

THE TIES THAT BIND

GERMAN AND AMERICAN YOUTH, AND THE FUTURE OF THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP

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Though no one could have predicted it at the time, the attacks of September 11th 2001 have become a symbol for a change in the relationship between the United States and Germany, through the alienation of young Americans and Germans from one another. The political conflicts between the United States and Germany over Iraq, the NSA, and human rights in the years following the attacks have masked a far more serious erosion in the foundations of the transatlantic relationship. Each generation since the Second World War has faced crises in German-American relations, including the occupation and subsequent NATO integration of West Germany in the 1950s, and the War in Vietnam; but previous periods of tension between the U.S. and Germany were followed by a restoration of ties based on the deep, fundamental connection between the two countries. The current crisis has been different, because it has occurred simultaneously with an accelerating deterioration of nearly all that has previously bound the United States to Germany. Young Germans in their 20s can hardly remember a time when Germany and the United States were genuinely close, let alone depended on each other, like during the Cold War. Americans of the same age see Germany as one nation among many, instead of as one of its most important allies and an opportunity for economic advancement.

The relationship between Germany and the United States since the Second World War has been undergirded by ethnic, economic, linguistic, and political links that have weakened and become marginalised in a multi-polar world and an increasingly multi-cultural America. Young Americans are not engaging in exchange with Germany or learning its language; their ethnic links to Germany have become diluted or non-existent. Simultaneously, more aggressive criticism from sectors of German society and the

media have created a space for anti-American activists to oppose the transatlantic relationship more strongly, and has made it more difficult for Germany to cooperate with the United States on issues such as TTIP, or Russian aggression. Because of this, restoration of the relationships strained by American actions in the Global War on Terror has been made extremely difficult, even in the face of great dangers that require German-American cooperation. However, as the post-war relationship between the United States and Germany fades, there is an opportunity for this younger generation to build a new relationship based on international-political equality, increasingly shared values, and new opportunities for business in a globalised world.



U.S. Soldier in Shula, Iraq: Germans and Americans hold strong negative opinions of one another over the issue of Iraq. | Source: Charles W. Gill, U.S. Army, flickr ©.

THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT...

The foundations of the American view of Germany, and the German view of America, can almost be described as exact opposites. Germans have historically viewed the United States through its direct actions in relation to Germany and the rest of the world. Because of its massive military, cultural, and economic footprint, the United States has occupied a disproportionate measure of the German imagination. By contrast, American opinion of Germany is best described as founded on nostalgia. Americans who have ancestral ties to Germany and/or have served in Germany in

the U.S. military have been critical in shaping German-American relations. This foundation has lent a strong resiliency to American affection towards Germany. For example, opinion polls in 2003 demonstrated a considerable mutual disdain between America and Germany over the issue of Iraq, with both citizenries holding quite negative opinions of one another.¹ However, by 2004, American opinion of Germany was nearly back to its 2002 high and hasn't decreased since. By contrast, German opinion of the United States has still not completely recovered.²



The Mardi Gras Society Rheinischer Verein in Chicago: The German-American heritage lost most of its former relevance. | Source: spablab, flickr ©.

The German-American community is the foundation of American affection towards Germany. Germans themselves don't regard German-Americans as kin in any meaningful way, but German heritage in America drives most studies of German as a language, celebrations of German culture and holidays, and American public opinion in favour of Germany. There are 46 million Americans who claim German ancestry and they comprise the plurality ethnic group from Ohio across the north all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

- 1 | Cf. "Perceptions Of Germany And The Germans Among The U.S. Population", Magid, Dec 2013, http://c.y.mcdn.com/sites/www.aatg.org/resource/resmgr/GermanisCritical/PerceptionsofGermany2013_Mag.pdf (accessed 15 May 2015).
- 2 | Cf. Pew Research Center, "Global Indicators Database", 2014, <http://pewglobal.org/database/indicator/1/country/81> (accessed 15 May 2015).

