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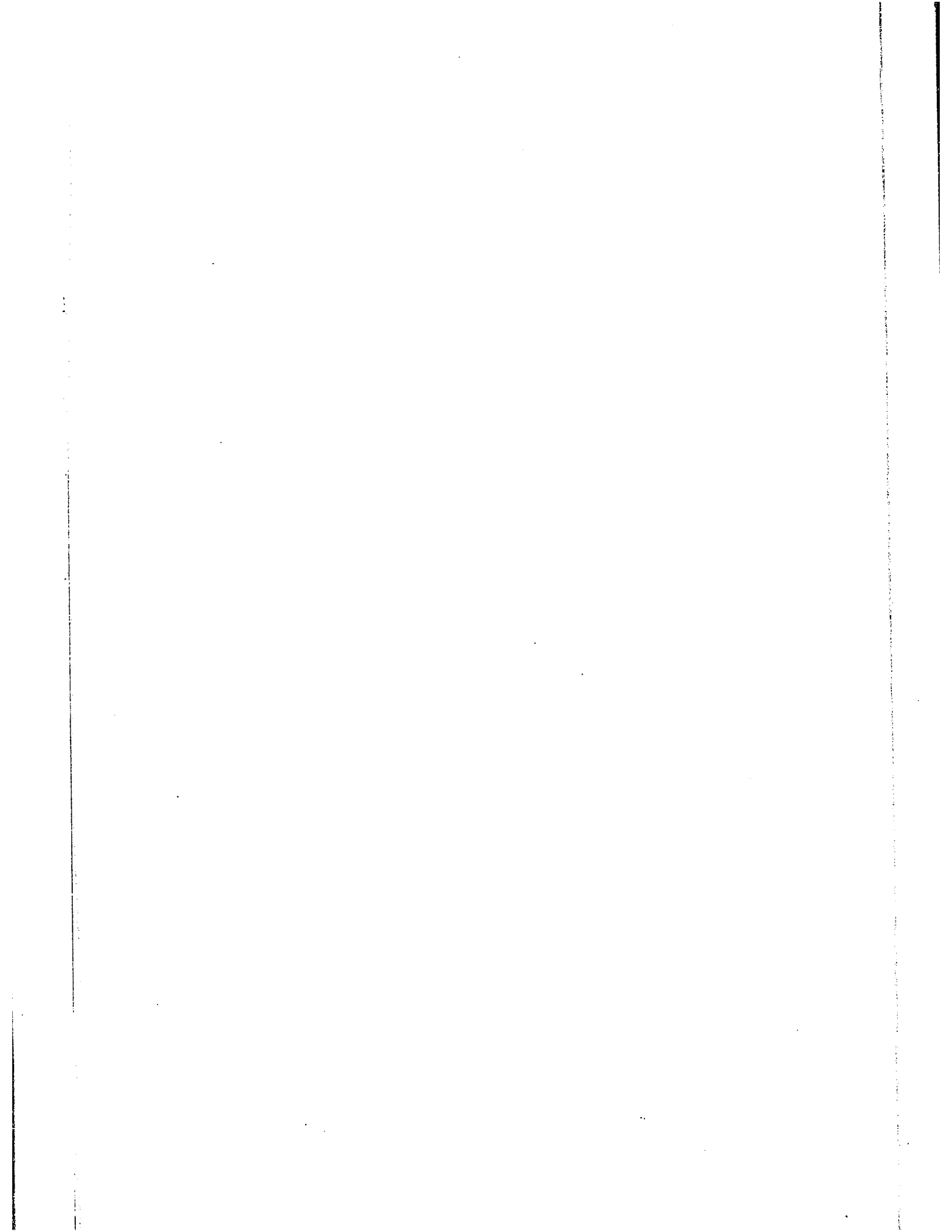
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**“What Shall We Do With Germany?”  
The Public Debate in the United States on the Future of  
Postwar Germany**

by

Elizabeth Combes-Neufeld



Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
M. A. degree in History

Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa

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## Abstract

### “What Shall We Do With Germany?” The American Debate on the Future of Germany During World War II

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University of Ottawa, 1997

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During World War II, the American foreign policy opinion elites conducted an intense debate in the popular and academic presses on the problem of how to treat the people of Germany. Taking place during a war conducted by a democracy against a totalitarian regime and coinciding with the introduction of scientific public opinion measurement, the debate emphasised American democratic ideology. The participants in the debate, from government officials to journalists, often constructed their arguments around national character theories which allowed them to proceed rapidly to the conclusion that the whole German people bore the blame for the war. On this basis these commentators outlined plans to both permanently curb German aggression and to bring democracy to Germany. These developments fostered impractical public expectations for foreign policy achievements and drove the public debate on the German problem to extremes which found their way into policy planning. These extremes precipitated an elitist reaction that presaged the development of the postwar realist approach to foreign policy, including its emphasis on planning by experts and its concomitant dismissal of mass public opinion. This approach is apparent in the pollsters' wartime analyses of mass public opinion on the German question.

## Acknowledgements

When I first started browsing through World War II era magazines, searching for materials on prospects for peace and American foreign policy, I laughed at the articles describing the German people as ugly, graceless, degenerate and outright demonic. Although I did not take them seriously at the time, I reported them to my seminar on American foreign policy along with the materials I then considered more relevant to the problems of postwar peace. They would, I thought, add some humour to the proceedings. I scarcely realised that they would lead me to consider fundamental problems of American democracy. For this transition, I owe my appreciation to Professor Brian Villa, who also undertook to supervise my thesis. Always determined that his students will learn to love history and, thus, always patiently willing to go over the same question for yet another time, he has become my friend and mentor.

A master's thesis is a major accomplishment, but it is also only a beginning. I will remember my defence as an experience that reinforced this 'fact of life' for graduate students. To my examining committee, Professors Béatrice Craig and Paul Lachance, and to its chairperson, Professor Don Davis, I owe gratitude for their thought-provoking questions and generous praise of elements of my work.

This student's experiences provide no exception to the rule that successful graduate work depends not only upon good academic relationships, but also upon solid friendships. Two long-time friends, Marian Forster and Lynda deForest, gave me extra support and encouragement through all the ups and downs of completing my thesis. They provided accommodation for my many trips from Toronto to Ottawa, and Lynda, an excellent editor, also read and commented on my work. My most special friend and husband, Bob Neufeld, gave me his constant and unstinting support—emotional, intellectual and financial. He also did the dishes.

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**Chapter 1**  
**Introduction: Democratic Ideology and the**  
**Public Debate on the German Problem**

Shortly after the United States entered World War II, one of the nation's most prominent wordsmiths urged his fellow Americans to expect more from this war than "the negative defensive victory we won before." He exhorted them to imagine their victory "as an affirmative thing," a victory by which they would "win the future of the world to such an extent that they [would] be able to change not its governments only, but its geography, its actual shape and meaning in men's minds." With these words Archibald MacLeish, Harvard law graduate, poet, Librarian of Congress and, in wartime, a director of the Office of War Information urged Americans to envision their victory as a triumph of their democracy. He encouraged them to imagine the postwar world as an American world in which democracy—American democracy—would prevail over all forms of tyranny, and a world in which American practices of trade and commerce would become the foundation of exchange among nations.<sup>1</sup>

Even before the United States joined the fighting, Franklin Roosevelt had identified the struggle as one of democracy against tyranny. The President seldom missed an opportunity to reinforce the rhetoric; for example, he reminded the press in March 1941 that

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<sup>1</sup> Archibald MacLeish, "The Image of Victory," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1942, pp. 2, 3, 6.

Nazi forces are not seeking mere modifications in colonial maps or in minor European boundaries. They openly seek the destruction of all elective systems of government on every continent—including our own; they seek to establish systems of government based on the regimentation of all human beings by a handful of individual rulers who have seized power by force.

These men and their hypnotized followers call this a new order. It is not new. It is not order. For order among nations presupposes something enduring...some system of justice under which individuals, over a long period of time, are willing to live. Humanity will never permanently accept a system imposed by conquest and based on slavery.<sup>2</sup>

Long before the conflict's end the wartime rhetoric made democracy the mantra of victory<sup>3</sup> and the touchstone of many Americans' expectations for the postwar world. If they were fighting a war to defend democracy against tyranny, then the world at peace would surely be a democratic world. Illuminated by this aura of idealism Americans, anticipating that as victors they would take control of Germany's postwar destiny, undertook to deal their enemy a sound military defeat. In both the popular and academic presses, they analysed the German problem and offered their prescriptions for Germany's future. The numbers of books and articles swelled into the hundreds and their words filled thousands, even tens of thousands, of pages. Editors and publishers still welcomed their manuscripts for some time after the fighting had stopped.

The public debate on the German problem was for Americans a powerful exercise in their practice of the democracy they were fighting the war to defend. It received its impetus, however, not only from the heightened idealism attending a nation at war, but also from the introduction of quantitative public opinion polling techniques during the preceding decade.

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<sup>2</sup> Address to the White House Correspondents' Association. Washington, March 15, 1941, reprinted in Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Arthur L. Smith, Jr., *World War II Policy and Strategy: Selected Documents with Commentary* (Santa-Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1979), pp. 145-146.

<sup>3</sup> Richard L. Merritt, *Democracy Imposed: U. S. Occupation Policy and the German Public, 1945-1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 4: "Democracy was the mantra of the times."

Some—the pollsters especially—appreciated the potential of these new methods, which made public opinion more palpable, to bring democratic practice closer to the ideal. They saw the public debate on the German question as an opportunity to demonstrate the worth of public opinion in policy making processes. The introduction of the polls thus transformed the debate on Germany into a test of how foreign policy should be made in a democracy—by experts or by public opinion.

The German problem was an unfortunate topic for such a test. It compromised and ultimately defeated hopes for a democratic foreign policy. The debate was a wartime debate, and Germany was the wartime enemy. Under these circumstances, the dynamics of wartime propaganda shaped commentary on the German problem. MacLeish eschewed the harsher side of wartime propaganda and favoured an idealistic reinforcement of the public's morale and patriotism, but many commentators embraced the wartime need to ensure that Americans would complete the job of defeating the enemy. They stressed Germany's intractable hostility to democratic ideals and its determination to crush democracy if Americans did not crush Nazism first and then take final steps to prevent its reemergence. Their analyses fostered a fundamental misunderstanding and a deliberate distortion of German culture that marked the public debate on postwar Germany. At their extremes, descriptions of the German problem involved the crassest of stereotypes, and proposals to achieve a democratic Germany included the most undemocratic of means.

A small number of voices raised more fundamental objections. They questioned the jingoism of the war rhetoric. They questioned the assumption, implicit in the wartime rhetoric, that Americans could be secure only in a world that duplicated their own values and institutions. These critics

dismissed as moralistic the attitude that American relations with other nations should be oriented towards their achievement of democracy. For this group the Morgenthau Plan, which leaked to the press in September 1944, demonstrated that the government was willing to pander to the worst elements in the public debate. Predicated on the belief that German culture could not be readily converted to democracy, the Morgenthau Plan proposed to keep Germany at peace by dismantling its industrial economy and forcing the German people into agricultural subsistence. It was the last straw for these critics. Walter Lippmann may well have been thinking of this plan when he suggested that Americans would be "quixotic, and almost certainly obnoxious, to go crusading in order to impose American institutions and the American ideas of liberty and equal rights."<sup>4</sup>

An awareness that ideals alone could not provide a basis for a workable foreign policy underscored this school of criticism. For its proponents, many Americans had emerged from their interwar isolationism only to seek security through the opposite extreme: a foreign policy that reinvented the postwar world in their own image. Americans had failed to appreciate the extent to which they would share their victory and, consequently, their say in the peace, with their allies. These critics understood that Russia, with its own ideological assumptions and its own postwar agenda, would not likely accept the American outlook on the postwar world. In their view, American ideals of world democracy were meaningless if the United States did not have the power to achieve them over the objections of a foreign power. They argued that the war rhetoric had blinded Americans to changing reality, and it had encouraged them to set foreign policy goals that their government could not achieve.

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Lippmann, *U. S. War Aims* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1944), p. 41.

Unlike these critics, the pollsters upheld the wartime ideals; but their data led them to question the calibre of the public debate and the quality of the public opinion they measured. For the pollsters, Americans had failed to grasp the war's greater significance. Americans understood they were fighting against the threat of Nazi aggression, but did not see themselves as fighting for democracy as the means to peace. This deficiency in the public's perception, the pollsters argued, had blinded Americans to their greater interests in the peace arrangements. Consequently, Americans supported policy options for postwar Germany that would recreate the conditions under which Nazism had festered. The pollsters found the sources of Americans' misperceptions in the public debate, which had omitted or distorted vital information and had failed to inspire the general public to look beyond its own narrowly defined self-interests.

During World War II, then, the wartime rhetoric, with its heightened and evangelical emphasis upon American democratic ideology, together with the emerging science of public opinion measurement, fostered a hope that a democratic policy making process responsive to the public will would replace decision making by elites. This expectation for foreign policy achievements went beyond the ability of policy making processes to deliver. The wartime rhetoric also drove the public debate on the German problem to extremes that found their way into policy planning for Germany. The failure of the debate to develop a viable policy for postwar Germany precipitated an elitist reaction that presaged the development of the postwar realist approach to foreign policy, including its emphasis on planning by experts and its concomitant dismissal of mass public opinion.

### 1.1 Some perspectives on ideology, stereotypes and foreign policy

Understanding the progress of this debate depends first upon recognising how ideology came to permeate discussions about an appropriate American policy for postwar Germany. This study assumes that ideology plays a vital role in policy formation processes, and thus in public debates about policy. It raises implicitly a larger question: how can we deal with our ideological constructs so that they positively inform solutions to foreign policy problems? This study treats 'ideology' as a cognitive filter through which participants in the debate about the German problem evaluated the issues raised and the propositions made by the various antagonists, and also weighed news of any events that might be relevant to the discussion. This approach recognises that arguments flowing from an ideological starting point may be well-reasoned and sound—without a coherent ideological framework, arguments are not likely to make any sense at all—but holds that where ideology leads, irrational and emotionally charged stereotypes are sometimes not far behind. To that extent, ideologically driven arguments may have undermined the formulation of an effective foreign policy for postwar Germany. As this study suggests, contemporaries aware of some of this debate's internal contradictions drew conclusions of vast importance for postwar policy formulation.

In assuming a vital link between ideology and policy formation, this study borrows a theorem from the social sciences: if a person defines a situation as real, then it is real in its consequences.<sup>5</sup> Several studies of American foreign policy, some closely related to the debate on the German

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<sup>5</sup> Ole R. Holsti, "Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy," in John C. Farrell and Asa P. Smith, eds., *Image and Reality in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 16.

problem, have made use of this theorem. Political scientist Ole R. Holsti applied it in his study of John Foster Dulles's perception of Russia as an enemy: "Enemies are those who are defined as such," Holsti wrote, "and if one acts upon that interpretation, it is more than likely that the original definition will be confirmed." Quoting George Kennan, Holsti continued, "It is an undeniable privilege of every man to prove himself in the right in the thesis that the world is his enemy; for if he reiterates it frequently enough and makes it the background of his conduct, he is bound eventually to be right."<sup>6</sup>

Historian Daniel M. Smith has argued that "[f]ramers of policy obviously live in a world of ideas as well as of 'facts.' Their implicit assumptions and explicit judgments about the nature of 'reality' clearly affect how they perceive the issues and the nation's role in the world."<sup>7</sup> Smith thereby proceeded to examine the proposition set out by Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, that Americans "casually and deliberately articulated distorted similarities between Nazi and Communist ideologies, German and Soviet foreign policies, authoritarian controls and trade practices, and Hitler and Stalin." Seeing Soviet Communism as 'Red Fascism' Americans, they argued, ignored profound ideological differences between Nazism and Soviet Communism. They did not differentiate "one system proclaiming a humanist ideology and failing to live up to its ideal and the other system living up to its anti-humanistic and destructive ideology only too well." Americans focused instead on the similar practices of both regimes. They readily reasoned, for example, from the state control of information and denial of individual liberty

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<sup>6</sup> Holsti, p. 16, quoting "The Sources of Soviet Conduct."

<sup>7</sup> Daniel M. Smith, "Authoritarianism and American Policy Makers in Two World Wars," *Pacific Historical Review*, 43:3 (August, 1974), p. 16, quoting "The Sources of Soviet Conduct."

that characterised Nazi Germany's progress towards war, to predictions about Russia's behaviour in the postwar world. For Adler and Paterson the analogy between Nazism and Communism "substituted emotion for intellect, and it particularly affected the American perception of reality." They did not dispute the similarities of the two regimes, but they deplored Americans' failure to see the differences, which led them to the "unhistorical and illogical" conclusion that Russia would behave in the postwar world as had Germany in the years leading up to the war.<sup>8</sup> To emphasise their point, Adler and Paterson, too, drew upon Kennan:

When I try to picture totalitarianism to myself as a general phenomenon, what comes into my mind most prominently is neither the Soviet picture nor the Nazi picture as I have known them in the flesh, but rather the fictional and symbolic images created by such people as Orwell or Kafka or Koestler or the early Soviet satirists. The purest expression of the phenomenon, in other words, seems to me to have been rendered not in its physical reality but in its power as a dream, or nightmare. Not that it lacks the physical reality, or that this reality is lacking in power; but it is precisely in the way it appears to people, in the impact it has on the subconscious, in the state of mind it creates in its victims, that totalitarianism reveals most deeply its meaning and nature. Here, then, we seem to have a phenomenon of which it can be said that it is both a reality and a bad dream, but that its deepest reality lies strangely enough in its manifestation as a bad dream ...<sup>9</sup>

Smith did not question Adler's and Paterson's assertion that Americans illogically transferred their image of Nazi Germany to Communist Russia. He argued that the link was not casual, and he held that antipathy to totalitarian governments was deeply rooted in Americans' political identity.

"The concept of an evil authoritarianism-totalitarianism," he wrote,

runs like a continuous thread through much of recent American history, and ... ultimately goes back to our very beginnings as an independent nation. [It is part of] a continuum in American attitudes toward democracy and all forms of authoritarianism that have long characterized our approach toward the external world.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930's-1950's," *American Historical Review*, 75:3 (1970), pp. 1046, 1049, 1052, 1061.

<sup>9</sup> Adler and Paterson, pp. 1063-1064, quoting "Totalitarianism in the Modern World."

