevelt was an old Wilsonian. "Wilson's vision remained Roosevelt's model of action until the end of his life."⁵⁰ Roosevelt also pursued a concept of collective security guarantees. In his famous "Quarantine Speech" of October 5th 1937⁵¹ he pronounced himself, admittedly still in cautious terms, to be in favour of a collective containment of the totalitarian aggression in Europe and Asia. Although the number of sympathisers with right or left wing extremism was relatively small in the USA, anti-democratic forces also caused some turbulences in America. The House Committee on Un-American Activities, which was constituted in 1938, dedicated itself less to fascist activities and more to the alleged Communist infiltration of the American government administration. Conservative circles wanted to expose the "New Deal" as a "red" plan to destroy the American society. Bound by the majority vote of the neutralists and the mood in the United States, the American declaration of neutrality took place on September 5th 1939.⁵² After all, Roosevelt succeeded with the annulment of the embargo for munitions, so that the later Allied countries could receive supplies.

In order to secure his re-election in summer 1940 Roosevelt was urged to assure that on no account would he lead the country into a war. Since Great

47 At the Pan-America Day on 14. 4. 1939 he stated: "We know now that the development of the next generation will so narrow the oceans separating us from the Old World, that our customs and our actions are necessarily involved with hers, whether we like it or not. Beyond question, within a scant few years air fleets will cross the ocean as easily as today they cross the closed European seas. Economic functioning of the world becomes therefore necessarily a unit; no interruption of it anywhere can fail, in the future, to disrupt economic life everywhere." <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/7-2-188/188-13.html> (last check: 27.10.2006).

48 Message to Hitler and Mussolini on 14. 4. 1939, Samuel I. Rosenman (ed.), *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 13 vol., New York 1938-1950, Vol. 8, p. 201-205; ADAP, Serie D, Vol. VI, p. 202-204.

49 Cf. Sirois, *Illusion*, loc.cit. (note 38), p. 179.

50 Posener, *Roosevelt*, loc.cit. (note 41), p. 53.

51 Cf. Sirois, *Illusion*, loc.cit. (note 38), p. 105 ff.

52 According to an opinion poll of October 1939, 96.5 percent wanted America to keep out of the war.

Britain had no dollar reserves left at the end of December 1940 and bonds for war-waging countries were prohibited by the neutrality law Roosevelt took up a "Lend-Lease" program in order to continue to provide the Allies with arms.⁵³ In January 1941 Roosevelt announced his famous "Four Freedoms" as rough guidelines of a future world peace order: Freedom of Speech, Freedom to Worship, Freedom from Want and Freedom from Fear. Popular artist, Norman Rockwell, illustrated them. These freedoms, which were supplemented by further principles namely the refusal of territorial aggrandisements, sovereign rights, self-government of the peoples, freedom of movement on sea and non-violence, were included in the so-called Atlantic Charta of August 14th 1941. This was a common declaration, which Roosevelt handed to the press at his first meeting with British Prime Minister Churchill. This moral appeal had a similar function to Wilson's Fourteen Points and culminated in the declaration that they strove for "the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny".⁵⁴ Support for the Soviet Union after the German attack in June 1941 was more difficult to gain than for Great Britain because the Hitler-Stalin pact and the anticommunist activities in the USA were still fresh in the memory of the American population. Only Japan's attack against Pearl Harbor on December 7th 1941 and the war declaration of the Axis powers Germany⁵⁵ and Italy four days later relieved Roosevelt from the isolationist limitation and led to reconsideration in vast circles of the USA. From then on there were no loyalty problems regarding the Roosevelt government, although the tolerance clearly decreased during the war. For example, alongside the 120,000 Americans of Japanese and Italian descent there were also approximately 24,000 German Americans and pacifists, who were considered politically untrustworthy, were interned on the basis of the "Alien Enemy Act" of 1798.⁵⁶

At the end of January 1942 the Allies agreed on an affirmation of the principles of the Atlantic Charter by signing the United Nations Declaration.⁵⁷

At the Moscow conference for foreign ministers in the second half of October 1943 a European advisory commission was constituted for the elaboration of a common post-war policy and the establishment of an international organisation to preserve peace was agreed upon. Although, this war on the part of the Anglo-Americans had been led as a "democratic crusade against the powers of darkness",⁵⁸ the United States did not want to repeat the mistakes of First World War and wanted to take active part in the shaping of an international order and its

53 Cf. Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR. The War President 1940-1943. A History*, New York 2000.

54 Quoted from Schambeck/Widder/Bergmann, *Dokumente*, loc.cit. (note 7), p. 480.

55 Germany was not interested in the USA's entry into the war and thus did not react to the various injuries to neutrality.