America once had hundreds of German-language newspapers, and a vibrant German-speaking culture.³ During the First World War, the German language was banned and the culture suppressed, but this was unable to permanently squelch German-Americans' nostalgia for the land of their ancestors. Following the war, hundreds of thousands of American soldiers were stationed in Germany, experiencing German culture and building connections with German people, and forming an important link between the United States and Germany in the American imagination. These soldiers and Americans of German descent formed the backbone of German language study in the United States. American businessmen and tourists flocked to Germany and vice versa.

Politically, the Cold War and defense of Europe against the threat of Communism bound Germany and the United States together. However, these times were not without controversy and tension. German traditionalists were suspicious of American values and morals brought by the soldiers after the war, peaceniks were suspicious of integration into NATO, and some young Germans were so incensed by the American War in Vietnam that they attacked U.S. bases and murdered several young American soldiers.⁴ American affection for Germany, on the other hand, never waned. This, coupled with a Germany that was both dependent on and grateful for American economic and military assistance, enabled the transatlantic relationship to weather many storms.

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In the early 2000s, a combination of a strong economic downturn and political alienation had a strong negative effect on most aspects of the transatlantic relationship. Superficially, the German-American relationship seems to have recovered from its absolute lows in 2003. Trade, tourism, and public opinion polls have all dramatically recovered: tourism from Germany to the U.S. has doubled since 2003, trade is up dramatically since 2000, and German approval of the United States has risen to about half.⁵ However, despite the raw numbers, the most important aspects of the German-American relationship have withered. German

3 | Cf. "German-Americans: The Silent Minority", *The Economist*, 7 Feb 2015, <http://econ.st/1xs1yQF> (accessed 15 May 2015).

4 | Cf. Stefan Aust, *Baader-Meinhoff: The Inside Story of the R.A.F.*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009.

5 | U.S. Census Bureau, "Trade in Goods with Germany", 3 Apr 2015, <http://census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c4280.html> (accessed 15 May 2015); Pew Research Center, n. 2.

language study, once a respectable 20 per cent of total American foreign language study has declined to six per cent of the total.⁶ Backed by extensive efforts through the Chinese government, Mandarin language study has displaced German as the third language of instruction at many American high schools (Spanish and French being the first two). German programs have difficulty in appealing to non-white American students, who now make up a much larger proportion of the American student body.⁷ Aging German teachers are not being replaced, and the proportion of schools with any German program at all has dropped from 1/4, to 1/7. Mainly due to ignorance, young Americans think of Germany primarily as the land of Nazis and the Holocaust⁸, and their imaginations stretch not towards Europe, but Asia, with its promise of spectacular profits, and its dangers of conflict. The engine of the world economy and center of global military power is moving East, and young Americans are following.



Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Del Rosario with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in 2013: Due to America's pivot to Asia the transatlantic economic ties are becoming less important. | Source: U.S. Embassy Manila, flickr ©©©.

- 6 | Cf. Nelly Furman/David Goldberg/Natalia Lusin, "Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2009", Modern Language Association, Dec 2010, http://mla.org/pdf/2009_enrollment_survey.pdf (accessed 15 May 2015).
- 7 | Cf. Sam Dillon, "German in a Multicultural World", *The New York Times*, 13 Apr 2012, <http://nyti.ms/193TQbm> (accessed 15 May 2015).
- 8 | Cf. Pew Research Center, "Germany and the United States: Reliable Allies", 7 May 2015, <http://pewglobal.org/2015/05/07/germany-and-the-united-states-reliable-allies> (accessed 15 May 2015).

The U.S. government is of a similar mindset as its young people, and intends to “pivot to Asia”. Traditionally America has a “Two Ocean Navy” in the Atlantic and the Pacific. America will continue to have a two ocean navy, but those oceans will be the Pacific and the Indian. America’s economic, diplomatic, and military resources are going to be stretched to the limit across the region between Jerusalem and Shanghai, leaving little for Europe. Even the tourism and economic numbers that have recovered so well since the early 2000s are a shrinking piece of the overall pie. Trade with Germany has almost doubled, but as a percentage of America’s total foreign trade, it has slightly declined.⁹ Similarly, while tourism has technically doubled, as an overall share of the total it is less than three per cent, virtually the same as in 2002. In business dealings, vacations, alliances, and most importantly, imaginations, Germany and America occupy ever smaller spaces in each other’s worlds.