<sup>10</sup> Smith, pp. 303-304.

Smith argued that Americans could trace their antipathy to Nazism back to German-American rivalry over colonies and trade during the 1890s. Then, confronting a Germany reputed for military ruthlessness in pressing its claims, Americans perceived a threat to their security, economic interests and also to their democratic values and institutions. Their emergent stereotype of Prussian autocracy included the belief that it “completely submerged the individual to the needs and interests of the state.” Smith noted that the stereotype inspired Woodrow Wilson’s portrayal of Germany as a “selfish and autocratic power’ menacing peace and freedom” and his declaration that “[t]he Central Powers ... enslaved their own peoples and all who fell under their rule, ‘making every choice for them and disposing of their lives and fortunes as they will.’” The stereotype inspired the even more strident rhetoric of his Secretary of State, Robert Lansing: “Paganism, tinctured with modern materialism and a degenerate type of Christianity, broods today over Germany.”<sup>11</sup>

Americans, Smith continued, also reacted with dismay to the Bolshevik revolution of November 1917 which, they believed, “overthrew an apparently promising democratic provisional regime.”<sup>12</sup> Lansing, Smith noted, “feared the spread of Bolshevism into the defeated [Central] Powers ‘where it would become a greater menace to the world than Prussianism.’” To American policy makers of World War I, Smith concluded,

authoritarianism, whether on the right or left, represented the antithesis of American values and constituted a menace to the ideological and material interests of the United States. They saw the salient characteristics of autocracy, not as monarchical trappings or working class posturings, but as the negation of democratic responsibility, state control of most aspects of life, and reliance upon force of whatever kind to promote state goals at home and abroad. Philosophical

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, pp. 306, 308.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, pp. 308-310.

differences among various authoritarian systems seemed to pale into insignificance when underlying similarities were perceived.<sup>13</sup>

For Smith, Americans' understanding of the intentions of authoritarian or totalitarian governments almost exclusively by comparison with their own democracy was a normal state of affairs in American political life, not a sudden aberration in political thinking that appeared in World War II. With this proviso, Smith agreed with Adler's and Paterson's assertion that the link Americans made between Fascism and Communism was not logically sound. "Stereotypes all too frequently substitute for careful analysis," Smith wrote, "and analogies if not rigorously defined can cloud thinking and result in decisions based on faulty comparisons." Unlike Adler and Paterson, however, Smith did not necessarily believe that Americans in World War II had reached the wrong conclusion about Russian intentions, even though he allowed that they arrived at it through flawed reasoning. Most important, for Smith, was the relationship between Americans' perception of their democracy and their faulty reasoning about totalitarian governments. To establish this relationship, he cast the overarching ideology of American democracy as the filter through which most Americans understood their country's interaction with other nations. Paterson later concurred, noting in his revision of his and Adler's study, that Americans understood the two regimes simply as "the antithesis of [their] self-image and principles."<sup>14</sup>

In his study, *Ideology and U. S. Foreign Policy*, historian Michael H. Hunt has given considerable thought to the problem of how ideology informs policy. His observations on this process are relevant to the questions explored in this study. He has argued that American foreign policy decisions

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, p. 323.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas G. Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat, Truman to Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 4.

in the twentieth century have reflected deeply entrenched cultural values. In his opinion these values underscore "a powerful, mutually reinforcing body of thought that [has] gone far toward dominating the thinking of those most concerned with foreign policy issues."<sup>15</sup> Hunt found fault with Kennan for his suggestion that foreign policy conducted by experts, and thus removed as much as possible from democratic processes, could be freed from the constraints of ideology. Hunt, though, was not content, as were Adler and Paterson, to throw the realist's words in the faces of his followers. He argued that Kennan, despite his call for a rational and calculated approach to foreign policy, revealed in his conception of the containment strategy his deep personal commitment to the fundamental principles of a long-standing American foreign policy ideology.

Hunt defined ideology generally as a means of interpreting experience: "an interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality." Defined in terms of culture, however, ideology does not provide just a means of patterning experience, it provides a moral framework for appropriate responses.

"Ideological constructs," Hunt argued,

which culture not only inspires but also sustains and constrains, serve as a fount for an instructive and reassuring sense of historical place, as an indispensable guide to an infinitely complex and otherwise bewildering present, and as a basis for moral action intended to shape a better future.

A foreign policy ideology, Hunt continued, is "a relatively coherent, emotionally charged, and conceptually interlocking set of ideas ... [which]

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<sup>15</sup> Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U. S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. xii.

reflect the self-image of those who espoused them and ... define a relationship consonant with that self-image."<sup>16</sup>

Hunt maintained that Americans entered the twentieth century in possession of a well-developed foreign policy ideology based on the nation-building experiences of the young country's political elite. This ideology evolved through ongoing debates about policy issues. The most important of these debates for Hunt involved questions of security and access to trade in the years immediately following the Revolution, expansion into Mexican lands under President Polk, and the imperialism attendant on the Spanish-American War. The debates pitted the elite, largely white, male and privileged from birth, against the comparatively "weak and marginal" Southern Democrats, and New England Whigs and Republicans and, in the 1890s, dissenting church and ethnic groups. The elite fused the patriotic high ground to an activist foreign policy, and successfully opposed its vision of national greatness linked to the spread of liberty abroad, to more modest hopes for perfection of liberty at home.<sup>17</sup>

For Hunt, the elite's quest for national greatness captured the essence of Thomas Paine's pronouncement that Americans had the "power to begin the world all over again." In "Common Sense," Paine had employed the high rhetoric of Puritan rebirth and providential blessing, John Locke's idea of political and economic progress arising from individual interest and initiative, and the Enlightenment concept of a new world order promoting the betterment of all people, not just the aggrandisement of a few. In its justifications for expansionist and imperialist policies, Hunt argued, the elite transformed Paine's epistle into a powerful component of American foreign

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<sup>16</sup> Hunt, pp. xi, 12, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Hunt, p. 43.

policy ideology. This ideology sanctified "the American pursuit of lofty ambitions abroad [which,] far from imperiling liberty, would serve to invigorate it at home while creating conditions favorable to its spread in foreign lands."<sup>18</sup>

Hunt argued that the emerging foreign policy ideology contained two other critical components reflecting the values and self-image of the elite: an antipathy to revolutions that did not resolve in constitutional democracy and an ethnocentric outlook. A hierarchy of race governed the elite's approach to other peoples and also was a broadly accepted construct that met with little challenge when used to rationalise policy initiatives. It placed white Americans and their British ancestors at the top, characterised as the most intelligent, industrious, moral of purpose, and able to govern. A flexible notion, Americans used it to justify dispossessing others of their lands, or taking peoples under American tutelage and control. Describing other peoples in simplistic terms the racial hierarchy, Hunt noted, relieved Americans of any need to understand cultural differences. Americans' measure of the worth of others flattered their self-image and bolstered their claim to national greatness.<sup>19</sup>

Germans, Hunt continued, ranked slightly below their Anglo-Saxon cousins, and the Slavic peoples slightly lower again.

[Germans] had the same qualities as their racial cousins save one—they had lost their love of liberty. This single serious defect set Germans just beyond the Anglo-Saxon pale and made this still-formidable people into a threatening global competitor, to be closely watched. By the turn of the [twentieth] century they were increasingly pictured as latter-day Huns, prone to the aggressive, even brutal behavior characteristic of a militaristic and autocratic system. The Slavs, half European and half Asiatic, were also formidable racial competitors on the international stage. Highly regimented and of rugged peasant stock, they had displayed great endurance, patience, and strength (if not intelligence and a knack

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<sup>18</sup> Hunt, pp. 20, 42.

<sup>19</sup> Hunt, pp. 52, 78.

for innovation) as they had slowly but irresistibly extended their control over much of the Eurasian land mass.<sup>20</sup>

Intertwined with the ideas of a racial hierarchy and national greatness through the spread of liberty, Hunt continued, the American foreign policy ideology included a "nagging preoccupation with the perils of revolution." Americans, he argued, contrasting news of revolutions abroad with the memory of their own Revolution, increasingly idealised it and elevated it to the standard by which they judged all foreign uprisings. Thus, a revolution was rightfully begun against a government that persistently violated individual or property rights, or repeatedly defied the will of the majority. Led by "reputable" leaders and proclaiming moderate political goals, it proceeded on a moderate course, culminating in the achievement of a constitutional government.<sup>21</sup>

Foreign revolutions, starting with the French Revolution and continuing through the Bolshevik Revolution, raised Americans' high hopes for liberty's growth abroad, but in each case disillusionment soon set in. These uprisings, moderate at first, always deteriorated into radicalism and violence that undermined individual liberty and property rights. They became desperate struggles in which survival supplanted liberty as the ultimate aim, ending only when a dictator seized control and reestablished order. For the elite especially, differences of race and class figured largely in explanations of these revolutionary failures. By the late nineteenth century, growing American economic interests abroad transformed passive judgement into active responses, and differences of race and class provided rationalisations

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<sup>20</sup> Hunt, pp. 78-79.

<sup>21</sup> Hunt, pp. 95-96, 116, 124.

for interventionist measures in the Philippines, Latin America, China and, eventually, Russia.<sup>22</sup>

For Hunt, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points exemplified the fully formed American foreign policy ideology. They expressed Wilson's determination that victory in the war against Germany would mark the first step towards global eradication of "those banes of humanity that Germany stood for—imperialism, militarism and autocracy." Wilson's plan pushed upon his unwilling allies an American conception of international relations and an American program for the course of European revolutions. It anticipated, Hunt wrote,

an era of Anglo-Saxon cultural supremacy and Anglo-American diplomatic cooperation. ... [It] would unshackle trade, bring the arms race to a halt, banish secret diplomacy with its alliances and terrible carnage and, most important of all promote self-determination throughout Europe. Moderate, democratic, constitutional revolutions would prevail in Germany [and] Russia<sup>23</sup>

Franklin Roosevelt's and Winston Churchill's Atlantic Charter, Hunt continued, restated the Wilsonian policy for a war that provided a "second chance" to rectify Wilson's failures. To this extent, Roosevelt's values corresponded with his predecessor's. Hunt noted that both Roosevelt and Wilson believed that

democracies were a force for peace in the world because they acted on the peace-loving instincts of the common man. Serious difficulties among nations were to be traced to militaristic and despotic regimes that indulged a minority's taste for aggression and conquest at the expense and in defiance of the enlightened popular will.<sup>24</sup>

Kennan's policy of containment represented, for Hunt, not a departure from this foreign policy outlook, but a continuation. Hunt argued that the American foreign policy ideology

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22 Hunt, pp. 106-124.

23 Hunt, p. 134.

24 Hunt, pp. 146-147.

shaped Cold War policy and inspired the most important expression of that policy, the doctrine of containment. Ideology defined for the advocates of containment the issue at stake: the survival of freedom around the world ... [and] the chief threat to freedom: Soviet communism.<sup>25</sup>

From Kennan's views Hunt readily picked out the elements that conformed to his concept of the American foreign policy ideology. Kennan's description of the Russians and their leaders fit within the racial hierarchy; the communist leadership's "neurotic views of world affairs" combined with the Russians' "oriental secretiveness" and with the "traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity." Far from eschewing a moral mission, Kennan maintained that the Soviet threat provided Americans with the opportunity to "rise to 'the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear.'"<sup>26</sup> Geopolitics and realism, Hunt argued, were less new ideas competing with the old ideology than new means to pursue the same ideological ends.<sup>27</sup>

In Hunt's culturally based sense of the word, Kennan certainly did take the American foreign policy ideology for granted. He did not perceive ideological differences between democratic and non-democratic states as such; he saw them as rational versus irrational. For Kennan, National Socialism was the product of Germany's political immaturity, Russian communism was "pseudo-scientific," and the problems of the Germans' or Russians' adherence to their respective ideologies were more "psychological" than political.<sup>28</sup>

For Kennan, American democracy was not without its problems, especially at the level of foreign policy making. Here, he found plentiful evidence of the "inadequate and superficial," the "high-minded and idealistic,"

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<sup>25</sup> Hunt, p. 153.

<sup>26</sup> Hunt, p. 154, quoting *Foreign Relations of the United States* and "The Sources of Soviet Conduct."

<sup>27</sup> Hunt, pp. 5-8, 14-15, 152-153.

<sup>28</sup> George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, 25 (July 1947), pp. 566-567; *Memoirs: 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967), p. 102.

and the "erratic and subjective."<sup>29</sup> If the United States had escaped the consequences of bad policy decisions in the past, the stakes had grown too high for such blunders to continue.<sup>30</sup> In the words of Hunt's concise summary, Kennan sought to correct the impact on American foreign policy of an

errant and inappropriate moralism and legalism [that] defined the American approach to international affairs. By moralism Kennan meant devotion to virtue without the power and will necessary to sustain it. Moralism intruded in policy making either directly, through the attitude that policy makers themselves carried to office, or indirectly through the force of public opinion as it was shaped by vocal minorities, mass hysteria, yellow journalism, and political opportunists and posturers. Legalism ... was reflected in the application of domestic concepts of peacekeeping, adjudication, and contractual relations to an international sphere for which they were unsuited.<sup>31</sup>

In Kennan's view, the American people profoundly misunderstood the central issues of World War II. From a military standpoint, he argued, it was not winnable by the democracies alone. Thus, the war could not possibly have been more than strictly "defensive;" it could bring "immediate survival," but it "certainly [could] not advance ... any of the more positive and constructive purposes of democracy," the more so after non-democratic Russia became an ally. In this respect, Kennan found the American public hopelessly misguided in their attitude to the foreign policy issues of the war. He asserted that too many of his country's foreign policy problems

stemmed from the extent to which the executive has felt itself beholden to short-term trends of public opinion in the country and from what we might call the erratic and subjective nature of public reaction to foreign policy questions.<sup>32</sup>

Kennan judged the democratic framework inadequate for conducting an effective foreign policy. He dismissed the relevance of democratic processes, including public debate, for foreign policy making and appropriated this

<sup>29</sup> George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962 [1951]), pp. vi, 36, 93.

<sup>30</sup> Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, for example p. 73.

<sup>31</sup> Hunt, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, pp. 83, 93.

domain to a group of professionally trained experts. Only through expert guidance, he concluded, could the United States

create among the peoples of the world generally the impression of a country which knows what it wants, which is coping successfully with the problems of its internal life and with the responsibilities of a world power, and which has a spiritual vitality capable of holding its own among the major ideological currents of the time.<sup>33</sup>

Hunt, no less than Kennan, argued that Americans had pursued foreign policy objectives far beyond the ability of the nation to sustain. Not only had they overtaxed the nation's resources, they undermined Americans' ability to build democracy at home. Hunt argued that the Americans should pull back from their activist foreign policy—a proposal one critic labelled “almost neoisolationist”—and concentrate on policies of domestic reform.<sup>34</sup> He also argued that the American public respectfully deserved a greater role in foreign policy decision making. That the public is often ignorant of international affairs did not, for Hunt, alter the reality that in a democracy the public ultimately judges all policy decisions and outcomes. A less informed public, he noted, displays less tolerance for ambiguity and has less patience with complicated solutions to difficult policy problems. In his opinion policy makers would have to work around these difficulties by providing more information and improvements to education, and by acknowledging the limits of an uninformed public's tolerance.<sup>35</sup>

In their respective analyses both Kennan and Hunt attempted to assess the ills of foreign policy agendas far bigger than they believed the American nation could afford to sustain. Both studies arrived at the dilemma of foreign policy making in a democracy, a problem deeply entrenched in democratic

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33 Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” p. 581.

34 Hunt, p. 6. The critic was Akira Iriye, Review of *Ideology and U. S. Foreign Policy*, by Michael H. Hunt. *American Historical Review*, 39:4 (1988), p. 1103.

35 Hunt, pp. 180-182, 193-194.

theory. Democracy entails that a government cannot provide for the best interests of the people without their consent; thus, the public's opinion should guide policy making processes. To give its valid consent, however, the public's opinion must be informed and rational. Kennan, from the perspective of a foreign policy professional, found that public opinion was not cognisant of the relevant issues, and thus not fit to guide foreign policy. He sought to shield foreign policy making from public pressure. Hunt, undertaking a critique of the elite group that effectively controlled American foreign policy, found its ideological constructs fraught with misconceptions and irrationalities. He found also that its policy decisions had served the American people poorly. He appealed to the democratic ideal, and demanded a restoration of confidence in the public's ability to guide policy.

## 1.2 The American debate on postwar Germany

Looking back upon some forty years of Cold War diplomacy triggered by Kennan's "long telegram," Hunt found plenty to criticise in a foreign policy dominated by the American political elite. Before him, Kennan found that American foreign policy had reached the point of crisis—a crisis that turned on the problem of foreign policy making in a democracy. The public debate on postwar Germany, in which Kennan's ideas figured prominently,<sup>36</sup> provides a case study demonstrating Hunt's theory of ideology's impact on policy formation. This essay analyses the public debate, which is the necessary precursor to an informed public opinion, qualitatively. It explores the debate to discover the ideological environment in which it took place, its pivotal

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<sup>36</sup> Kennan's ideas *per se* did not figure in the public debate until they appeared in "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" in 1947. Other commentators, however, articulated similar ideas.

ideas and the arguments made for them, and its significance for one group of contemporaries, namely the pollsters.

The American debate on the future of postwar Germany unfolded within an ideological setting conditioned by two circumstances. First, the wartime situation—a war conducted by a democracy against a totalitarian regime<sup>37</sup>—placed nations with diametrically opposed ideological systems in combat. Second, the debate coincided with the introduction of scientific public opinion measurement. The second chapter explores the depth of wartime convictions that a greater role for public opinion in policy making processes constituted a moral defence of democracy against totalitarian alternatives. From naive to scholarly to self-serving, commentators ignored a long-standing and valid critique of public opinion by Walter Lippmann, who recognised that advances in communications technology had increased public opinion's roll in democratic processes, but who argued that these advances only compounded socially bound problems of stereotyping.

Stereotyped characterisations of the German people permeated wartime analyses of the German problem. They flowed easily from the commentators' pens, from pundits to diplomats. Kennan was no exception to this norm, and in a 1940 memo to the chief of the State Department's Division of European Affairs, he wrote:

Hitler may go but [German] unity will remain, and with it, barring outside interference, will remain—must remain—the jealousy, the uncertainty, the feeling of inferiority, the consequent lust to dominate Europe which are all that most Germans really have in common.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The alliance with the Soviet Union did not change this attitude for Americans; rather, Soviet Communism and Russia's role in the peace became important aspects of the public debate.