56 Cf. Stephen C. Fox, *Uncivil Liberties. Italian Americans Under Siege During World War II*, rev. ed., Parkland, Fla. 2000.

57 Cf. Angermann, *Die Vereinigten Staaten*, loc.cit. (note 44), p. 251; Felicitas Hentsche, *Demokratisierung als Ziel der amerikanischen Besatzungspolitik in Deutschland und Japan, 1943-1947*, Münster 2001, p. 32.

58 So Angermann, loc.cit., p. 256.

economic-social basis. To this purpose, already at the end of July 1944 the foundation of an international Monetary Fund and of an international bank for rebuilding and development were agreed. In late summer 1944 the USA, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, at a conference in Dumbarton Oakes at Washington, D.C. agreed on the plan of a Charter for the United Nations. In the following year the Statute of the United Nations was written in San Francisco.

Two times, Germany had unleashed war in order to gratify her world power delusions. What should happen now? Roosevelt as his successor, Harry S. Truman, insisted in principle on the continuity of American foreign politics,⁵⁹ which can be traced from the Wilson doctrine to the Atlantic Charta. In connection with the claim of international moral leadership, freedom in democracy and prosperity should be taught to the whole world. This “American Spirit of Liberty” was in essence also valid for Germany. Admittedly, the conditions were the denazification, demilitarisation, decentralisation, secession of territories and war-criminal processes as the first learning steps. The greater the divide between east and west, the more tolerantly the Americans behaved. The “Cold War”, incidentally a term brought in circulation in 1947 by Walter Lippmann (1889–1974),⁶⁰ forced the integration of West Germany into the American post-war order of the western world.⁶¹ This finally openly erupted into an east-west-conflict, which after the two world wars formed the third great ideological-political confrontation of the twentieth century.

After the conference of Casablanca in mid-February 1943 President Roosevelt formulated a sentence in relation to his politics of democratisation,⁶² which until today is one of the American basic convictions: Every nation which can freely choose its own form of government, would refuse a German or Japanese dictatorship.⁶³ We have long since learned that this doctrine is not true. However, the Americans of the mid-nineteen-forties did not yet believe that liberation and punishment of the perpetrators sufficed in order to clear the way for the establishment of a liberal democracy. Rather, they believed further steps, such as the psychological treatment of the German “national character” and re-education programs, to be absolutely necessary. Their aim consisted of a “liberation of the public area”, a change of society structures towards pluralism and civilization. The idea of a Civil Society formed the actual core of this democratic messianism. The USA also often disregarded cultural traditions in an imperialist manner. Again and again tensions accrued between the occupying power and

59 Cf. David McCullough, Truman, New York/London/Toronto/Sidney 1992.

60 Cf. Walter Lippmann, The Cold War. A Study of U.S. Foreign Policy (1947). Ed. Ronald Steel, New York 1972.

61 Cf. John Lewis Gaddis, The Cold War. A New History, New York 2005.

62 Cf. Frank Schumacher, Kalter Krieg und Propaganda. Die USA, der Kampf um die Weltmeinung und die ideelle Westbindung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1945–1955, Trier 2000, p. 151 ff.