CHASMS IN THE GERMAN-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP

Despite America’s changing focus and attention, Europe is still beset with economic instability, faces Russian aggression, and the ongoing threat of Islamist terrorism. The German-American relationship will be critical

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to facing these problems, and must be repaired. Americans have difficulty understanding the anger Germans felt over the invasion of Iraq, and the deep disappointment of many Germans over Guantanamo Bay, CIA black sites in Eastern Europe, and drone warfare across the globe. But German-American cooperation is still required for the security and prosperity of the world. Russia is still engaging in violent aggression against its neighbors and undermining democracy, Afghanistan continues to require Western support, and ISIS is continuing its rampage across the Middle East, despite its recent setbacks. The world needs German-American cooperation, but some actions of the United States – especially the NSA scandal – in addition to the ongoing negotiations about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) have been detrimental to proponents of the American relationship in Germany, and have created an opening for opponents of the transatlantic relationship to undermine its foundations.

9 | Cf. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), “U.S. International Trade by Selected Countries and Areas”, 6 Mar 2015, http://bea.gov/newsreleases/international/trade/trad_geo_time_series.xls (accessed 21 May 2015).

When evaluating the NSA scandal, it is important to note that no excuses can be made for the United States' recklessness. Germany is a long-standing ally of the United States, and such efforts to spy on the Chancellor's private phone and collect signals intelligence on German targets were categorically undeserved and unwarranted. The response of the United States was equally inconsiderate with President Obama refusing to apologise for the malfeasance. A congressional delegation sent to Germany at the time ended in acrimony when the Congressmen argued that America was justified in spying in Germany because 9/11 was planned in Hamburg. They claimed that Germans needed to understand the 9/11 experience to comprehend why America felt the need to spy so extensively, even on allies.¹⁰

But many people in Germany concluded that not only was America reckless with its actions in the Middle East, it was violating their privacy and perhaps even the privacy of the whole world. Young Germans, who lack the same sense of danger from world affairs as those who lived through the Cold War, are even more unsympathetic to America's espionage efforts.

That being said, countries spy on each other as a matter of course. America spies because it has the capability, and many of the countries protesting the United States would do the exact same things if they had an agency as capable as the NSA.

For young Americans and the group of Americans entering college this year, the defining event of their childhood was 9/11. They can't remember a year when the United States were not at war

in Afghanistan or Iraq. The experiences of young Americans and Germans could not be more different in this respect, and the malfeasance of the United States has contributed to the widening chasm between German and American youth. In addition some German

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media exercised a strong reaction to the NSA scandal without giving it proper historical perspective, which when viewed correctly, allows for a more sober evaluation of the exact scale of America's crime against Germany. While it is the duty of the media to reveal the damage caused by America's irresponsibility in its spying and the potential effects of large scale trade agreements, the reporting

10 | Cf. Raniah Salloum, "Non-Apology Tour: US Lawmakers in Berlin over NSA Scandal", *Spiegel online*, 26 Nov 2013, <http://spiegel.de/international/germany/a-935664.html> (accessed 15 May 2015).

of some German media outlets has contributed to the alienation of the two partners.

Another issue that reveals different approaches in the German-American relationship is the discussion over the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. This treaty, which often gets bad press in Germany, has the potential to expand European-American trade dramatically, and bring together a new generation of young American and German businessmen and women. The deal will probably benefit Germany more than any other party involved in the deal; almost 52 per cent of German GDP comes from international trade, compared to a mere 14 per cent for the United States. Despite the clear advantages for German exports, many in the German media have responded to the negotiations with paranoia and pessimism.¹¹ While a majority of EU citizens are in favour of the deal, the current climate in Germany means that Germans are some of the least supportive of TTIP, despite its enormous potential benefits to the German economy.¹² While discussion of TTIP's merits for the German economy is warranted with a trade deal of this magnitude, some of the commentary from mainstream German newspapers is downright vitriolic. The reality is that while there may be some instability following TTIP, any deal that allows Germany to export even more goods can be nothing but a good thing for German people and the German economy. With the relatively weak Euro buoying German exports, any improvement of access to foreign markets will be a net gain for Germany.