<sup>38</sup> Kennan, *Memoirs*, p. 118. In retrospect, Kennan found this conclusion about the German people "nostalgic ... I came away from Germany, some two and a half years later, with quite different feelings about the German people—feelings that took more thoughtfully into account the true complexity of their historical experience and

The third chapter examines the problem of stereotypes in discussions of the German problem and considers their impact on public proposals for Germany's postwar treatment. As an essential aspect of wartime propaganda, stereotypes played a central role in the debate. They also traded on contemporary ideas about national character, and led most often to the conclusion that the German people were unfit for democracy and eternally the world aggressor. These analyses did not go unchallenged, however. As the debate intensified, some commentators questioned the values that proposals based on national character represented. In their minds, people who professed democratic ideals seemed to be advocating an oppressive and unjust regime for postwar Germany.

In Kennan's opinion, Americans lost the war for democracy even before they entered it. In his view, postwar problems with Russia were the inevitable baggage attached to an alliance with a nondemocratic nation. The Allies, he argued, could not deliver a decisive military defeat to Germany without Soviet help; thus, when they accepted Russia as an ally, they made themselves beholden to Russian demands at the peace table.<sup>39</sup> Chapter Four examines the Russian dimension in the debate about Germany's future. The wartime rhetoric did not differentiate enemies and friends, Germany and the Soviet Union. It entailed that the United States should press, at the peace table, for democratic governments throughout liberated Europe. It decreed that the United States should encourage the Soviet Union to become as democratic in practice as its constitution proclaimed it to be in theory. Some, Walter Lippmann for example, argued that Americans needed a workable means of conducting their diplomatic relations with Russia should these

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recognized the existence within them of elements whose positive qualities, including courage and humanity, defied all efforts at negative generalization," p. 119.

<sup>39</sup> Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, pp. 76-77.

ideals prove unattainable. Others saw the prospect of postwar differences with Russia as an opportunity to make postwar Germany the new testing ground for two mutually antagonistic ways to life: communism and democracy. Only then did Germany emerge in the public debate as a nation where the United States, through its support of reconstruction, might showcase its democracy in the spirit of wartime democratic idealism.

The last chapter summarises the pollsters' assessment of how well the public debate informed Americans about the German problem. It also examines their conclusions about public opinion's fitness to guide democratic foreign policy making. In their interpretations of their data, the pollsters revealed their own biases in favour of Germany's reconstruction and a lenient treatment of the German people. The data suggested, however, that Americans favoured stringent peace conditions. The pollsters' data thus refuted their expectations that public opinion could guide policy making. Public opinion could be wrong, and in need of expert guidance. The pollsters faulted the public debate for its failure to provide, clearly and without distortion, appropriate information on the German problem, and for its failure to acquaint Americans with their national self-interests.

The pens that spilled so much ink on the German problem belonged to an elite group, a group somewhat expanded from Hunt's tightly defined American elite, but still made up largely of white, privileged men. Few women participated in the public debate, but all who did fit the stereotyped maxim that to succeed in a man's world, a woman must be twice as good and twice as resilient. Certainly, all the participants enjoyed the consideration and recognition attendant upon a good education and a successful career. Their ranks included academics, businessmen, journalists and politicians, but

editors and publishers welcomed to their presses anyone whose name or ideas promised to sell copy.

European—especially German—refugees and emigrants counted as the far more significant addition to the voices in the debate. Emigrants and refugees had several advantages over American or British voices in the debate. Experts on the German question not only owing to their professional positions, they were experts by virtue of being, or being seen as, Nazi victims. Many of them had actively supported democratic parties in their homelands and they understood World War II, first and foremost, as a war for democracy. In their arguments, they skilfully manipulated American democratic sentiment.

Of the many contributors to the debate on Germany's postwar future, this essay considers only a few. Still, their views represent the debate qualitatively. Their discussions illustrate the themes recurrent in the larger body of literature. Some of their analyses made colourful and dramatic copy, which editors often enough favoured over more dry discussions of economic or political problems underlying the war. The pundits considered here also included diplomats as high up as the Undersecretary of State, or those who forged links to positions of power to gain credibility for their views, thus making them even more attractive to editors.

Indicators that the analysts included here represent the central arguments in the debate include the extent to which their views circulated. Of those included in the third chapter, Douglas Miller's book, *You Can't Do Business with Hitler*, sold in excess of 50 000 copies in its first year, making the number five position on best-seller lists for 1941. This was a considerable achievement for a previously unknown Commercial Attaché in the American diplomatic service. Journalist and broadcaster William Shirer's *Berlin Diary*

sold more than half a million copies in its first six months, becoming the number one best-seller for the same year. Its sales quickly doubled with the release of book club editions. Sumner Welles, both before and after he resigned as Undersecretary of State, earned more column-inches in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* than most other commentators on wartime issues. *Life* magazine, with a circulation of 2.4 million (1940) published his views on Germany. Emile Ludwig, who presented his impressions of the German problem to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, published in several popular magazines throughout the war, of which *Collier's* reached a readership of 2.7 million households. The views of psychiatrist Richard Brickner, excerpted in *Atlantic* from his book, *Is Germany Incurable?* stirred commentary in other periodicals and received a separate summation in a Library of Congress bulletin reviewing literature on the German problem.<sup>40</sup> Shirer, Brickner, Miller, Welles, the foreign policy analyst Vera Micheles Dean and political commentator Walter Lippmann earned biographical notes in *Current Biography*, indicating their high profiles in the public debate. Lastly, the questions the pollsters asked and the data their surveys yielded, discussed in Chapter Five and tabulated in the Appendix, indicate the relative impact of the views these authors expressed.

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<sup>40</sup> Laura Morgan, *Treatment of Germany After the War*, Bulletin no. 28A (Washington: Library of Congress, Legislative Reference Service, 1944), pp. 7-8.

## Chapter 2

“freedom from all goose-stepping of the minds of the people:”

### The Debate's Ideological Setting

Many Americans went to war with a sense of optimism about their democracy that transcended the challenges of the interwar years. If some still held out hope for Communism in Russia, they generally understood that both it and National Socialism represented the antithesis of democratic values. They thus confronted the totalitarian darkness that had shrouded Europe, believing that the beacon of their democracy would light the way to the future. This beacon shone all the brighter for Americans' own attempts to recognise and correct their democracy's flaws, some of which the Depression had brought into sharp relief. In this national emergency they had not, as had Germany, found democracy wanting and discarded it; they had found democracy wanting and undertaken to improve it. One war booster contrasted the New Deal with German militarism, writing: “One leader said to his ruined countrymen, ‘Let us make.’ The other said to his, ‘Let us take.’” He continued:

Even if you are one of those who regard the New Deal as Americanism at its worst, it is still Americanism. However distorted you may think its ideas, they are still ideas whose origin is to be found in the Constitution and the *Federalist*, not in Wagnerian opera. Its traditional hero is Mr. Jefferson, not Wotan; and Mr. Jefferson, with all his faults, was recognizably a statesman and not a baritone singer seven feet high with cow-horns on his hat.

Hitler, then, had chosen barbarism and could ultimately give no more to Germany and the German people than his own vainglory. In contrast,

Roosevelt had acted on the Americans' belief that their democracy was perfectible, "that the people are capable of drawing steadily closer to justice."<sup>1</sup>

Americans' optimism about their democracy derived also from the introduction of quantitative opinion polling. The polls were no less controversial than the New Deal, but they were just as 'American.' They, too, offered a dramatic contrast to totalitarian practice; dictators dispensed with public opinion altogether, but the pollsters held out the promise that quantitative calculation and analytical interpretation of public opinion would bring the workings of democracy closer to the ideal. Elmo Roper, for example, hailed the polls as the means "not only for preserving democracy from the totalitarian trend, but for giving it a new purity and strength." George Gallup and Saul Forbes Rae applauded the "sampling referendum" as "an advance in human relationships, and a forward step in the technique of self-government which in practical social importance will rank it with the original conception of government by the people."<sup>2</sup>

The growing popularity of the polls refocused attention on the quality of the opinion they measured and on the relationship of the press to a sound public opinion. Launching the *Public Opinion Quarterly (POQ)* in 1937, its editors proclaimed that

[a] new situation has arisen throughout the world, created by the spread of literacy among the people and the miraculous improvement of the means of communication. Always the opinions of relatively small publics have been a prime force in political life, but now, for the first time in history, we are confronted nearly everywhere by *mass* opinion as the final determinant of political, and economic action. Today public opinion operates in quite new

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald W. Johnson, "Roosevelt Against Hitler," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 1941, pp. 398, 400.

<sup>2</sup> Elmo Roper, "So the Blind Shall Not Lead," *Fortune*, 25:2 (February 1942), p. 102; George Gallup and Saul Forbes Rae, *The Pulse of Democracy: The Public-Opinion Poll and How It Works* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), pp. 125-126, quoting Robert Updegraff, "Democracy's New Mirror."

dimensions and with new intensities; its surging impact upon events becomes the characteristic of the current age—and its ruin or salvation?<sup>3</sup>

The rising force of mass public opinion, the *POQ*'s editors asserted, had compelled government branches, the executive and elected representatives to improve their communications with both the public and the press. The press, as an agency of "mass impression," had assumed an increasingly critical role in informing a more literate public eager to know the issues and express its responses. Further, the "private" measurement of opinion on "public" issues posed new challenges for democracy. "The fate of representative government," the editors wrote in anticipation, "grows uncertain."<sup>4</sup>

The *POQ*'s editors dedicated its pages to an ongoing examination of the new mass public opinion's impact on democratic processes. In 1942 they published an overview by Richard S. F. Fells, a graduate student in politics at Princeton. Fells saw public opinion as fulfilling the ideals of the American Revolution, activated by the technologies of mass communication, and aroused by issues of war and peace. He explained that

[t]he American Revolution was an open manifestation of a desire for a responsible government, and implicit in this idea of responsible government was the idea of responsibility to influential public opinion. But the influential opinion of 1776 was not a uniformity of opinion of the American people as a whole but rather the opinion of the élite.<sup>5</sup>

Rightfully so, continued Fells, quoting John Adams' century-old disparagement of public opinion in support: "I hope it will be no offense to say, that public opinion is often formed upon imperfect, partial and false information of the press. Public information cannot keep pace with the facts."<sup>6</sup> Adams spoke these words, however, before telegraph, telephone,

3 "Forward," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1:1 (1937), p. 3.

4 "Forward," pp. 3-4.

5 Richard S.F. Fells, "Public Opinion in American Statecraft," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 6:3 (1942), p. 392.

6 Fells, p. 396; quoting *The Works of John Adams*, Vol. 6.

linotype and rotary press had reduced the significance of space and time while expanding the means of information distribution. These technological advances had made possible the increase "in both quantity and quality" of the public opinion worthy to influence policy formation.

Fells cited several examples of mass public opinion "literally forcing the executive branch of the government to act against its will" in foreign relations.

Sixteen million dollars' worth of damage done to invested American capital in Cuba, together with Spanish horror news stories transmitted to the American people via William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, culminated in the Spanish-American War of 1898. As Charles A. Beard cogently points out, "Here was a combination of the economic interest, appealing humanity, 'good journalism,' and popular tumult which drove the United States steadily towards war."<sup>7</sup>

As the United States plunged deeper into World War II, Fells recalled almost nostalgically an earlier flood of public opinion in favour of international peace. The American State Department, he argued, had turned a deaf ear to French calls for a treaty outlawing war, but when Premier Aristide Briand issued his invitation directly to the American people through the Associated Press, "this was all that was needed to stimulate latent opinion in the American public. The press began to champion the utopian dream of international peace; the American people echoed a typical response in behalf of that ideal." In 1929, a recalcitrant American government caved in to public demand promoted by the press. Having received petitions with more than two million names, the Senate passed the pact with only one dissenting vote. Granted, the Kellogg-Briand pact had amounted to no more than an "international kiss," but for Fells it represented the triumph of the public will over secret diplomacy.

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<sup>7</sup> Fells, p. 399, quoting *The Rise of American Civilization*, Vol. 2. Fells shied away from any discussion of 'yellow journalism.'

Should a technologically enabled public opinion, Fells asked, play this role in democratic government? He proposed a rational study of public opinion

first, viewing the concept of public opinion as an idea having an independent history of its own; second, seeing how new techniques have liberated this idea and given it a new significance; and, third, determining if this new significance of public opinion, due to new techniques, is incompatible with the basic postulates of democracy.<sup>8</sup>

On this last point, Fells invoked James Mill who championed the rationality of public opinion, and followed with George Gallup:

Mill, following in the Benthamite tradition, elaborated the argument for the inerrancy of public opinion. On the grounds that man is a human being, he is "possessed of reason," and, "accustomed to weigh evidence. ... When various conclusions are ... presented with equal care and with equal skill, there is a moral certainty ... that the greatest number will judge right." This was the essential foundation of nineteenth century liberalism; it was also the core of Dr. Gallup's thought in answer to the question, "how wise are the common people? ... I think that the ... American people have a remarkably high degree of common sense. These people may not be brilliant or intellectual or particularly well read, but they possess a quality of good sense which is manifested time and time again in their expressions of opinion on present-day issues."<sup>9</sup>

The idea that technology enabled public opinion to keep pace with the facts was central to Fells' analysis. It made true Mill's and Gallup's liberal concept of a valid public opinion. It afforded everyone the opportunity to participate in, and understand, events essential to the effective formulation of policy. For Fells the impartiality of the press was simply not an issue; the facts combined with the good sense of the common people would produce an appropriate public opinion. His optimism ignored long-standing critiques of the relationship between the press and public opinion, for example, Walter Lippmann's, written some twenty years earlier.

Through his work as a propagandist during World War I, Lippmann had discovered not only the power of mass public opinion, but also the ease with

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<sup>8</sup> Fells, pp. 403-405.

<sup>9</sup> Fells, pp. 405-406, quoting Mill, *The Liberty of the Press* and Gallup, *Public Opinion in a Democracy*.

which it could be manipulated. The rising power of public opinion, he observed, had transformed the democratic decision making process. Interaction of the executive and public opinion had supplanted the interaction of the executive and congressional branches of government.<sup>10</sup> To exercise its new influence effectively, however, the public required accurate and reliable information on which to base its opinion. The press's traditional emphasis on freedom from censorship and freedom of expression obscured a multitude of problems. Inaccurate reporting, hearsay, imagination, prejudice, lack of common sense, and emotionalism coloured every editor's and reporter's treatment of the news and, consequently, the information available to the public.<sup>11</sup>

For Lippmann, the basic tenets of liberal philosophy broke down in modern conditions where public opinion governed. The Benthamite liberals, he maintained, advocated tolerance of opinion in a world in which it did not count as a political force. Using John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* as an example, Lippmann asserted that

the premise from which Mill argued was that many opinions then under the ban of society were of no interest to society, and ought therefore not to be interfered with. The orthodoxy with which he was at war was chiefly theocratic. It assumed that a man's opinion on cosmic affairs might endanger his personal salvation and make him a dangerous member of society. ... The plain truth is that Mill did not believe that much action would result from the toleration of those opinions.<sup>12</sup>

Mill argued against theological control of an ineffectual public opinion, but public opinion in modern democracy bowed before a new orthodoxy wielded by the press. The newspaper, Lippmann asserted,

is in all literalness the bible of democracy, the book out of which a people determines its conduct. ... Now the power to determine each day what shall seem

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), pp. 60-61.

<sup>11</sup> Lippmann, *Liberty and the News*, p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Lippmann, *Liberty and the News*, pp. 30-31.

important and what shall be neglected is a power unlike any that has been exercised since the Pope lost his hold on the secular mind.<sup>13</sup>

Americans assumed, he pointed out,

that the press should do spontaneously for us what primitive democracy imagined each of us could do spontaneously for himself, that every day and twice a day it will present us with a true picture of all the outer world in which we are interested.<sup>14</sup>

Lippmann thought, initially, that higher professional standards in reporting would solve the problem, but recognising that his recommendations covered only part of the public opinion formation process, he extended his analysis to the public itself. Limited by the bounds of their own experiences and their culture, he argued, people filtered information through their own emotions, habits and prejudices. "We do not first see, then define, we define first and then see," he claimed. "In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture."<sup>15</sup> So essential for comprehending a complex world, stereotypes naturally limited one's ability to differentiate fact and judgement. They crippled the journalist attempting to report news, and the reader attempting to comprehend it. For Lippmann, innovations in news technology did not facilitate a greater understanding; instead, they compounded socially bound problems of comprehension.

The press, Lippmann maintained, was

too frail to carry the burden of popular sovereignty, to supply spontaneously the truth which democrats hoped was inborn. And when we expect it to supply such a body of truth we employ a misleading standard of judgment. We misunderstand the limited nature of news, the illimitable complexity of society; we overestimate our own endurance, public spirit, and all-round competence. ...

If the newspapers, then, are to be charged with the duty of translating the whole public life of mankind, so that every adult can arrive at an opinion on

<sup>13</sup> Lippmann, *Liberty and the News*, p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1945 [1922]), p. 320.

<sup>15</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 81.

every moot topic, they fail, they are bound to fail, in any future one can conceive they will continue to fail. It is not possible to assume that a world carried on by division of labour and distribution of authority, can be governed by universal opinions in the whole population. Unconsciously the theory sets up the single reader as theoretically omniscient, and puts upon the press the burden of accomplishing whatever representative government, industrial organization, and diplomacy have failed to accomplish. Acting upon everybody for thirty minutes in twenty-four hours, the press is asked to create a mystical force called Public Opinion that will take up the slack in public institutions.<sup>16</sup>

The public, then, could no more bear the burden of forming an appropriate opinion than could the press in providing the necessary unbiased information. Lippmann concluded that neither the public nor the press should participate in policy formation. Rejecting a democratic theory based on omniscient public opinion he affirmed the practice of representative democracy. He called for policy making at the expert level only if democracy was to work at all.<sup>17</sup>

Lippmann despaired of the virtues of public opinion and a free press, but World War II provided the occasion of their reaffirmation. Fells identified the problem of public opinion in the formation of policy as "basically the problem of totalitarianism v. democracy." Since both ideologies laid claim to the will of the people, he argued, the difference between them stemmed from more than the obvious dichotomy between the policy making role of force in totalitarianism and public opinion within democracy.