63 Quoted from Hentschke, Demokratisierung, loc.cit. (note 57), p. 36.

the Germans, but also within the German population, which resulted from the careless contact with the native culture and the easygoing import of American cultural assets to Germany.⁶⁴ America understood and still understands its popular culture, at that time jazz, cinema, technology and consumer goods, as a source of its international power.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the USA did not succeed with some important social reforms. So, for example, they failed with the attempt to abolish the German civil service and to replace it by an Anglo-American variation.⁶⁶ According to the Americans even the first of all freedoms, religious freedom, could not be entirely established in Germany, a crucial deficit, which they have criticised until today.⁶⁷ For it was America's religious dynamics, which filled this people with revolutionary strength. This is what Max Weber meant when he wrote to Adolf von Harnack in 1906: "[...] when judging from a religious point of view [...] the American's average sect member [...] stands high above our mainstream 'Christian'."⁶⁸

However, with their democratisation politics the Americans once again encountered their cardinal problem: the problem of credibility. Admittedly, this did not break out in West Germany, which was soon the "model pupil"⁶⁹ of American democratisation politics, as an immediate consequence of the Second World War. However, it socially arrived with the Vietnam war and finally turned into an official government contradiction and rejection of American leadership before the second Gulf War. The justification to intervene with the inner structure of foreign societies, to perform cultural implantations and to advance the process of pluralisation of course wins only full persuasion from one's own integrity. This integrity has often been missing. The arduous process of having to explain to a young GI from the Southern states stationed in Germany that

64 Cf. Konrad Jarausch/Hannes Siegrist (eds.), *Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945–1970*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 1997, esp. p. 49 ff.; 275 ff.; 315 ff. Also see Heide Fehrenbach/Uta G. Poiger (eds.), *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations. American Culture in Western Europe and Japan*, New York/Oxford 2000.

65 Cf. Foner, *American Freedom*, loc.cit. (note 1), p. 232. Also see Uta G. Poiger, *Populärkultur*. In: Detlef Junker, *Die USA und Deutschland*, loc.cit. (note 4), Vol. 1, p. 666–675; Edward Larkey, *Populäre Musik*. In: loc.cit., p. 517–528; 676–685; Michael Ermarth, *Populärkultur*. In: Junker, *Die USA und Deutschland*, Vol. 2: 1968–1990, Stuttgart 2001, p. 507–516; Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire. America's Advance through Twentieth Century Europe*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 2005.

66 Cf. Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, Vol. 2: *Deutsche Geschichte vom 'Dritten Reich' bis zur Wiedervereinigung*, Munich 2000, p. 121.

67 Cf. Gerhard Besier, "The First of our Liberties ... a Lustre to our Country." Zum Verständnis der Religionsfreiheit in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika. In: idem./H. Lübke et. al., *Religionsfreiheit und Konformismus. Über Minderheiten und die Macht der Mehrheit*, Münster 2004, p. 27–48.

68 Quoted from Claus Offe, *Selbstbetrachtung aus der Ferne. Tocqueville, Weber und Adorno in den Vereinigten Staaten*, Frankfurt a. M. 2004, p. 76.

69 Cf. Thomas Reuther, *Die ambivalente Normalisierung: Deutschlanddiskurs und Deutschlandbilder in den USA, 1941–1955*, Stuttgart 2000, p. 389 ff.

German racism was a basic evil of the *Führer's* dictatorship,⁷⁰ was of course only a reflex of the inner-American circumstances. The first question in the focus of discussion during the New Deal was economic security, not the civil and political rights of the African Americans. Only at the end of the nineteen-thirties and the beginning of the forties did civil rights become the centre of attention. However, at this time the left-liberal influence had already weakened and a conservative coalition of Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans ruled the Congress.⁷¹ Two of Roosevelt's Four Freedoms raised their suspicions. They argued that "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" were not "American freedoms", for they only encouraged individuals to make themselves dependent on the government.⁷² Instead, they demanded "Freedom of Private Enterprise", that is freedom for entrepreneurship and spirit of enterprise.⁷³ America itself was therefore in no way unanimous about the freedoms, with which it wanted to favour non-democratic Europe and finally the whole world! However, the harshest contradiction to their own ideals lay in the race question. In contrast to Wilson, who had propagated Anglo-Saxon culture as a national norm, Roosevelt promoted the pluralistic acceptance of a cultural variety, but he could not remove the racial bias, which stood as antithesis to the democratic ideals and that, although Nazi-Germany had been able to refer to the American practice of segregation in order to affirm its own race theories. There were admittedly some equality measures during the Second World War⁷⁴, but particularly in the South of the United States racial discrimination continued. The USA reported 13 lynch murders of Blacks in 1940/41 alone.⁷⁵ In a town in Mississippi, which is ironically called "Liberty", a Black pastor was murdered in 1944 simply because he had refused to sell his land, where there was supposed to be oil, to a white man. African Americans, who migrated to the North or West met with hate and aversion there. In June 1943 Detroit experienced racial unrests, which cost the lives of 34 people, and 20,000 white workers of an aero engine factory went on strike because the wages of their black colleagues had been raised.⁷⁶