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Obviously the German media isn't the only party to blame for the German suspicion of TTIP. At the onset of the NSA scandal, Germans overwhelmingly desired to cut off trade negotiations until the NSA scandal was properly concluded.¹³ Trade deals like these require a great deal of trust, and the United States' actions and some unbalanced German media coverage have created an environment

11 | Cf. Matthias Bauer, "How Anti-TTIP Groups Dominate Online Media in Germany", Atlantic-Community.org, 24 Feb 2014, <http://atlantic-community.org/-/how-anti-ttip-groups-dominate-online-media-in-germany> (accessed 15 May 2015).

12 | Cf. Daniel Tost, "Malmström: Germany's TTIP debate 'more heated'", *EurActiv*, 24 Feb 2014, <http://euractiv.com/sections/trade-society/malmstrom-germanys-ttip-debate-more-heated-312354> (accessed 15 May 2015).

13 | Cf. "Embassy Espionage: The NSA's Secret Spy Hub in Berlin", *Der Spiegel*, 27 Oct 2013, <http://spiegel.de/international/germany/a-930205.html> (accessed 15 May 2015).

among Germans of paranoia directed against a deal that will probably benefit them more than any other party involved. With German-American trade comprising an increasingly small percentage of both countries' economies, this deal has the potential to create new connections among up-and-coming German and American businessmen and women seeking a profit. There will of course be some displacement within the German economy, and compromises made in the field of industry standards and other areas; this is certain. However, the effects will be nowhere near as negative as what is currently propagated by sectors of German society.¹⁴



For the German Chancellor, here in conversation with the U.S. President, there is no question that European standards will be preserved within the TTIP. | Source: Nikki Short, European Council, flickr ©©©©.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership is one of the greatest opportunities of the post-Cold War era to bring these two continents together, and if TTIP is squandered through the carelessness of the United States with the NSA scandal and the short-sightedness of some Germans regarding TTIP and German-American relations in general, this opportunity to invigorate

14 | Cf. "‘We can't protect every sausage,' says German agriculture minister over TTIP deal", *Deutsche Welle*, 1 Jan 2015, <http://dw.de/p/1EEem8> (accessed 15 May 2015).

relations between a new generation of Germans and Americans will be squandered.

A NEW HOPE

So we are left with a discouraging picture of the new era of German-American relations. Young Americans will have hardly any ethnic links with Germany, won't do as much business with Germans compared to their fathers, won't have been stationed in Germany as soldiers, and will probably not have studied German in school, even if they were lucky enough to have the opportunity to do so. In polls, Americans are enthusiastic in their affections for Germany, but without actual contact between the people, it's not clear that this affection matters. Germans are, by far, more reticent about their allies across the Atlantic,

but it's not clear that this is relevant either.

While Germans will continue to learn English to improve their access to the global economy, and, politically, Germany will still be

allied with the United States through NATO, their actual contact with Americans will diminish. The American attention is turning to Asia, and the political and military resources of the United States will focus on Middle Eastern oil and East Asian trade routes, leaving Germany and Europe on the relative periphery of the American mental and political orientation. However, Germany is not unimportant simply because young Americans and parts of the American government believe it to be so. America is shifting its resources to Asia; but this creates a marvelous opportunity to build a new political relationship between Germany and the United States based on political equality, and the enormous shared values of the new generation of Americans and their German counterparts.

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For the first generations of the post-war German-American relationship, the bonds between the United States and Germany were close, but the people grew gradually distant as Germans turned away from the nationalism, conspicuous religiosity, and extreme individualism of their American counterparts. The political relationship between Germany and the United States was close by necessity, but given America's overwhelming military and economic might, the two nations were far from equal. Americans learned German because their grandparents did, and tourism and trade were high because during the Cold War, there were few other options.