The true distinction is that in a totalitarian form of government the people have been forced to the instinctive obedience to a power which they no longer recognize to be of their own creation; whereas in a democracy, the people have retained their ability to maintain a feeling of supremacy, and to be continually aware of their government as their agent.<sup>18</sup>

For Fells, public opinion could not be separated from the democratic process. "All power springs from the people," he reminded all who might have forgotten. "The people can never delegate their sovereignty, for in a

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<sup>16</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 362.

<sup>17</sup> Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, p. 364, 369-378.

<sup>18</sup> Fells, p. 407.

democracy sovereignty inherently resides in the people.” With the development of modern communication, public opinion could assume its rightful place in the democratic system. Public opinion polls and analysis of public opinion might be a new science, but they belonged intrinsically—and in the war crisis, poignantly—to contemporary American political-social life. “The democracy of our age,” Fells concluded, “in order to be creative must compound those elements into a philosophy of government which will fit the world we live in.”<sup>19</sup>

That world had changed profoundly since World War I. More than one observer noted that during the interwar years governments—communist, fascist and democratic—had increased their control over private enterprise and, thus, had increased constraints on individual liberty. Such interventions had differed in their objectives and methods; still, all had been responses to devastating economic crisis, and the wartime need to mobilise the resources of the entire nation held out the prospect that state control would increase throughout the war years and also through the postwar recovery. “Does this mean,” asked one political commentator, “that, in fighting totalitarianism, we shall inevitably be conquered by its methods from within?” For American democracy, this war was double jeopardy. If in the war the “ramparts of liberty”—freedom from arbitrary arrest and persecution, freedom of the press, speech, assembly and election—should fall, the war was lost “morally” no matter how great the military victory.<sup>20</sup>

The exigencies of World War II thus heightened Americans’ concerns about the condition of their democracy and its ability to withstand totalitarian challenges from both without and within. Any development in

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<sup>19</sup> Fells, pp. 409-410.

<sup>20</sup> William Henry Chamberlin, “The Crisis is Here,” *Atlantic Monthly*, (June 1942), pp. 673-674.

American politics that seemed even remotely 'European' in its origins or that seemed to depart from American democratic ideals provoked deep concern. Despair for democracy, however, was not the order of the day. Analyses that warned of potential threats and cautioned against complacency also celebrated American democratic traditions and expressed confidence that Americans could improve their democracy rather than throwing it over for totalitarian solutions. In this vein, the political scientist Harold Lasswell expressed his concern that "[i]n these trying days, we must rely more than ever upon the proper functioning of public opinion for the preservation of democracy," and his confidence that "[i]n America, we can achieve democracy through public opinion."<sup>21</sup> His arguments turned upon the same "division of labour" and "distribution of authority" that made public opinion untenable for Lippmann. Lasswell employed different terms—"specialisation" and "balance"—but in his opinion these were the unique historical conditions of American democracy and the necessary conditions for its continuing stability in a technologically complex and rapidly changing world.

A government of, by and for the people, Lasswell explained, entailed a two-part burden for public opinion: "to make permanent demands for justice and majority rule; [and] to make provisional, ever-changing demands for popular policies consistent with the permanent demands." Historically, he continued, Americans had demanded a more democratic government as they began to feel economically secure. Businessmen, especially, seeking to reduce the control of the colonial administrations in their enterprises, became the most outspoken in their calls for reform. They adopted the new "language of liberty" to further their campaigns, and thus merged the idea of popular rule

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<sup>21</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Democracy Through Public Opinion* (n. p.: George Banta Publishing Co., 1941), pp. 1, 176.

and their demand for less government intervention in their businesses. The emergent democratic foundation stressed government responsibility to the people, constrained the decision-making power of the government, and redistributed many government functions to freely competitive enterprise. It defined the appropriate "social balance" in American society and pressed public opinion to uphold that balance in its own interest. Lasswell explained:

[D]emocracy is most secure where there is social balance, not predominance. The predominance of any organized group or any privileged few is a menace to vigorous and alert public opinion in the public interest. The organization may be government [or] business ... in no case can it be trusted with totalitarian pre-eminence. The practice of balance and not totalism is one of the surest safeguards of effective justice and genuine majority rule.<sup>22</sup>

In Lasswell's opinion, public opinion upheld justice and majority rule if it acted to maintain the balance between government and business. It recognised when freely competitive enterprise was best left alone and when such national emergencies as war and economic breakdown made necessary an expanded role for government. It understood when either government or business became too big and acted to restore the appropriate balance.<sup>23</sup> Americans, he noted, had already attempted, with limited success, to grapple with the monopoly power of big business. Big business, he asserted, was not really business at all.

[T]here comes a point when a business enterprise gets so big that it becomes coercive; in short, it bids for predominance. When bigness passes into predominance, an enterprise changes its function in society. It begins to exercise the degree of influence that is governmental in scope. ...

... Monopoly power is the power to dictate prices in a market. The power to dictate is sovereign power. Hence monopoly is not a form of business but a form of government; it is a form of dictatorship if not subject to majority rule.<sup>24</sup>

American public opinion, however, had done no more than call in the government. By putting their faith in leaders who would support measures

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<sup>22</sup> Lasswell, pp. 9, 16, 132-133.

<sup>23</sup> Lasswell, pp. 134-136.

<sup>24</sup> Lasswell, pp. 146, 148.

to restore freely competitive enterprise, Americans had restored only a partial balance and had run the risks attendant upon big government.

Lasswell cautioned:

We do not solve our problem of balance by the simple expedient of calling in the government. Predominance in any sphere of public life is a danger to the free expression of opinion. We know that regimentation under any system of control is a danger to outspoken democratic opinion. ... The threat to freedom is great whether the predominating agency is private enterprise or government.

Lasswell also warned:

The two great elites of monopolistic business and gigantic government are in partial alliance and in partial conflict; it is freely predicted that the tension between them is great enough to end in the merging of the two, inaugurating a monopolistic and dictatorial order in America.<sup>25</sup>

Lasswell believed that in a world of continuing technological advances and economic turbulence public opinion could only maintain the necessary balance if it became more involved in the policy making process—if it established policy initiatives that bound public officials to act on its behalf.<sup>26</sup>

Lasswell appreciated that continuing economic depression had demoralised large numbers of Americans and had undermined the strength of American public opinion. This stemmed, he argued, not only from the obvious problem of financial duress that accompanied job loss, but from the way in which Americans seemed to blame the victims for their misfortune. Stigmatised as “charity” cases, “unemployed” and “on relief” the victims of the depression struggled to maintain their sense of self respect. Under these circumstances “breakdown in economic routine” became a “destructive crisis.” In that sense, Lasswell saw public opinion as its own worst enemy. He wrote,

It is suicidal for society to inflict humiliation upon millions of its members. It is too much to expect that anyone can kick people around without releasing a flood of destructive impulses. It is too much to expect that we can wreck the hopes of millions of people without sowing a whirlwind of destructiveness.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Lasswell, pp. 140, 141.

26 Lasswell, p. 141.

27 Lasswell, p. 154.

In case his readers entertained doubts about the ultimate end of a demoralised public opinion, Lasswell pointed to Nazi Germany. There, a disheartened people had succumbed to the Nazis, who subverted democratic processes in the service of their narrow interests. The German people had failed to recognise that Hitler's policies were incompatible with democracy, and they could not cope with the destructive tactics of the Nazis, who adhered to democratic formalities until they gained effective control of the government. German "[o]pinion could not decide at what point any given detail of the pattern of democracy passed from valid association with democratic reality and became part of the façade of despotism."<sup>28</sup>

At home, the "private plutocracy" born of big business did not help public moral. "In nearly every field of economic activity," Lasswell noted, "the 'big man' has crowded out hosts of 'little fellows.'" From independent farmers to shopkeepers and small manufacturers, big business had squeezed not only income, but social status and political control, increasing both the general sense of insecurity within the American middle class and its potential for anti-democratic reaction. Lasswell equated this sort of reaction with big government, which was certainly not, in his opinion, democratic government. It was government by the worst elements of the middle class, the "leaders of unions and of parties of protest," the "specialists on propaganda and organization," those most willing to incite a demoralised public to overturn democracy. Lasswell continued:

With mounting insecurity throughout the world, the trend is away from free enterprise and toward bureaucracy. If all organized activity in society passes into the hands of government, the most influential positions in society will be in the bureaucracy. In such a society the dominant social formation would be the part of the middle class that is skilled in propaganda, organization, and violence—not in business.

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<sup>28</sup> Lasswell, pp. 16-17.

This, he pointed out, had been the case in the Soviet Union, where power had become concentrated in the government, a government that, he continued, made “no effort to disenfranchise all who acquire skill in propaganda, organization, violence, engineering and other operations. On the contrary, those who perform unskilled or semi-skilled jobs are in the lowest ranks of influence.”<sup>29</sup>

Such bleak prospects notwithstanding, “there [was] no need for America to slide unwittingly down the European path through private monopolism to dictatorship,” Lasswell wrote. Americans enjoyed several advantages that augured well for their democracy. They could draw upon their long-standing democratic tradition and their history of national success. They had never experienced humiliation in a desperate war. They had crossed the threshold of the twentieth century with “a unity of aspiration,” while Europeans had carried forward their internal quarrels over “space, class, race and creed.” Americans had achieved “a unified middle class outlook;” they valued skill and knowledge, and repudiated aristocratic privilege. “We are comparatively free,” Lasswell wrote, “from ‘bums’ at the bottom of the social structure who believe that ‘society owes me a living,’ or from gilded bums at the top of the social pyramid who expect the same indulgence.” More importantly, the European descent into totalitarianism provided an example for Americans to avoid.<sup>30</sup>

These advantages left Americans better positioned to enlist technological change—particularly the expanding specialisation in all aspects of knowledge and material production—in their democracy’s behalf. Lasswell maintained that Americans could engineer “democracy though public opinion” by

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<sup>29</sup> Lasswell, pp. 156-157.

<sup>30</sup> Lasswell, pp. 170-171, 174-175.

increasing the stake individual Americans held in their democracy, by improving the ability of all Americans to think rationally, and by improving the quality of information and the news. In his opinion, Americans had already made considerable progress in the right direction, especially considering the totalitarian alternatives; they had only to stay the course. His prescription, following the path of his analysis, treated the social, as well as the philosophical, dimensions of public opinion.

Increasing Americans' stake in their democracy entailed, for Lasswell, full and respected employment. He explained:

The basic conception of democratic justice calls for reciprocity of respect among all persons in a given society. ...

The demand to be respected is one of the deepest impulses of human personality. [People] need to respect themselves by having a respected place in society. And that spells the need for security in a respected job."

Lasswell argued that expanding technology had increased the number of "brainworkers" in American society from 35 per cent in 1870, to 44 percent in 1930. These jobs, he understood, commanded better remuneration and higher levels of respect. This trend, he believed, would continue to democracy's benefit.<sup>31</sup>

Self-respect underscored all of Lasswell's analysis. "We depend upon leaders to detect, to prevent and to cure the ravages of destructiveness in society," he wrote, "but whether leaders can exercise this function depends upon the level of community attainment in character as well as intelligence and skill." Thus, self-respect involved not only a skilled job, but a thorough civic education for everyone. It also involved character development, especially during youth. "From the patient scientific study of personality growth," Lasswell continued, "we have confirmed the ancient saying that those who cannot respect themselves cannot respect others." Specialisation

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<sup>31</sup> Lasswell, pp. 33-34, 154, 171-176.

in human development had already advanced society's understanding of the "storm and stress" of adolescence and many other "destructive processes in our prevailing methods of child care and youth training." Continuing growth in this knowledge would enable Americans to discover and eliminate destructive processes in all of American society.<sup>32</sup>

To improve their capacity for rational argument, Lasswell argued, Americans could take advantage of developments in the methods of logic and self-analysis. He expressed his confidence that Americans could master techniques for analysing information, from propaganda to news, to ascertain its efficacy for sound, democratic public policy. They could learn to determine cause and effect, logical truth, ethical, legal and theological implications, and expediency.<sup>33</sup> Americans could also learn to overcome stereotyped thinking. They could, by learning such simple psychoanalytical techniques as free association, begin to recognise their biases—class, economic, social, cultural, psychological—and discount them in evaluating arguments.<sup>34</sup>

To improve the quality of information and news available for public discussion Lasswell looked to "researchers and reporters ... the specialists upon whom we must depend for the facts which are needed ... to achieve public opinion in the public interest." Scientifically organised research as well as the press, he pointed out, supplied systematic and reliable data on all matters of public concern. The press, Lasswell argued, counterbalanced the slower workings of science.

[W]e cannot wait until events are described by the eye of science; we need to know what happened yesterday, today, or even a few moments ago. The cursory look is the special skill of the reporter. His job is to see as much of the truth as he can at a glance, for he must act against a "deadline." The reporter is not only

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32 Lasswell, pp. 98, 125-129.

33 Lasswell, pp. 35-44.

34 Lasswell, pp. 45-60.

a specialist on truth; he clarifies and vivifies. His function is composite, hence difficult to standardize; it is rushed, hence in peril of mere sensation.<sup>35</sup>

Lasswell anticipated that, as journalism became increasingly professionalised and as schools of journalism placed more emphasis on training in the social sciences, the press would be able to offer better descriptions and interpretations of current events. To this end, he noted, the press had begun to do its share, enhancing its "critical spirit" in evaluation of news reports, and by opening its pages to commentators with conflicting political viewpoints.<sup>36</sup>

Lasswell's analysis combined a deep distrust of elites and a profound faith in Americans' capacity to improve their democracy. His views echoed those of Gallup and Rae, who held that flaws in public opinion involved a breakdown in the "machinery of our democratic institutions," not any inherent incapacity of the general public. "The public contains many people who have never been fitted by education for the task of citizenship," they wrote, "Others have found economic life so insecure that they readily fall victim to false panaceas." These were the exception, however. More importantly, they were not instances of the "swinish multitude," but examples of remediable social problems. The further study of public opinion, Gallup and Rae argued, would facilitate solutions.<sup>37</sup>

For the two pollsters, the rise of National Socialism evidenced the flaws of any political practice that placed sole trust in supposedly disinterested representatives. They argued:

By and large, the thesis that the people are unfit to rule, and that they must be led by their natural superiors—the legislators and the experts—differs only in degree, and not in essence, from the view urged by Mussolini and Hitler that the people are mere "ballot cattle," whose votes are useful not because they represent

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35 Lasswell, pp. 66, 69.

36 Lasswell, p. 105.

37 Gallup and Rae, pp. 286-287.

a valuable guide to policy, but merely because they provide "proof" of the mass support on which the superior regime is based. It must not be forgotten that the dictators, too, urge that the common people, because of their numbers, their lack of training, their stupidity and gullibility, must be kept as far away as possible from the elite whose task it is to formulate laws for the mass blindly to obey.<sup>38</sup>

As the editors of the *POQ* noted, interest in public opinion's fitness to rule derived from the realisation that public opinion's role in policy formation had steadily expanded over the preceding century, not from the wartime juxtaposition of the democratic and totalitarian ideologies with which its proponents framed their analyses. Depression, Communism, Nazism and war provided them with a powerful basis on which to attack their detractors, and the wartime showdown between opposing political philosophies added a sense of urgency to their cause. This urgency became a rallying call to bring vital policy questions before the public for its consideration, and to do so in a way that fitted the public to pronounce upon them.

Consequently, during World War II public opinion achieved a new status in American democratic practice; it became the focus of the wartime moral defence of democracy. The armed forces and the booming war economy assuaged the employment problem. The press, as the primary forum for public policy discussions, became the wartime fountainhead of a sound public opinion. James Russell Wiggins, Managing Editor of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reminded an editors' conference that

[n]ews is the raw material from which sound public opinion is fabricated. If the news is colored, twisted, defective, biased and warped, public opinion is dangerously likely to exhibit similar defects. The news, therefore, has become a commodity the integrity of which is so vital to a functioning democracy, that private enterprise that deals with it can expect to be held to the strictest accountability for the proper handling of it.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gallup and Rae, p. 259.

<sup>39</sup> James Russell Wiggins, "The Function of the Press In a Modern Democracy," *Journalism Quarterly*, 19:2 (1942), p. 164.

Opening a new press room at the State Department, Secretary of State Cordell Hull reminded correspondents of their wartime obligations. "There has never been a greater need," he told them,

for an alert public opinion than there is today. It will continue to be increasingly greater until victory has crowned our efforts and post-war problems have been settled. You will perform a tremendous function for good or bad, according to the skill and intelligence and practical judgement with which you aid in developing and keeping thoroughly alive what we call an alert public opinion.

... Your most vital task today is to make the maximum contribution in your work to what we would call an informed public opinion relating to basic international questions, those arising during the war and those that are inevitably arising even now in relation to the post-war peace.<sup>40</sup>

Addressing the National Editorial Association in April 1941 Walter D. Fuller, President of the Curtis Publishing Company, exhorted the delegates to preserve a free press to "save America:"

In these days of great national emergency, I prefer to greet you not as fellow publishers ... not as fellow editors ... but as guardians ... guardians of a priceless heritage ... the guardians of a free press of a free people.

An informed people is fundamental to a continuance of this Republic. Therefore nothing is so vital to the whole future of our country as the public opinion molded by a free American press. ...

The workings of American democracy depend upon an informed public opinion. Freedom of the press is an institution without which our democracy cannot live. More and better use of freedom is freedom's only defense.

And, yet, it is not enough to mouth terms like "freedom" and "democracy." ... And so I pose the question—"What freedoms do we defend?" ... Well, most obviously freedom from concentration camps, from a controlled press, from subjugated enterprise, from down-trodden humanity, from a dominated educational system—freedom from all goose-stepping of the minds of the people.<sup>41</sup>

In one breath Fuller combined the two factors that conditioned discussions of postwar issues. He affirmed the belief in the power of a free press to develop a public opinion appropriate to guide policy making. He expressed Americans' wartime need to see their democracy progressing steadily away from totalitarian entrapment. Fortified by theory, and responding to wartime urgency, editors and publishers devoted page after

<sup>40</sup> "Work of Press Vital for Future, Says Hull," *Editor and Publisher*, July 15, 1944, p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Walter D. Fuller, "Freedom for What? Preserve a Free Press and You Save America," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 7:15 (May 15, 1941), pp. 467-468.

page to postwar issues, especially the question of Germany. Pundits of foreign policy issues, seeking to influence policy through public opinion, scrambled to air their views in the popular press.