It is part of the ironies of the era that the fight or demarcation especially against the totalitarian dictatorships of Europe led to an inner democratisation of the United States. The USA had to bring their own house in order under the pressure of their foreign policy claim of hegemony. For example a judgment from the Supreme Court of Justice of 1943, which ruled that Jehovah's Witnesses had the right to refuse to salute the flag in public schools, was part of

70 Cf. Gerhard Besier, "Selbstreinigung" unter britischer Besatzungsherrschaft. Die Evangelisch-lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers und ihr Landesbischof Marahrens 1945-1947, Göttingen 1986, p. 20.

71 Cf. Foner, American Freedom, loc.cit. (note 1), p. 218.

72 Loc.cit., p. 228.

73 Loc.cit., p. 230.

74 Cf. loc.cit., p. 242 f.

75 Cf. loc.cit., p. 242.

76 Loc.cit., p. 243.

this process.⁷⁷ Under “Cold War” conditions this process continued. In the ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union the Americans were constantly forced to increase their own moral credibility. By upholding the ideals of a universally understood free society, despite their own weaknesses, the USA also domestically nurtured a resistance-potential, which constantly evoked new social eruptions. Both world wars had an emancipation effect for women and minorities. The newspaper *The Crisis* wrote “A racially segregated army cannot fight for a free world.”⁷⁸ In tough and even violent confrontations during the nineteen-fifties and sixties the African Americans supported by left-liberal forces and the Supreme Court⁷⁹, struggled for their socio-political equality. They are rightfully proud of this act of self-liberation.

“From the German point of view, no other country of the world has determined the fate of the Germans in the twentieth Century as much as the United States of America. [...] the step-by-step transformation of West German values, mentality, society and culture cannot be explained without considerable American influence”,⁸⁰ writes Detlef Junker, an historian of America. The limits of this shaping influence lie in the understanding of freedom. America’s optimistic dynamics, the aversion against a strong state and administrative over-regulation, the permissive scepticism, the joy of risk and the optimistic self-confidence of being able to remove problems out of one’s own strength – these attitudes have remained highly alien to the Germans. For promises of security they have willingly accepted all possible limitations of their freedom and have been obedient to authority until today. Great German intellectuals, from Max Weber⁸¹ to Karl R. Popper⁸² and Ralf Dahrendorf⁸³, have suffered exactly under that. And exactly the opposite, namely that “picture of freedom”, has always fascinated them about America, despite all reservations. But that is another story.

77 Cf. loc.cit., p. 223.

78 Loc.cit., p. 244.

79 Cf. Jim Newton, *Justice for All. Earl Warren and the Nation He Made*, New York 2006, esp. p. 292 ff.

80 Junker, *Politik*, loc.cit. (note 4), p. 22; 25.

81 Cf. Claus Offe, *Selbstbetrachtung aus der Ferne*, loc.cit.(note 68), p. 59 ff.

82 Cf. Karl R. Popper, *Alles Leben ist Problemlösen. Über Erkenntnis, Geschichte und Politik*, Munich ²1996; idem., *Alle Menschen sind Philosophen*, München ²2005, esp. p. 155 ff.; 265 ff. In the latter Popper speaks of the “dreadful heresy of nationalism” and the “important moral demand for the protection of minorities. [...] The improvements that I have seen in this area during many visits to America since 1950 are much bigger than I ever thought possible.” [self translation] (Loc.cit., p. 229). Also see: loc.cit., p. 219 ff.

83 Cf. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Die angewandte Aufklärung; Entdeckung der Atemluft der Freiheit*. Interview with FAZ on 26. 3. 2005, p. 36.