The new generation of Germans and Americans will experience a different world in all of these respects. The values of young Americans line up increasingly closely with their German counterparts.

Regarding the importance of religion, social values, and the role of government, young Germans and Americans are closer in values than any previous generation.

While young Germans vote in ways not entirely dissimilar to older generations, there is an incredible dissonance between the values of the youngest generation and the oldest in the United States.¹⁵ Regarding the importance of religion, social values, and the role of government, young Germans and Americans are closer in values than any previous generation. America's increasingly multi-cultural identity is in turn appealing to more and more Germans, as American society embraces the cosmopolitan characteristics represented by President Obama, who is still personally popular among many Germans. And while far fewer Americans are learning German, we are likely to see a significant return to the language because of its importance for doing business in Europe. In Russia, there are more students learning German than English, and the German language is important for business across Eastern Europe. While Americans may have stopped learning German for sentimental reasons, the potential renaissance in German-American trade under TTIP will cause a resurgence due to the sheer economic benefit of knowing the language.

Politically, America's interests are focused on other parts of the world, which means there is an opportunity for a new relationship of equality with Germany. America is going to depend on Germany for the peace and prosperity of Europe. As its energies will be elsewhere, and it is incumbent upon Germany to take responsibility for Europe. In the past, some have seen Germany as a bridge between East and West, balancing the excesses of the Western democracies of America, France, and Britain while attempting to bring Russia into the family of nations. Such a naive view can no longer be entertained. Germany will have to take its place at the heart of the West as the indispensable leader of the democratic societies of Europe, prepared to confront any threat to their peace and freedom.

15 | Cf. Jocelyn Kiley, "As GOP Celebrates Win, No Sign of Narrowing Age, Gender Gaps", Pew Research Center, *Fact Tank*, 5 Nov 2014, <http://pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/05/as-gop-celebrates-win-no-sign-of-narrowing-gender-age-gaps> (accessed 15 May 2015); "AfD: The party of the youth?", Open Europe blog, 25 Sep 2013, <http://openeuropeblog.blogspot.de/2013/09/afd-party-of-youth.html> (accessed 15 May 2015).

The German Federal Government has already boldly taken steps toward filling this new role. It has embraced Germany's economic leadership in Europe and has taken on responsibility for security policy by rapidly and efficiently arming Kurdish fighters in Northern Iraq. It has assumed a leading role in the negotiations over Ukraine, taken a patient line against Vladimir Putin's aggression in parts of Ukraine. Previous generations of Americans have looked condescendingly upon Europeans for not providing for their own security. But now Americans will grow up seeing Germany responsible for and protective of its own continent, and as an international equal.

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With all of these factors combined, we can see more clearly the future of the relationship between young Germans and Americans. In an increasingly globalising world and multi-cultural United States, Germans and Americans occupy an increasingly small space in each other's lives. While trade and tourism between the two nations are growing, they are now a much smaller percentage of the whole, while German language study in the U.S. has declined dramatically in recent years. Because of post-9/11 American policies and overblown German fears of American hegemony on issues like the NSA or TTIP, young Americans and Germans have grown up alienated from one another compared to decades past.

However, there are several factors that suggest American youths will change this, and that new political realities will bind the United States and Germany. Young Americans share far more of their social and political values with their German counterparts than their elders, from religion to social engagement and organisation. Young American entrepreneurs seeking to do business in Europe will find German an important language in those markets. The boom in trade following the passage of TTIP in Europe and America could underwrite a new expansion of German language study, founded on economic need rather than ethnic links, which will run through a Germany whose youths' values have never been closer to their American counterparts. And American foreign policy will learn to regard Germany as an equal, as it relies on Germans to responsibly maintain peace and prosperity in Europe. This change in the German-American relationship is not a crisis, but an opportunity. Young Americans and Germans will have the chance to

build a new relationship based on their deeply held values as they seek to advance democratic values and economic opportunities in our new multi-polar, pluralistic, and economically growing world.