## Chapter 3

### Ersatz Enigma:

#### The Impact of Propaganda and National Character on the Debate

##### 3.1 The enigma's illogic

Shortly after World War II ended, Ferdinand Hermens took the American press to task for its role in the wartime debate on Germany. "By now," he wrote, "almost everyone is aware that something is wrong with American policy toward Germany. But there is little or no appreciation of one factor that may well have a lot to do with the failure—the prominence of stereotypes in our thinking about the defeated Reich." Borrowing the words of Edmund Burke, Hermens accused the press of deliberately "drawing up an indictment against a whole people." It had identified "the entire German nation with a fanatical, arrogant, treacherous 'Nazi type.'" Seldom considered before the American entry into World War II, he continued, these denigrations of the German character peaked with the revelations of the Nazi death camps, and occupation policy showed their influence. For Hermens, the non-fraternisation policy was a case in point. By forbidding its occupation force any social contact with the German people, United States policy makers had deemed all Germans, by virtue of being German, guilty of war crimes to

at least some extent. When the military government abandoned the policy so early in the occupation, it demonstrated the error of that judgement.<sup>1</sup>

A political scientist at the University of Notre Dame, Hermens had been an anti-Nazi activist and a member of the Catholic Centre party in his native Germany. Immigrating to the United States in 1935, he soon took up his pen against the American movement for proportional representation. Hermens argued that in Germany proportional representation had channelled the protest vote, inevitable during any period of economic depression, towards extremist groups. Representative democracy—American democracy—prevented extremists, who could not gather at least a plurality of votes, from holding office but proportional representation permitted a candidate's election with only a tiny fraction of support. Owing to proportional representation, Hermens continued, advocates of "every 'ism' in all Germany" found places in the *Reichstag*. By 1932 the various extremists had won a majority of the seats and stifled the voices of political compromise. With German democracy paralysed, Hitler's tyranny filled the void.<sup>2</sup>

The Weimar Constitution, in Hermens' opinion, had burdened German democracy with a defective electoral process. Consequently, he did not hold the German people responsible for Nazism, or for the renewal of war. The Germans themselves, he argued, had been the first victims of Nazi injustices. Having availed itself of a flawed system, and with its tremendous power to force compliance, the Nazi dictatorship silenced all internal opposition to the

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1 Ferdinand A. Hermens, "The Danger of Stereotypes in Viewing Germany," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 9:3 (1945), pp. 419, 424.

2 Ferdinand A. Hermens, "Germany and a Christian Peace," *Catholic World*, August 1942, p. 431; "The Potsdam Policies," *Forum*, February 1946, pp. 490-491. He wrote two works on proportional representation: *Democracy and Proportional Representation*, Public Policy Pamphlet no. 31 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940) and *Democracy or Anarchy? A study of Proportional Representation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: *The Review of Politics*, 1941).

atrocities it committed at home and in the countries it occupied. Hermens wrote,

The people of Germany ... were indeed the first victims of the tyrannical system by which they are ruled long before its evil effects were combined with (and magnified by) the evils of totalitarian warfare, and then directed against other nations. This consideration alone should dispose of the demand, "They're all guilty, punish them."<sup>3</sup>

People who held all Germans responsible for Nazi policies, Hermens believed, misapplied to a totalitarian regime a basic assumption of democracy—that the government is responsible to the people and carries out the will of the people.<sup>4</sup> "Where there is no freedom, there is no responsibility," he maintained,<sup>5</sup> and he reminded Americans that Thomas Paine said, "Man is not the enemy of man, but through the medium of a false system of government."<sup>6</sup> The Germans, Hermens maintained, would learn from their nation's mistakes. They would set up a democracy if the victors would give them a chance.<sup>7</sup>

In the public debate on the German problem, Hermens saw little in the way of enlightened and dispassionate argument. He saw much in the way of propaganda born of a "wartime psychology" understandable in terms of war-induced stresses, but not conducive to rational discussion. Wartime propaganda, he believed, produced "a warped view of the history of the enemy peoples [that complimented] the anger and the sorrow caused by the devastations of war." It engendered calls for a harsh and punitive peace

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<sup>3</sup> Hermens, "Germany and a Christian Peace," p. 428.

<sup>4</sup> Hermens argued that Americans did not hold the Russian people responsible for Communist atrocities, such as the elimination of the kulaks, they could do nothing to prevent. "Germany and a Christian Peace," p. 429.

<sup>5</sup> Ferdinand A. Hermens, *The Tyrant's War and the People's Peace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), p. 205.

<sup>6</sup> Hermens, "The Potsdam Policies," p. 489.

<sup>7</sup> Ferdinand A. Hermens, "Ferrero's Message: One man's view of Germany's Future," *Commonweal*, October 22, 1943, pp. 7-8; "Germany and a Christian Peace," pp. 428-429.

settlement which, if adopted, "would mean that we had discarded our own ideals and accepted the moral standards of the enemy."<sup>8</sup>

Propaganda was, however, essential to the prosecution of the war.

"Propaganda," wrote Quincy Wright in his treatise on war, "is the process of manipulating symbols so as to affect the opinion of a group." In wartime, he continued, propaganda promotes unity

by identifying the enemy as the source of all grievances of our people, by repeating and displaying symbols which represent the ideals which we share, by associating the enemy with hostility to those ideals, and by insisting on our own nobility and certainty of victory and on the enemies' diabolism and certainty of defeat.<sup>9</sup>

By this definition, wartime propaganda functioned well enough in garnering public support for prosecuting the war but, as Hermens suggested, while the fighting continued it skewed discussion about Germany. On the positive side of this formula, American ideals entailed that all the world's peoples should and could become democratic. The negative perspective implied Germany's hostility to, and inborn incapacity for, democracy. To a greater extent, the public debate on the German problem involved a struggle to resolve this dichotomy.

As the master of uplifting propaganda, Archibald MacLeish best illustrates the positive side of this dilemma. "The basic issue of this war," he wrote in late 1944, "was whether men were to live from this time forth as citizens of a nation or as subjects of a state." An Allied victory, he continued, afforded

a chance to construct men's lives on the surface of the earth in the free light and sweet air, rather than underground in the mutually exclusive, darkly hateful, armed and ignorant corridors of the colonies of ants. ...

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<sup>8</sup> Hermens, "Ferrero's Message," p. 6; *The Tyrant's War*, pp. 1, 5-12.

<sup>9</sup> Quincy Wright, *A Study of War*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), pp. 1093, 1095.

... In the peace we aim to make a world in which men everywhere shall live as citizens—a world in which no ant-hill state shall dig us down to slavery and darkness by the dread of war. ...<sup>10</sup>

Military defeat in World War II meant, MacLeish explained, a totalitarian world in which societies could survive only if they organised, like colonies of ants, on the “helot model.” Military victory, on the other hand, did not guarantee peace. Only democracy achieved by all the world’s nations would do that. He argued:

There is no possibility of peace but in the practice of democracy, and there is no possibility of the practice of democracy if any corner of the world is held by fascist power, armed and prepared for war—or arming and preparing. ... [I]f we mean to make a peace, then there is no stopping in our purpose short of this—this purpose: a world in which men everywhere shall live as citizens, a world in which the people shall possess the power. And not here alone, or in the countries of our allies in this war, but everywhere.”<sup>11</sup>

The idea that democracy ensures peace runs deep in democratic theory. Kenneth W. Thompson has noted that Kant, in “Perpetual Peace,” argued that democracy was “the only form of government capable of ensuring the maintenance of peace.” “According to this view,” Thompson explained, “the prospects for peace depend on the multiplication of democracies because only they cherish peace. Only nondemocratic states make war.”<sup>12</sup> At a practical level, this idea explained the German strategic advantage. The military analyst Fletcher Pratt noted that

[t]otalitarianism allows the commitment to total aggressive war. Civilian institutions and infrastructures can be improved for, seconded to, used as covers for, or subjected to the creation of the infrastructures for total war. With total war plans and infrastructures in place and kept up to date, the entire system awaits the nod of the totalitarian leader. In a democracy, on the other hand, democratic processes and public opinion almost confine the state to defensive warfare.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Archibald MacLeish, “The People Are Indivisible,” *Nation*, October 28, 1944, p. 509.

<sup>11</sup> MacLeish, “The People Are Indivisible,” p. 509.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth W. Thompson, *Traditions and Values in Politics and Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (Louisiana State University Press, 1992), p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> Fletcher Pratt, “German Planning for Total War,” *Harpers*, February 1941, p. 233.

At a more idealistic level, Hermens—making a perhaps unconscious contribution to wartime propaganda—argued that democracy was “the only form of government with which the nazi tyranny can be replaced. ... A democracy is peaceful by its nature; it does not have to fear its own people, and so it can be at peace with the rest of the world.”<sup>14</sup>

MacLeish upheld world progress towards democracy as an article of faith for Americans. He expected them to trust in the ability of all the world’s peoples to govern themselves, just as the founders of American democracy had believed that Americans could govern themselves. He called upon them to confirm their own faith in democracy by extending it to all the peoples of the world. He exhorted them to

intend that men shall rule themselves throughout the world. We must advance not for ourselves alone but for the people everywhere, the great American proposition on which the founders of this nation stood. We must believe positively and not passively, literally and not as a figure of speech, that the people ought to govern themselves because the people *can* govern themselves, and because the government of the people by themselves will make for peace.<sup>15</sup>

Affirming their faith in their own democracy came easily for most Americans, but professing faith that others—especially Germans—could achieve democracy was problematic. Why had the Germans given up on their democracy? Why had they led the world into war again? Were the German people responsible for the war, or only the Nazis? Could they become democratic? How would they become democratic? To find faith that Germany could achieve democracy, Americans needed answers to these questions.

Frequently enough, the answers served the negative demands of wartime propaganda and thus did not inspire confidence in the German potential for peace. They suggested that something inherent the German

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<sup>14</sup> Hermens, “Ferrero's Message,” p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> MacLeish, “The People Are Indivisible,” p. 509.

people made them prefer Nazi authoritarianism and aggression. These answers intimated that just as the Germans had cast off the Weimar Republic, they would not necessarily welcome democracy after the war. In *Berlin Diary*, which sold more than half a million copies in its first year, William Shirer counselled his readers that

[i]t is not correct to say that Nazism is a form of rule and life unnatural to the German people and forced upon them against their wish. ... It is true that the Nazi Party never polled a majority vote in Germany in a free election, though it came very close. But for the last three or four years the Nazi regime has expressed something very deep in the German nature and in that respect it has been representative of the people it rules. The Germans as a people lack the balance achieved, say, by the Greeks, the Romans, the French, the British, and the Americans. They are continually torn by inner contradictions which make them uncertain, unsatisfied, frustrated, and which force them from one extreme to the other. The Weimar Republic was so extreme in its liberal democracy that the Germans couldn't work it. And now they have turned to the extremes of tyranny because democracy and liberalism forced them to live as individuals, to think and make decisions as free men, and in the chaos of the twentieth century this was too much of a strain for them. Almost joyfully, almost masochistically, they have turned to an authoritarianism which releases them from the strain of individual decision and choice and thought and allows them what to a German is a luxury—letting someone else make the decisions and take the risks, in return for which they gladly give their own obedience. The average German craves security. He likes to live in a groove. And he will give up his independence and freedom—at least at this stage of his development—if his rulers provide this.<sup>16</sup>

As Berlin correspondent, first, for the Hearst newspaper chain and, later, the Columbia Broadcasting System, Shirer had witnessed the totalitarian reality of German life. His first-hand observations and his professional reputation lent authority to his nonetheless simplistic and stereotyped evaluation of the German people. As an analysis of the German “nature” his description also typified many discussions of the German problem throughout the war that took for granted the dubious proposition that nations have a national character—that observable differences among people or groups of people can be systematically organised to describe nations.

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<sup>16</sup> William L. Shirer, *Berlin Diary* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., n. d. [1941]), pp. 484-485.

Interest in the study of national character was revitalised by the diplomatic chaos surrounding the onset of World War I. The German Professor of Aesthetics and Psychology Richard Müller-Freienfels prefaced his study of the German national character with the comment that World War I had resulted largely from the “false estimations and inferences we made on both sides.”<sup>17</sup> The British historian Sir Ernest Barker also appreciated the importance of national character to diplomacy, commenting that “[h]e who can understand the psychological groundwork and the general character of nations possess a golden key of policy.”<sup>18</sup> The American historian James Truslow Adams’ interest in national character developed with his increasing awareness that “[the American] is becoming ... an important factor to be considered in the future of the world, not merely from his numbers, the resources of his country, and his power in the future international balance, but in himself.”<sup>19</sup>

All three students of national character endeavoured to replace casual observations of national traits with systematic analysis. Müller-Freienfels attempted the “exact observation of the composite phenomenon of German national life” throughout German history, to discover the elements of German character “persevering despite all change” and to discern “[t]hat which characterizes the German distinctly from all other nations.”<sup>20</sup> Adams expressed his interest in “what geographical, historical and social forces had made the American different from the citizen of any other nation.” and believed himself ideally suited to the task not only owing to his historical

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17 Richard Müller-Freienfels, *The German: His Psychology and Culture* (Los Angeles: New Symposium Press, 1936), p. vii.

18 Ernest Barker, *National Character and the Factors in Its Formation*, rev. ed. (London: Methuen and Co., 1948), p. xi.

19 James Truslow Adams, *The American: The Making of a New Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), p. vii.

20 Müller-Freienfels, *The German*, pp. 1-2.

knowledge, but because in the course of his world travels he had had ample opportunity to contrast Americans with other peoples.<sup>21</sup> Barker made the most significant attempt to provide a contemporary theoretical framework for the study of national character. "To see how nations have become what they are," he suggested, "may be the best way of discovering how they can make themselves other than what they are."<sup>22</sup> He described national character as "a spiritual superstructure which [a nation] has built by its own hands for its own dwelling." Its development paralleled the individual character a person develops through social discipline and moral choice. He defined it as the aggregate of the individual moral and intellectual characters of its citizens. He wrote:

A nation ... has a character, which is the sum of acquired tendencies built up by its leaders, in every sphere of its activity, with the consent and the co-operation—active in some, but more or less passive in others—of the general community.<sup>23</sup>

Barker compiled and elaborated an all-encompassing list of elements essential to national character which included race, economics, politics, geography, religion, language and literature, ideas and education. In his opinion, a nation not only formed its character through these elements, but through them a nation expressed its character and, further, might learn how to transform its character. The idea that a nation could transform its character distinguished Barker's study. Through this idea, he attempted to remove his theory one step—however tentative—from the established view that national characteristics were part of "nature," not "nurture." It created links—however tenuous—from national character to democratic theory, and to contemporary theories of social reform. Barker argued:

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<sup>21</sup> Adams, *The American*, pp. vii, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ernest Barker, *National Character and the Factors in Its Formation* (London: Methuen and Co., 1927), pp. v-vi.

<sup>23</sup> Barker, *National Character* (1927), pp. 7, 140.

For long centuries of a nation's history its character is engaged in a process of development which is mainly unconscious. In our age of democratic self-determination, and in an epoch of national systems of education, growth may be different; and nations at the long last may perhaps 'see and choose' their way. From the stage of the making of national character by race and environment, by population and occupation; through the stage in which nations made themselves what they were by the reaction upon them of the institutions, political and ecclesiastical, and of the literature which they had made for themselves—they may now have moved to a stage at which they make themselves freshly by their own free choice of ideals (ideals consciously framed and consciously pursued) in the fields both of social organization and of national education.<sup>24</sup>

Barker reconceived national character as a social construction; it was "made" and thus "modifiable," in each nation "by the minds and the wills of its members." Thus, in each generation a nation's citizens did not bear responsibility for the national character they inherited from their ancestors, but each generation retained responsibility for the betterment of its nation's character. Nonetheless, Barker's theory did not escape the "nature" problem, for if a nation's character was "the sum of acquired characteristics," then a nation's past national character remained important. Not only did it explain how a nation had achieved its current temperament, it provided a fund from which the citizens could draw in reshaping their national character. Barker explained that

there is no such thing as a given and ineluctable national character, which stamps and makes the members of a nation, and is their individual and collective destiny. Character is not destiny to each nation. Each nation makes its character and its destiny. We cannot therefore draw up an indictment against a whole nation, as eternally cursed, or sing pæans in its praise as eternally blessed. Let us rather believe ... that a nation is engaged in an eternal turbulence of generation and regeneration, and let us assign to it, in each age, the burden of responsibility for what it makes of itself. ...

Not only is national character made, it continues to be made and re-made. It always remains, in its measure, modifiable. ... Remembering these things, we may learn not to judge the present of a nation by the characteristics of its past: we may be ready to see and to forecast change in a nation, and even to give it our sympathy, if it brings the nation nearer to our own ideals; above all, we may beware of facile generalizations about immutable national traits. Yet it remains true that there are profound and abiding permanences in a nation's character; and the heaving of the surface must not blind us to the stillness of the depths. ... What seems a modification may only be the coming again into light of a facet

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<sup>24</sup> Barker, *National Character* (1927), pp. 5-6.

which was always there; and if the modification be something entirely new, it may be but a little thing, however it may dazzle us at the moment, in comparison with the accumulated fund of general disposition. Just because national character is tradition—socially created and socially transmitted tradition—we must believe that it is something which our minds have made and may change. But just for the same reason, we must also believe that what has been made through the centuries is strong and endures, and that the weight of the past is heavier in the balance than that of the present.<sup>25</sup>

His admonition against “facile generalizations about immutable national traits” notwithstanding, Barker freely admitted the limitations of an analysis of national character: “A nation can hardly see or describe objectively another nation—or indeed, for that matter, itself ... Prejudice clouds the vision.”<sup>26</sup>

His own prejudices led him to see national character as a wellspring of national renewal in times of profound duress and overwhelming change. “It is only in some destined hour of national crisis,” he wrote, “such as came to us in the midsummer of 1914, that we can see for ourselves, and show to others, the stuff of which we are made.” He also believed that in a period of rapid technological change, division of labour, and social unrest, his own country’s national character could provide the foundation of a new social structure, strong enough to shelter British democracy from the winds of fascism and communism—from, Barker warned,

the strong man armed, impatient of cliques and speculation, and rejoicing in the black shirts of a purer order of Fascism [and] the Marxist in a hurry, disdainful of bourgeois culture and slow evolution, and dictating behind a red guard in the interests of the proletariat.<sup>27</sup>

Hermens shared Barker’s antipathy to totalitarianism. For Hermens, though, studies of national character blended almost seamlessly into the wartime propaganda he found so offensive. Borrowing the words of Carl J. Friedrich, Hermens pointed out that assertions about national character amounted to no more and no less than

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<sup>25</sup> Barker, *National Character* (1927), pp. 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Barker, *National Character* (1927), p. 270.

<sup>27</sup> Barker, *National Character* (1927), pp. 270, 275-276.

the most potent weapons of propaganda. Nations have, in the age of nationalism, been readily personalized and their character has been set forth with assurance by travelers, journalists and scholars alike. It is not too much to say that this entire literature is, from a scientific viewpoint, worthless. Though some have written of these matters with learning, the argument usually focuses either upon selected personal experiences from which generalizations are drawn to fit the author's preconceived notions or political prejudices, or a selection is made from the particular country's literature to prove a preconceived idea or point of view. As might be expected, the particular author's own nation (with some notable exceptions) is depicted as possessing a most desirable character, while one or more others are proclaimed as bad. That the age of nationalism should have produced such mental constructs is probably natural enough; that these constructs do not stand critical analysis is certainly clear.<sup>28</sup>

In his study of constitutional government Friedrich also pointed out that arguments supporting national character supposed a level of uniformity among a nation's citizens that comparisons of individuals did not. They took for granted that a nation's character remained constant over long periods of time. They assumed some degree of inheritance and, accordingly, reduced to a form of "biological materialism of which Hitler's racialism [was] the most extreme manifestation."<sup>29</sup>

The logic of wartime propaganda and its adjunct, national character, thus shaped the public debate on peace with Germany. It suggested that Germany's national characteristics militated against democratic reform. It entailed that the German people must, if they were ever to be at peace with the postwar world, become democratic. It rationalised plans to transform Germany and its place in the postwar world.

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<sup>28</sup> Hermens, *The Tyrant's War*, p. 19, quoting Carl. J. Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy: Theory and Practice in Europe and America*.

<sup>29</sup> Carl. J. Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy: Theory and Practice in Europe and America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1941), pp. 23-24. For examples of the works on national character with which he found fault, Friedrich, p. 598, n.20, referred his readers to Barker's *National Character*, and also to André Siegfried, *France, a Study in Nationality*.

### **3.2 The German national character and prescriptions for peace: Some examples ...**

Analyses of the German problem that argued from the national character idea often shared similar features. They described the German character as developing over, and gaining permanence with, time. They contained or implied a comparison to Americans. They found the German people responsible for the Nazi government and thus for the war. They suggested or predicted Germany's continuing quest for world domination in the absence of some restraint. Having found the Germans essentially antidemocratic and disinclined towards peace, they considered whether the people could change, or if the youngest generation might be taught democracy and peace. The proposals for peace contained in these analyses were often severe, but the degree of severity depended on the writer's perception of the German potential for change. Lastly, their authors wrestled with the moral dilemma their proposals entailed, some matter-of-factly, others defensively. Five examples follow: two by American diplomats, one by a German expatriate, one by an American Professor of Psychiatry, and the last by the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, who played a primary role in formal planning for Germany. All but Morgenthau's appeared in their essentials in popular magazines, and all proposed occupation plans for Germany based on the German national character.

Commentators who found no hope for change made peace proposals devastating in their implications. Douglas Miller, for example, saw World War II as a Nazi drive for world power, but one in which the German people, owing to their moral weakness, acquiesced. Miller had served fifteen years in Germany with the United States Department of Commerce, rising to the position of Commercial Attaché at the American Embassy. In 1939 he

received an appointment in economics at the University of Denver, and during the war he served as an assistant to Colonel William J. Donovan, coordinator of the Office of Strategic Services. Miller's experiences with Nazi manipulation of American business interests in Germany fostered his belief that the German people accepted the Nazi regime all too passively. They lacked the "civic courage" to resist Nazi rule. He recounted, for example, an exchange with a German official over a treaty violation. The official politely acknowledged the legitimacy of the complaint, and regretted his powerlessness to address Miller's concerns. Miller concluded, "Honest old-fashioned Germans feel humiliated when they have to do Hitler's dirty work, but they did not seem able to make an effective stand for their principles."<sup>30</sup>

"The German mind and character as we know them today," wrote Miller, "have been created by circumstances, by the history of the German people and their surroundings." Miller believed Germans had become accustomed to Nazi doctrines much as they had become inured to centuries of authoritarian domination. Conditioned throughout their history to obey authority, Germans had learned to "divorce their thinking from their action more sharply than [Americans]." They thus tended to support anyone who could seize the reigns of power and wield the means of control.<sup>31</sup> The Germans were, Miller continued, "uncertain in the very depth of their souls." They lacked "a stable and balanced attitude toward life [and] the world in general." Miller offered three potential explanations for these characteristics: the division of the German people into Catholic and Protestant blocks, the so recent achievement of political unity, and the possibility that the Germans,

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<sup>30</sup> Miller, Douglas, *You Can't Do Business with Hitler* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1942 [1941]), p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, Douglas, "Why Germans Act as They Do," *New York Times Magazine*, August 31, 1941, pp. 22, 25.

living at the centre of Europe and having no natural boundaries at their political frontiers, had "been pulled this way and that by outside attractions." The German people also had acquired a hardened, selfish and egotistic character having "been brought up in a hard school." Compared to Americans, they had lived under such crowded conditions that they had not enjoyed the same opportunities to develop "the softer and kinder side of life."<sup>32</sup>

The Germans, Miller claimed, were consequently quarrelsome and possessed of an excessive pride and assertiveness which "inclined [them] to stand on their rights and sometimes to encroach on the rights of their neighbors." Germans displayed a "tendency to excess" and a "lack of moderation and sanity" in their thinking that facilitated their scholarship, and also steeled their determination during World War I. They were "deeply pessimistic about the ideals and institutions of the Western civilized world." They had become too cynical and this characteristic underscored their passive acceptance of the Nazi regime. "Very few Germans," Miller argued, "go all the way with Hitler," but they would support the Nazi government as long as it continued to win the war.<sup>33</sup>

In Miller's opinion, this war was the final depravity of the German people. "They have abolished the ideals of mercy and humanity in Germany," he insisted. This time the Germans had "killed too many innocent people in cold blood." This time too many Germans had "demoralized and brutalized" themselves through their contributions to the Nazi regime. They could not be made into good citizens of postwar Europe. Even the young people had learned "that there is no difference between right and wrong." They had

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<sup>32</sup> Miller, "Why Germans Act as They Do," p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Miller, "Why Germans Act as They Do," pp. 5, 22, 25; "The Achilles Heel of Nazi Germany," *New York Times Magazine*, August 24, 1941, pp. 3,4.

learned only "to be selfish and work for No. 1 in a changing and violent world." Germany had become, he insisted, "a breeding ground for criminals and adventurers."<sup>34</sup>

By passing directly from a discussion of the German character to his charge for the peace, Miller implied that the Germans' national character alone had led them to seek world domination. Following the war, he concluded, "[e]ither Hitler's system [would] dominate the entire world and enslave every country, or [Americans would] have to take such final steps as to remove forever this menace to our safety and our future." He insisted that

for the sake of our own future security and world peace, we are entitled to take such steps as may be necessary, no matter if this does treat the German people severely. I would apply the principles of total war which they have so ingeniously worked out and remove from Germany all the industrial fabric which maintains the war machines. Industrial disarmament is permanent under modern conditions.

I would haul out the trucks, commandeer supplies of metals and machinery, take up strategic railroad tracks. I would redraw future boundary lines so that the coal and ore fields in the east and west would be outside the boundary of the Reich. I would supervise the ports and the frontiers so that war-essential machinery and metals would not enter the Reich. This is perfectly feasible, practically possible. Such a policy would force the Germans to devote their entire energies to tilling the land to raise adequate supplies of food to keep themselves alive.

This would mean that the German cities would decline. The total population would drop to a smaller figure. Young men would emigrate. It would give the rest of the world a breathing space for many years to settle its own problems before deciding whether it could get along peaceably with what remained of the German people or not. This proposal is harsh. Any postwar settlement will have to be.

Emil Ludwig also condemned the German people, but he held out more hope for change over the long term. A popular biographer and historical novelist, Ludwig was German-Jewish by birth and Swiss by choice some years before the Nazis assumed power in Germany. During the war he sojourned in the United States. Well connected, he presented his views on Germany to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. He compared Germans

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<sup>34</sup> Miller, "The Achilles Heel of Nazi Germany," pp. 4, 22.

with Americans, generalising from individual characteristics to psychological well-being, political attitudes and the Germans' ultimate responsibility for accepting Nazi domination. Similar to Miller, his evaluation of the German national character justified his peace proposal.

Ludwig described national character as a people's "inner structure,"<sup>35</sup> and "the sum total of the traits which distinguish a nation as a whole—even though some of those traits may be partially or entirely absent in individual members." He referred to it also as the "innate characteristics [that] gain strength through customs that are carried on over centuries."<sup>36</sup> Drawing upon the 'first appearances' associated with honour and treachery, Ludwig compared a poorly mannered German to a well-mannered American. He described

the self-assured bearing of the American, his serene open countenance when he meets you. He is obviously natural and fearless and makes no pretense. The German, living under a constant strain, first takes the other fellow's measure and in an instinctive distrust weighs the risks he may run with him and the advantages he may gain. ...

The American will not hesitate to help someone in trouble in a crowd, in the street, or on a bus; the pioneer life of his forebears has developed that instinct which today has become a kind of moral tradition. The German ... without any naïve self-assurance and natural dignity, would in a similar situation be hampered by doubts as to the proper thing to do in view of his particular standing.<sup>37</sup>

For Ludwig, the Germans' poor manners betrayed an inner turmoil. He argued that lack of self-assurance led Germans to adopt a different standard of personal fulfilment, based not on "a bigger bank account, a better home, or a more beautiful car," but on "power, glory, giving orders, and the feeling of being a *Herrenmensch* (a Master)."<sup>38</sup> A German, Ludwig explained, felt "a

<sup>35</sup> Emil Ludwig, "How to Treat Defeated Germany," *Collier's*, October 2, 1943, p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Emil Ludwig, *The Moral Conquest of Germany* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc., 1945), pp. 13, 19-20.

<sup>37</sup> Ludwig, *Moral Conquest*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>38</sup> Ludwig, *Moral Conquest*, p. 19; United States, House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Testimony of Mr. Emil Ludwig, "The German People," Friday, March 26, 1943, p. 3.

tension of happy expectancy to get an order and to be able to carry it out! The superior, on the other hand, [got] his satisfaction in playing the almighty.”<sup>39</sup>

He continued,

It is this lack of self-assurance that has called forth in the German the desire to conquer his happier neighbor and, at the same time, to idealize that very conquest. ...

As a soldier, the German for 2,000 years has found satisfaction in seeing the fear he evokes in other countries. He is not made happy by an inherent feeling of harmony; he is happy when he knows that others are less happy than he. ...

Want of self-assurance has also developed the German's passion for commanding and obeying.<sup>40</sup>

In Ludwig's opinion, two peoples with such contrasting senses of personal fulfilment would naturally favour disparate political systems. He argued that

[t]he American looks upon the State ... as a plane ... on which all live on the same level, and therefore share their feeling of self-assurance. The ablest rise and surpass the others in prestige, money, or artistic accomplishment. To the German ... the State, looks like a pyramid. He himself is but one of its stones, supporting another one and in turn pressing down upon the stone below. The higher he finds himself in that hierarchy, the better he feels. To catch a mere glimpse of the master's boots on top—whether the general's, the boss's, the Führer's, or the Kaiser's—is all he really asks for.<sup>41</sup>

Insecure Germans, Ludwig maintained, preferred institutions they could hide behind. Uncomfortable with the free expression of their own wills, they gravitated towards forms of government that would relieve them of all responsibility. The Germans' national character, Ludwig maintained, simply did not lend itself to appreciating the trust and liberty essential to democracy. It did not equip them to understand the republic foisted upon them at Versailles, or to prosper under it. Hitler, Ludwig explained, “gave to that warrior nation authority, that feature of public life they had so much missed in republican days. At last there was an end to that colorless,

<sup>39</sup> Ludwig, “How to Treat Defeated Germany,” p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Ludwig, “How to Treat Defeated Germany,” p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> Ludwig, *Moral Conquest*, p. 14; “The German People,” p. 5.

paradeless regime in mufti! At last that time without obedience was over!"<sup>42</sup> Morally, Hitler was "the true symbol" of Germany. "It is a mistake to say that Hitler is not Germany," Ludwig asserted. "In his demagogism, he unites just those incentives which goad the German mind to frenzy."<sup>43</sup> Legally, also, Hitler represented the Germans. They elected him through legally constituted elections and, by the same constitution, Hindenburg appointed him Chancellor. "They knew the program of the Nazis through Hitler's book, and elected them anyway."<sup>44</sup> Even when Hitler falsified the results of the plebiscites, Ludwig said, "[h]e was still the expression of the will of the nation."<sup>45</sup>

In a moral and legal sense Hitler is the true symbol of the present German Nation. He was elected in the most democratic way. No President ever came to this hill with a better legal claim to his office than Mr. Hitler had. ... He was elected chief of the strongest party. ... The whole nation, with the exception of a negligible minority, was delighted to find finally a new boss.<sup>46</sup>

Since the Germans had elected a totalitarian regime, Ludwig argued, they could not escape ultimate accountability. He proposed that the United States punish Germans, in the spirit of Beccaria, "for the security of society, [and] to educate [them] and thus bring about [their] reform."<sup>47</sup> To this end the victors would undertake a thorough disarmament of Germany. They would take supervisory control of Germany's education system to purge it of undesirable teachers and text books. They would establish "political guardianship" over the Germans, until they could demonstrate their ability to

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<sup>42</sup> Ludwig, *Moral Conquest*, p. 122; "How to Treat Defeated Germany," p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Emil Ludwig, "The German Mind," *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1938, p. 255-263.

<sup>44</sup> Ludwig, "How to Treat Defeated Germany," p. 47.

<sup>45</sup> Ludwig, "The German People," p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> Ludwig, "The German People," pp. 8-9.

<sup>47</sup> Ludwig, "The German People," p. 11; *How to Treat the Germans* (New York: Willard Publishing Co., 1943), p. 65; *Moral Conquest*, p. 141.

live democratically.<sup>48</sup> The victors would demilitarise Germany, not only by disbanding the German armed forces and removing all weapons, but through the reduction of the nation's industrial capacity. Deindustrialisation, Ludwig argued, was vital to world security; "with their industrial apparatus intact, no power on earth could prevent the Germans from rearming again." Deindustrialisation would also lead to a lower standard of living for postwar Germans, but this effect would prove useful as a mechanism for their reform. It would deprive them of the unhealthy sense of strength they drew from their industrial accomplishments. A reduced industrial base would also prevent the Germans from earning funds for reparations payments, but this would create an opportunity for Germans to donate their labour to postwar reconstruction. World security and ridding Germans of their "megalomania," Ludwig insisted, required that they endure "a lowered standard of living and the export of [their] labour." Thus, they would make direct restitution for their wartime ravages of Europe. "The Germans turned eight million unarmed men into chattel slaves," Ludwig argued. "It is just and moral to make them pay with their own hands for that crime."<sup>49</sup>

For Sumner Welles, the Germans had never made, throughout the preceding 200 years, "any constructive contribution to regional or world peace." He argued that the peace with Germany must take its history of militarism into consideration. Welles' attitude to Germany had hardened during his 1940 diplomatic mission to Europe as President Roosevelt's emissary. Then, his meetings with the Nazi leadership convinced him that Hitler would entertain no overtures of peace, and that the Allied nations were fighting a defensive war—that Hitler would not stop until he had achieved all

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<sup>48</sup> Ludwig, "The German People," p. 14; *How to Treat the Germans*, p. 74; *Moral Conquest*, p. 152.

<sup>49</sup> Ludwig, *Moral Conquest*, pp. 162-164.

his objectives, or was defeated.<sup>50</sup> Following his resignation as Under Secretary of State, Welles published his views on postwar plans early in 1944.

Welles argued that two crucial aspects of German history made it a menace to world peace. First, "the German people came to believe in German militarism as the supreme glory of the race." Second, the unification of the German people under one government created "a homogeneous mass, capable by their dynamic vigor and sheer weight of their numbers of disrupting the equilibrium of European stability."<sup>51</sup> Together these developments had increased the power of the German General Staff which, for Welles, personified German militarism and which, well aware of Germany's imminent defeat, "[had]made detailed plans for a later renewal of its attempt to dominate the world."<sup>52</sup>

For Welles, safeguarding the world from the German threat involved bringing the German people to discard militarism and embrace democracy and world cooperation, but he cautioned that "it would be as softheaded as it would be softhearted for the United Nations to assume that such a change can be brought about during the lifetime of the present generation." The events of the interwar years had shown that "the German people were not responsive to democracy," and following this war, Welles asserted, the chances that Germans would welcome democracy would be even less certain. The Nazi regime had ruined the German youth for democracy. Welles did not believe that the German people should enjoy full political sovereignty before a new generation had matured. He argued:

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50 Sumner Welles, *The Time for Decision* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1944), pp. 90-119. *Life*, July 24, 1944, pp. 76-82+, published condensed versions of two chapters, on peace with Germany and on international cooperation, from Welles' book.

51 Welles, *The Time for Decision*, pp. 347, 336.

52 Welles, *The Time for Decision*, pp. 347, 339, 342.

Since Hitler gained control of the German Reich, the youth of Germany has been hopelessly corrupted. It would be an optimist indeed, no matter how deep his sympathy for the German people, who would have any hope that the younger generation will ever be able even to understand what democracy is. During their formative years the younger Germans have had no education other than that given them by the Nazi machine. They have been taught to believe in no ideals other than that of the master race and the inherent right of the Germanic peoples to dominate the world. They have watched with enthusiasm the consistent and effective efforts of their leaders to reduce the population and the future population of the peoples of the occupied countries. They have had inbred in them a total contempt for religion and a brutal hatred for other races. These millions of Germans will be at the prime of life during the next two decades. They will be a controlling force within Germany. Theirs will be a force for fanaticism and revenge. ...

If, after years of trial have passed, and a new generation of Germans comes of age under conditions which make the new Germans conscious of what the word "liberty" really means, we may all hope democracy—true and not artificial—will prevail in every region of Germany. When such a time comes the German people should once more be afforded ... as full an opportunity to determine freely their political destinies as any other peoples of the earth.<sup>53</sup>

The most effective and equitable means to safeguard the world from German militarism, Welles maintained, involved partitioning Germany into three separate states. He argued that partitioning would enable the German people to have the same economic opportunities as all other European peoples, would provide the Germans with the "opportunity to achieve economic security and, ultimately to comprehend and to enjoy popular government." These new states also would endure strict controls, to keep the German General Staff from achieving reunification, to supervise the gradual restoration of self-government, to remove all arms and munitions from German control, and to supervise all mining and heavy industries. All German communications and transportation would come under international control. The peace with Germany, Welles concluded, could not be punitive or vengeful, but since Germany had twice in the century brought war to the world, its victims were entitled "to see to it that the German race cannot again so afflict humanity."<sup>54</sup>

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53 Welles, *The Time for Decision*, pp. 356, 357-358, 361.

54 Welles, *The Time for Decision*, pp. 351, 352, 356, 359, 361.

Richard M. Brickner, Assistant Professor of Clinical Neurology at Columbia University, applied the classic paranoid diagnosis to German society. Over succeeding generations, Brickner argued, "the emotional core of German culture ... has long been growingly and menacingly paranoid in character." For Brickner, the Nazi movement and leaders were "symptoms, not causes" of a paranoid society which naturally raised individuals such as Hitler and Göring to the top. Brickner wrote:

Internally, Germany has long been turning itself into the kind of society that an individual paranoid would like to create. Such a society naturally rewards with social approval people to whom paranoid behavior is congenial. As a parallel to this internal situation, Germany has also been trying to impose a paranoid hierarchy on the whole world, devoting to the task the all-out energy, sense of timing, and ruthless logic that characteristically develop from the paranoid's internal pressures. Germany believes that she is or ought to be the father-emperor-schoolmaster-slavedriver-general-drillmaster-boss-hero of the universe. Since paranoid demands are by definition insatiable, every success merely whets her appetite for more.<sup>55</sup>

In describing paranoid symptoms in German culture, Brickner provided a catalogue of wartime stereotypes culled from other authors. One writer had called Germany "a country where men are continually flying to extremes." Sober common sense and clear logical processes were an 'iron collar to the Germans, who escaped from them as quickly as possible into that peculiar subjectivity in which alone they feel comfortable.'" Another had noted a German predilection for "cults, crank movements, theosophy, nudism or peculiar diets." Two more described

two contrary aspects of the German character: the imperious aspect that has a motto "live as I wish; move as I say; sit or stand as I order; think as I think; speak as I do," and the leader-worshiping aspect which makes Germans "adore being ruled and kept in their places, and perspire with satisfaction when they get plentiful opportunities for heel-clicking and hand-kissing."

"The 'feel' of paranoid mission," continued Brickner,

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<sup>55</sup> Richard M. Brickner, "Is Germany Incurable? The Treatment," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1943, p. 94; "Is Germany Incurable?" *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1943, pp. 85-86.

is unmistakable in Shirer's description of an audience listening to Hitler at the Berlin opera, "their hands raised in slavish salute, their faces now contorted with hysteria, their mouths wide open, shouting, their eyes burning with fanaticism, glued on the new god, the Messiah."<sup>56</sup>

For Brickner, paranoid Germany had determined to take from other nations not "because it would be more convenient" to have direct control, but because

her leading spirits believe ... that it is a far, far better thing for the world in general that a superior nation like herself should have the disposal of such wealth. It is intolerable that the former nation-owner, insignificant folk with an impudent tendency to resist expropriation, should longer usurp a privilege obviously intended for their betters who have the job of raising a great nation to the pinnacle of world importance that is her cosmic due. Bloodshed involved in correcting one of nature's more careless mistakes is not only permissible but sacred.<sup>57</sup>

German philosophers, writers and political figures also provided Brickner with examples of German paranoia. He quoted Heinrich Heine who suggested a century earlier that Christianity had but subdued

"that ancient German eagerness for battle which combats not for the sake of victory, but merely for the sake of the combat itself ... when the Cross, that restraining talisman, falls to pieces, then will break forth again the ferocity of the old combatants, the frantic Berserker rage."<sup>58</sup>

In 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm had called upon his troops to

"Remember that you are the chosen people! The spirit of the Lord has descended upon me, because I am Emperor of the Germans! I am the instrument of the Most High. I am His sword, His representative. Woe and death to all those who resist my will! Woe and death to those who do not believe in my mission! Woe and death to the cowards! May all the enemies of the German people perish! God demands their destruction—God who, through my mouth, commands you to execute His will."

Brickner compared Wilhelm to President Lincoln:

It is difficult to imagine a German leader preparing his men for battle with the words, so alien in their humanity to every paranoid ideal, used by the

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<sup>56</sup> Brickner, "Is Germany Incurable?" pp. 87-88. Brickner quoted from Edgar Ansel Mowrer, *Germany Puts the Clock Back*; Lilian T. Mowrer, *Journalist's Wife*; Carl Brinitzer and Berthe Grossbard, eds., *Germans vs. Huns*; Daisy, Princess of Pless, *Daisy, Princess of Pless, by Herself*; William Shirer, *Berlin Diary*.

<sup>57</sup> Brickner, "Is Germany Incurable?" p. 89.

<sup>58</sup> Brickner, "Is Germany Incurable?" p. 89, quoting Heinrich Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany*.

Commander-in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States in addressing the 166th Ohio Regiment ... "I happen, temporarily, to occupy the White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has. It is in order that each one of you may have, through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise, and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations. ... It is for this that the struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthright."<sup>59</sup>

Brickner reassured his readers that "the odds are against any given German baby's escaping this cultural 'infection,' and this means that enough adult Germans in each generation will manifest paranoid behavior to make Germany behave in a paranoid fashion as a group."<sup>60</sup> Without treatment, Germany would continue on the same path to war. He concluded that, unlike the prognosis for the individual paranoid, Germany could overcome the illness that drove it to seek world domination. Brickner did not recommend punishment which, he argued, would simply incite the paranoid's sense of persecution. Demilitarisation of Germany was essential. "Unless you take away a paranoid's gun before sending him to a doctor," Brickner wrote, "there will presently be no doctor to treat him." But psychiatry endorsed, he continued, the Atlantic Charter requirement that victors and vanquished alike have access to reasonable economic security. "It is difficult," he pointed out, "to get results from psychiatric treatment offered to a patient shivering with cold and gnawed by hunger."<sup>61</sup> These conditions met, the treatment for Germany would involve a "guardianship" to encourage democratic and paranoia-free Germans to assume leadership roles, and to create a "coincidence of greater security ... with a regime that does not conceive Germany as plotted against and held down."<sup>62</sup>

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59 Brickner, "Is Germany Incurable?" p. 91, quoting Ernst Berner, ed., *Die Reden Kaiser Wilhelms II*, and G. Mercer Adam, ed., *Speeches of Abraham Lincoln*.

60 Brickner, "Is Germany Incurable?" p. 87.

61 Brickner, "Is Germany Incurable? The Treatment," pp. 94, 95.

62 Brickner, "Is Germany Incurable? The Treatment," p. 98.

Henry Morgenthau prepared his plan for Germany's occupation in September 1944 and tabled it at the second Quebec Conference. It found its way into the public debate owing to a leak to the press, but Morgenthau did not publish his rationale for the plan until he resigned from the Cabinet following President Truman's inauguration. At that time he asserted that since the Conference, "the basic principles" of his plan had "represented the official position of the United States Government" and were reflected in the Potsdam Declaration.<sup>63</sup> His arguments fit the national character pattern. For Morgenthau, Germany lusted after war and conquest as much as Americans desired peace. Germans, he wrote, had been

elaborately and deliberately miseducated. The medieval belief that war was not only the sole profession fit for a gentleman but that it was also the best trade for a common fellow survived in Germany long after it had been outmoded in all the rest of Europe that passed for civilized. It survives today. To that belief was added and is still added a sedulously fostered conviction that the German is not only a better man than any foreigner ... but that the German is destined to rule over the inferior people, too. The conception of that rule as a civilizing mission was notable by its absence. Germany was to dominate the world with lash and club for the sole comfort and enrichment of Germans.

Of course other nations have had their share of megalomaniacs. ... But outside Germany they were confined to a little heeded minority, a lunatic fringe. Inside Germany, the same teachings were if anything more lunatic, and they were also official, all-pervading and finally accepted without question.

The Nazis pushed these ideas farther than any of their predecessors, but they could not have done it without the generations of preparation. The German people had to be cultivated intensively for nearly two hundred years before they could produce those finest Nazi flowers—the gas chambers of Maidanek and the massacre of Lidice. ... [T]he traditional German will to war goes back as far as our own traditional will to freedom.<sup>64</sup>

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63 Henry Morgenthau Jr., *Germany Is Our Problem* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. xii. My purpose is to place Morgenthau's thinking in the context of the public debate. John H. Backer's brief historiography of the Morgenthau plan indicated that early discussions viewed JCS 1067, the occupation directive for the American zone authorized by President Truman, as "simply a slightly modified version of the Morgenthau plan. ... Subsequent research," Backer continued, "challenged this interpretation; it exposed its numerous oversimplifications and demonstrated the need to separate the economic and political aspects of Morgenthau's initiative." "From Morgenthau Plan to Marshall Plan," in Robert Wolfe, ed., *Americans as Proconsuls: United States Military Government in Germany and Japan, 1944-1952* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), p. 156.

64 Morgenthau, *Germany Is Our Problem*, pp. 104-105.

Germany, Morgenthau argued, had the "will" to try world conquest again. The German people would

remember much more clearly how close they came to victory than how they came to be defeated. But even if they had not come so close, the will which has supported two world wars with terrible tenacity and virtual unanimity will not be broken by a few disasters. Desire for war has been planted in the German as desire for freedom in the American. The process has been going on in both for about the same length of time.<sup>65</sup>

Morgenthau wanted no more of the "economic blitzkrieg" by which Germany rose to dominate the European economy in the interwar years.<sup>66</sup> "Germany's road to peace leads to the farm," he insisted.<sup>67</sup> He detailed a plan for the elimination of all heavy industry in Germany, and for the conversion of large estates to small farms. Germany would retain a secondary industry sufficient to meet domestic consumer needs only. He advocated partitioning Germany and extracting reparations through forced labour and the transfer of existing German assets. He stipulated that the military occupation should refrain from taking any steps to strengthen the German economy. Germans would have to make do with what was available after the Allies extracted their due.<sup>68</sup>

For the most part analyses of the German national character produced little more than arguments to keep Germany weak out of fear of what it might again become. They made prevention of German aggression the object of the peace, and seldom—Welles, who discussed at length a plan for the United Nations, was an exception—considered the possibility that preventing aggression, not just preventing German aggression, was the object of the peace. In its call for a fairly lenient peace, Brickner's proposal stood apart

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65 Morgenthau, *Germany Is Our Problem*, p. 114.

66 Morgenthau, *Germany Is Our Problem*, p. 17.

67 Morgenthau, *Germany Is Our Problem*, p. 48.

68 Morgenthau; *Germany Is Our Problem*, pp. v-vii.

from most others; Hermens noted that Brickner had drawn "tolerable conclusions" from "untenable premises."<sup>69</sup>

National character analyses generally yielded conclusions that the German people could not be trusted to take responsibility for what their nation would become in the postwar world; the victors would determine that for them. Miller bluntly viewed his pastoralisation plan as an unfortunate necessity,<sup>70</sup> but most proposals based on national character claimed not only to provide the key to preventing German aggression, but to be humane and fair. For Hermens, they were "the white man's burden' in a different setting."<sup>71</sup>

### 3.3 ... and some objections

The alternative to believing that all Germans were Nazis was believing that some Germans were not. Commentators who took this position usually concluded that those Germans who had directly supported the Nazi cause would be brought to task, and that non-Nazi Germans would take responsibility for fostering a peaceful Germany. Proposals for peace based on this type of argument tended toward the view that the United States should endeavour to help those Germans who chose to take responsibility, while maintaining controls to ensure that others would not rebuild Germany for war. Three examples follow: by Walter Lippmann, Vera Micheles Dean, Editor and Research Director for the Foreign Policy Association, and James Warburg, who published his views after resigning as Deputy Director for Propaganda Policy in the Office of War Information.

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69 Hermens, *The Tyrant's War*, p. 18.

70 Miller, "The Achilles Heel of Nazi Germany," p. 22.

71 Hermens, *The Tyrant's War*, p. 168.

For Walter Lippmann, the enemy in Germany consisted of the Nazi party, the wealthy industrialists who supported Hitler's bid for power and the old feudal upper class which provided most of the German army officers. In his view, this group alone made up the "war party." It carried the tradition of German imperialism, and it could survive underground while working to disturb the postwar balance of power in the allied nations. Lippmann argued that only the defeat of the German war party would provide a chance for democracy in Germany. Nevertheless, he maintained that Americans could not expect to impose democracy. "Only an overwhelming German desire to liquidate this military caste can really liquidate it," he wrote, and that desire would not exist at the moment of defeat. The Allies would have to take steps to "induce and promote" it.<sup>72</sup>

Lippmann proposed that the Allies take control of Germany's industrial policy. This control would facilitate the destruction of the war party's economic and political power, the elimination of monopoly trade practices, both domestic and foreign, reintegration of German industry into the world economy, and the reorientation of German industry to provide a level of wealth for the German people much higher than Weimar or Nazi Germany had provided. This, he argued, "would be the right thing to do in order that the mass of the German people may learn to identify their own welfare with our victory and the world's peace." It would provide the German people with a vested interest in preventing a relapse into militarism.<sup>73</sup>

Lippmann maintained that the occupation of, and removal of arms from, Germany constituted only temporary measures to gain time for industrial

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<sup>72</sup> Walter Lippmann, "The Problem of Germany," *Current History*, 4:22 (June 4, 1943), pp. 231, 234. This article was reprinted from Lippmann's syndicated column; *U. S. War Aims* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1944), pp. 116-117.

<sup>73</sup> Lippmann, "The Problem of Germany," p. 234.

controls to work. He calculated that about fifteen years after the armistice a new generation of leaders would have emerged from the German generation under thirty at the time the armistice. These new leaders would determine the success of the peace. They would either accept the postwar settlement, in which case the war party would die out, or they would reject it, and the militarist influence would revive. In Lippmann's opinion the Allies had to take this risk. To do otherwise entailed a permanent occupation.<sup>74</sup>

Vera Micheles Dean argued that following the war

the German people should be neither willfully humiliated nor indefinitely reduced to subjection. At the same time, they should be made to bear their share of responsibility for the maintenance of order in Europe and the world, on terms acceptable to other peoples as well as to the Germans.<sup>75</sup>

Dean believed that national groups expressed specific characteristics that indicated their level of political maturity. She noted that the Germans had displayed "a profound respect for military prowess, amounting to a national obsession," and they had displayed a "disregard for the lives not only of non-Germans but also of Germans who, for one reason or another, did not fit into the accepted political pattern of the day." These attitudes, combined with their "sentimental attachment to children, dogs, and flowers," indicated to Dean that the individual German had not yet "emerged from the tribe, the mass, the state." Just as England following the reign of Elizabeth I, and France after Napoleon, had settled into more peaceful regimes, so too could Germany change.<sup>76</sup>

Dean argued that by blaming all Germans for the war the United Nations would cut themselves off from the people whose cooperation they

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<sup>74</sup> Lippmann, *U. S. War Aims*, p. 111-113.

<sup>75</sup> Vera Micheles Dean, "What Future for Germany?" *Foreign Policy Reports* 18:22 (February 1, 1943), p. 282.

<sup>76</sup> Vera Micheles Dean, "Germany's Role in Post-War Reconstruction," *Yale Review* 32:1 (September 1942), pp. 115-116.

needed to reintegrate Germany into the postwar world. She maintained that the victors would find among almost all walks of German life—a few among the industrialists, and more among the small farmers, lower and middle classes, religious leaders and youth—people who were ready for peace. “The best kind of re-education for Germans,” she cautioned, “would be for the United Nations to behave, henceforth, in their relations with each other, and with the Axis powers once they have been defeated, as they would like to see Germany behave towards them.” Seeing the war as an ideological struggle, she believed its objective should be to win the Germans from Hitler, not the destruction of the German nation.<sup>77</sup>

Though she believed Germans could change, Dean did not hold that the evidence for that change had to be the appearance of democratic institutions in Germany. She wanted only that the Germans “assume their share of responsibility” for a stable and peaceful Europe. She argued that deindustrialisation would prevent constructive change in Germany, and thus make impossible Germany’s positive role in postwar peace. She explained that “unilateral disarmament ... would require simultaneous dismantling of the German industrial machine, a prerequisite of modern armament ... [and] could not be adequately enforced without permanent subjugation of Germany.” She argued that

the will of a people to fight and to sacrifice lives and material comforts for that purpose may not spring merely from innate militarism, but may be due to a whole gamut of unsatisfactory economic and social conditions that must be corrected before demobilization of spirits can be achieved.<sup>78</sup>

Dean’s proposals for peace included the Germans’ participation in their own liberation and in the reconstruction of Europe. Any direct occupation of

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<sup>77</sup> Dean, “Germany’s Role in Post-War Reconstruction,” pp. 121, 126; “What Future for Germany?” p. 283.

<sup>78</sup> Dean, “What Future for Germany?” pp. 290-291.

Germany, she insisted, should facilitate the establishment of a non-Nazi regime and not undertake a punishment of the whole German people. The German people would provide labour and technical expertise for Europe's reconstruction, but Germans would send representatives to an international body supervising the reconstruction effort. Germany would not pay reparations in cash or commodities.<sup>79</sup>

James Warburg saw the problem of what to do with Germany in part as "the problem of what to do with ourselves." Fascism, he argued, "is in essence the ganging up of such individuals to exploit society by inducing it to give up freedom in exchange for the illusion of security." He wondered if the equality of opportunity for all idealised as "the American way of life" had not given way to "a system of vested interests ... each seeking to obtain or retain advantage without regard to the rights of others." He understood World War II not only as a defensive fight against an aggressor enemy, but as an assertive struggle against fascism. He described it as "a world-wide civil conflict which crosses all national frontiers. It is a war between those who want freedom for mankind and those who want freedom for themselves at the expense of others." Fascism, he insisted,

is the ultimate perversion of capitalism. Fascism carries out to the nth power capitalism's most outstanding weakness as a social system, namely, its tendency to overconcentrate power, privilege, and prerogative in the hands of the few at the expense of the many.<sup>80</sup>

For Warburg there were no "fascist peoples," and no "peoples which do not contain the seeds of fascism." He described analyses of national character as "sheer nonsense" that treated "the Germans' in exactly the same way as Hitler and his followers have written about 'the Jews.'" He maintained that

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<sup>79</sup> Dean, "What Future for Germany?" p. 295.

<sup>80</sup> James P. Warburg, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1944), pp. 6, 19-20.

“the evil which has made Germany what it is today is inherent in all human beings of every race and every nation.”<sup>81</sup>

Seeing World War II as two wars, Warburg prescribed separately for Germany as a military aggressor and as a fascist system. To make Germany incapable of aggression, he advocated an occupation of a few short months for “disarming and disbanding the armed forces, destruction of the whole machinery of the German General staff, including its industrial ramifications; taking over of war stocks; and destroying the blueprints, jigs, and dies of war plants.” The occupation would also establish control commissions to maintain disarmament and enforce reparations agreements, including any for the provision of German labour.<sup>82</sup>

Beyond this, solving the problem of how to fit Germany into the postwar world belonged, in his opinion, to the German people. Warburg believed that the Germans should decide how to free themselves from Nazi domination. He expected that Germans would want to break up the landed estates, and to eliminate or socialise the monopoly powers of big business. He believed they would want to reorganise their system of education. He did not want the Allies to do this for Germany, however. He wanted only that they help the German people to achieve this for themselves, if they so desired. He believed, nevertheless, that the Allies should demand that Germany free itself from fascism by refusing to recognise German sovereignty until it had achieved a stable government “which would respect the rights of individuals and with which—as the servant of the German people—they could deal on terms of full equality.”<sup>83</sup>

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81 Warburg, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home*, pp. 10, 281-282.

82 Warburg, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home*, pp. 10, 286-287.

83 Warburg, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home*, pp. 10, 284-287, 289.

Lippmann, Dean and Warburg did not demand of Germany that it become a democratic nation in the image of the United States. For these writers, American democracy was not perfect. They preferred to continue improving it for the benefit of all Americans, but they would not foist it upon others. They imputed German participation in the war not to national character, but to social, political and economic factors. They expected the United States to eradicate Nazism, and to help create conditions in which national groups could decide for themselves the forms their governments would take. They expected postwar Germany to redress its wartime actions, and they expected it to learn to take a responsible role in promoting world peace, but they would not take control of its destiny.

These objections to national character arguments eschewed both premises of wartime propaganda. They took for granted that all nations could become democratic, but they did not hold that all nations should become so as a prerequisite of world peace. They suggested that the United States could more readily achieve understandings with foreign democracies than with other forms of government, but they did not see the imposition of democracy on foreign peoples as a prerequisite of practicable foreign relations. They did not hold, either, that the German people were inherently incapable of achieving democracy. They demanded that the United States assist in creating economic conditions in which democracy could flourish if the German people chose to adopt it. They argued that economic sanctions for, and prolonged control of, postwar Germany would only recreate the conditions that led Germany to war. They understood that the contradictions inherent in wartime propaganda could not provide a sound basis for peace—that, in Hermens' words, "[t]he view that any national group is, and always

will be incapable of self-government is incompatible with belief in the principles of democracy.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Hermens, *The Tyrant's War*, p. 160.

## Chapter 4

**“a testing ground for various ways of life:”**

### **The Russian Dimension in the Debate**

The wartime expression of democratic ideals, entailing that all peoples could and should become democratic, not only set the tone for deliberations on Germany's postwar fate, but also created expectations for the soon-to-be liberated countries in Europe. By positing that democracy was inherently peaceful, and totalitarian regimes inherently aggressive, it underscored analyses of relations among the Allies and created the potential for suspicion and distrust. This would have mattered little had the Soviet Union been a weak partner, but its capacity to endure and then overwhelm the German invasion convinced many analysts that Russia had the power to support its demands for the postwar world and that Americans might have to settle for less than their wartime ideals promised.

Concerns about Russian intentions prompted some analysts to consider whether a Russian victory over Germany on the eastern front would lead to the Bolshevisation of Europe, and if an inability to reconcile conflicting ideologies might lead to a breakdown in Russian-American relations. Most commentators who considered these questions realised that world peace depended less on the details of how to subdue Germany than on the ability of Russia and the United States to agree on this and all other issues pertaining to the peace. Their conclusions reflected a consensus on the appropriate

limits of Russian interests. They differed in their assignment of responsibility for a Russian failure to cooperate. In some cases, their conclusions included a third approach to postwar Germany, one that would see it become a showcase of American democracy.

A few analysts believed that ideological differences between the United States and Russia were largely exaggerated. James P. Warburg argued that American behaviour would set the parameters of Russian-American relations. "So far," he observed, "Britain and the United States have, broadly speaking, pursued a policy of backing the Governments against the people, while the Soviet Union has followed a policy of backing the people against the Governments." Warburg thus suggested that Americans had more to fear from their own foreign policy initiatives than from Soviet intentions. Russia would follow the American lead in matters of international cooperation.<sup>1</sup>

The ways in which communism paralleled democracy, Warburg argued, had become obscured by the "techniques of violence" Russia employed in achieving its revolutionary aims. Communism, Warburg argued, "[sprang] from the idea that all men are equal and entitled to equal opportunity." Fascism derived only from "the runaway greed of the few who wish to take advantage of the many," from the privileged few who sought only to improve and consolidate their positions. Fascism was, he insisted, "the ultimate perversion of capitalism." Russia, he continued, "sought to establish economic democracy through a political dictatorship which it is now gradually moving to abolish." It began as a "world-wide revolution of the working class against its 'capitalist exploiters' ... [but had] abandoned world revolution and become a purely national experiment in state socialism." Warburg continued:

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<sup>1</sup> James P. Warburg, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1944), p. 274.

Democracy is neither a system, nor a set of institutions, nor a code of laws, nor a combination of policies. *Democracy is a personal belief and a personal code of behavior.* ...

We shall not fear other systems by which human beings strive for freedom, security, justice, and equality; we shall fear only those devices—of which fascism is the most highly developed—by which the selfish few attempt to set back the clock of human progress and to deny all freedom, all security, all justice and all equality.

For Warburg, the United States, by perfecting its democracy at home, could set an example for others. By encouraging other peoples to work out their destinies for themselves, and by declining to intervene uninvited in other nation's affairs, the United States would deprive other powers of any justification for such intrusions.<sup>2</sup>

Other analysts pointed out that American expectations for the peace had created a diplomatic conundrum resolvable only by a commitment on the part of all great power victors to cooperate in settling postwar affairs, especially in Eastern Europe. Vera Micheles Dean explained, had already taken first steps toward cooperation by renouncing revolutionary communism. In 1927 Stalin had exiled Trotsky, the principal proponent of world revolution, from Russia and had made the achievement of a modern, industrialised nation its primary policy objective. Russia had confirmed that commitment during the war by dissolving the Third International. This did not mean, for Dean, that Russia was becoming more democratic; it meant that Russia's primary interests were centred internally and its foreign policy interests lay only in preventing further aggression.<sup>3</sup>

Having a massive land and resource base from which to develop its national economy Russia would not need, Dean argued, to guarantee its program by appropriating lands in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, she

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<sup>2</sup> Warburg, *Foreign Policy Begins at Home*, pp. 19-20, 292, 294-296.

<sup>3</sup> Vera Micheles Dean, "The U. S. S. R. and Post-War Europe," *Foreign Policy Reports*, 19:11 (August 15, 1943), pp. 123, 136.

realised that Russia had legitimate interests in close ties to Eastern Europe and she did not believe that Russia would refrain from intervention there "to produce reactions favorable to its cause." Only close collaboration among the great powers, she maintained, could resolve the conflict between Russia's historical claims to Eastern Europe, given new force by Russia's defence of those lands during the war, and the western democracies' insistence on democracy for Eastern Europe plus a free hand for themselves on the balance of the continent. London and Washington, she explained

felt ... that while Russia undoubtedly has a special interest in the postwar development of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, Britain and the United States cannot disinterest themselves in the fate of the peoples inhabiting those regions without violating the letter and spirit of their pledges in the Atlantic Charter. ... But nothing could be more calculated to encourage Russia to play a lone hand in Eastern Europe than for Britain, and the United States, to indicate that they intend to act independently of Russia in Western, Southern and Central Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Dean offered a solution involving concessions on both sides: Great Britain and the United States would accept Russia's claims to the western boundary that existed "at the time of the German invasion on June 22, 1941." Russia, while incorporating the Baltic States and Eastern Poland into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, would permit these peoples, according to the terms of the Atlantic Charter, sovereignty over their lands and freedom to choose their form of government. Dean's principal concern was not that Russia would interfere in the affairs of Eastern Europe—all powerful nations, she understood, took an interest in the affairs of their weaker neighbours—but how Russia would achieve its ends. By adhering to the Atlantic Charter, the great powers would act "with some sense of responsibility toward these countries," considering their welfare and the interests of the world community. She thus saw an opportunity for "an honorable contest" among the great powers "to devise the most effective methods of restoring Europe to

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<sup>4</sup> Dean, "The U. S. S. R. and Post-War Europe," p. 131.

some semblance of order and decent living." She understood the United States could have no guarantee that Russia would not impose communism in Eastern Europe. If, however, the western democracies seized territory or conducted their foreign policies without regard for the interests of other nations, then they would have no justification for opposing any territorial claims Russia made thereafter.<sup>5</sup>

Some commentators smoothed over ideological differences. Sumner Welles advocated tolerance of Russian Communism in the spirit of the Atlantic Charter, the third point of which acknowledged "the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live." Under Communism, he argued, Russians enjoyed a government that more effectively represented their concerns than had the Tsarist regimes. Though not a democracy in a recognisably American style, the Russians supported Communism as the structure for their government:

What must not be forgotten ... is that before 1917 the Russian people as a whole never had the slightest voice in the policy of their government. Only in the past twenty-five years has the determining force within Russia come from the masses as well as from an autocratic few at the top. From the standpoint of our Western tradition, that is superficially true. From the standpoint of the Russian people, it is a hopelessly inadequate appraisal. The Russian people today are satisfied that their government is devoted to the popular interest. While the methods by which popular reactions are made apparent within the Soviet Union are totally different from those within the Western democracies, and particularly within the United States, the Soviet government today is guided by the popular will, and ultimately depends upon that will for its existence. Certainly in the immediate future the foreign policy of the Soviet government will continue to represent what the people want.<sup>6</sup>

Stalin, Welles continued, had turned away from world-revolutionary communism and toward state socialism with the expulsion of Trotsky and the adoption of the first five-year plan. He proposed that the postwar settlement create a system of regional interests. Russia, he argued, had as much right to

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<sup>5</sup> Dean, "The U. S. S. R. and Post-War Europe," pp. 125, 132, 134, 139.

<sup>6</sup> Sumner Welles, *The Time for Decision* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), pp. 309, 313-314.

set up a regional system in Eastern Europe, "composed of co-operative and well-disposed independent governments" as the United States had to promote an inter-American system in the Western Hemisphere. Russia "was entitled to determine its frontiers with a view to its essential security [but only] with regard for the right of self-determination on the part of the peoples inhabiting the regions concerned." Welles stated, more concretely than Warburg and Dean, the appropriate limits of Russia's interests:

If the Soviet Union attempts to use such a regional system for the purpose of imposing a series of protectorates, as a preliminary to their subsequent incorporation within the Soviet Union itself, the other nations of the world can only regard it as an unmistakable sign that Russia is embarking upon a policy of expansion, whether by military force or by the domination of the internal affairs of independent states.<sup>7</sup>

Still other analysts suggested that Russia and the United States should conduct their relations pragmatically, on the basis of the same self-interest that governed their alliance against German aggression. William Henry Chamberlin, an expert on Russia and a former Moscow correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor*, decried attempts to "whitewash or redwash Stalin." He argued that since postwar cooperation between the two powers was crucial to peace, Americans should set aside their understandable aversion to Russia's practice of "habeas cadaver" and base their policy strictly on the common need for peace. Chamberlin, too, focused on the issue of revolutionary communism and the problem of the Communist International. He could not recall an instance, he maintained,

when the foreign parties of the International did not follow, in the most slavish way, the political line prescribed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. ...

Now a situation where a group of citizens of one country takes orders blindly and unconditionally from the government of another power is at best unhealthy and not conducive to smooth international relations.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Welles, *The Time for Decision*, pp. 332, 333.

<sup>8</sup> William Henry Chamberlin, "Russia: An American Problem," *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1942, pp. 150-151, 155-156. John Lewis Gaddis has summarised

Chamberlin saw Soviet support of foreign revolutionary movements as the “touchstone of future American-Soviet relations.” If Russia emerged from the war with a clearly nationalist agenda and abandoned revolutionary communism, “there would seem to be no obstacle” to normal relations. The choice, he continued, was Russia’s alone. A Russian undertaking to extend its power into Europe would jeopardise American interests there much as they had been compromised under Hitler. “So,” he concluded, “the prospect of future permanent coöperation between America and Russia depends mainly on the character and mentality and foreign political aims of the Russian régime.”<sup>9</sup>

Warburg and Dean placed an onus on the United States to set a good example, while Welles and Chamberlin placed that burden upon Russia, but all these analyses contained a big ‘if’—if Russia refrained from spreading communism, the United States and Russia could cooperate for world peace. Forrest Davis, Washington Editor for the *Saturday Evening Post*, informed Americans that the President himself subscribed to that ‘if.’ In his policy toward Russia, Davis explained, Roosevelt was gambling that Russia had disavowed revolutionary communism and that he could bring his wartime ally, which had “fallen out with the European tradition, back into the family of nations.” Roosevelt hoped that the great powers’ mutual need for peace would provide the common interest enabling them to submerge their ideological differences. “The President does not blink at the consequences of a United Nations victory,” Davis wrote. That victory would create a power vacuum in Europe, leaving Russia the only great power on the European

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Chamberlin’s and other similar arguments in *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 42-46.

<sup>9</sup> Chamberlin, “Russia: An American Problem,” p. 152. I am grateful to Professor Brian Villa for bringing to my attention the idea that many foreign policy analysts believed that Russia, and not the U. S., would decide the course of postwar relations.

continent. If Russia, "as the sole European power, display[ed] tendencies toward world-conquest, [the United States'] vital interest would be again called into account."<sup>10</sup>

Davis understood that Roosevelt had assumed an enormous risk. To gain an appreciation of its magnitude, Davis referred his readers to a blunt assessment of Stalin's power and its potential impact on postwar Europe, penned by the *Post's* Associate Editor, Demaree Bess. The United States, Bess argued, understood the Russian power potential before the two nations became formal allies. It offered Lend-Lease aid to Russia not because it was weak, but because it "possessed the will and the means to keep on fighting Germany indefinitely." Bess suggested that Russia perhaps believed it had thanked Americans amply for their aid by using it effectively against Germany. If Americans expected that Russia would extend further thanks by accepting an American agenda for postwar Europe, they carelessly discounted Russian power. Russia, he asserted, enjoyed "the most completely independent government in the world." It had made no formal commitments that might impair its freedom in its conduct of the war, not even in return for Lend-Lease aid. Russia had, on the other hand, demanded that the western allies acknowledge its claims to the Baltic States and other portions of Eastern Europe. Russia graciously accepted the "vague and generalized" provisions of the Atlantic Charter, but agreed only to set aside its claims to Eastern Europe until the end of the war. Then, Russia would demand a free hand in Eastern Europe and it would have the power to secure its claims. These facts, Bess argued, undermined both American and British claims for

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<sup>10</sup> Forrest Davis, "What Really Happened at Teheran," part 1, *Saturday Evening Post*, May 13, 1944, p. 37; "Roosevelt's World Blueprint," *Saturday Evening Post*, April 10, 1943, pp. 109, 110.

Eastern Europe and their support of "all the little governments-in-exile."

After the war, Bess insisted, Russia would

possess the geographical position, the military power and the political influence to do very much as she pleases over a very large section of the earth. And the Russians naturally [would] be more sympathetic to the idea of extending their own system, rather than ours.<sup>11</sup>

"As matters stand," Davis resumed, "the shape of the post-war world depends more on Stalin than on Roosevelt or the British leaders." Not immune to the potency of the wartime rhetoric, Davis pointed out that Roosevelt subscribed to democracy as the most peaceful form of government.

Essentially a man of the west, he believes that the civilization found around the Atlantic basin and typified by the United States and Britain to be the most advanced, humane and hopeful yet developed. He knows that the English-speaking powers have come nearer to renouncing war as an instrument of national policy than the other great powers of the west.<sup>12</sup>

Roosevelt nevertheless subscribed to the "realistic great-power theory." "No 'moral imperialist'" and "[n]o ideologue," Davis continued, Roosevelt was "looking not for something that seems attractive on paper, but for something that will work." He would accept Stalin's informal reassurances, offered at the Teheran Conference, that Russia "had no desire to own Europe," and that Russia already held enough territory for its needs. Roosevelt further accepted Stalin's repudiation of revolutionary communism as further proof of Soviet intentions. He would concede to Stalin an Eastern European sphere of influence on the "Pan-American pattern." He would limit American claims there to the conditions of the Atlantic Charter, and hoped that Stalin would decide likewise.

In this regard, Davis pointed out, the democratic Allies had already set an example. Great Britain had begun to replace its colonial empire with the

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<sup>11</sup> Demaree Bess, "What Does Russia Want?" *Saturday Evening Post*, March 20, 1943, pp. 19, 91-94.

<sup>12</sup> Davis, "Roosevelt's World Blueprint," p. 110.

British Commonwealth, and the President had repudiated the (Theodore) Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Both Atlantic powers had relaxed their respective holds on India, Ireland, the Philippines and Cuba. More than this, Davis explained to Americans, Roosevelt could not demand of the Russians. He had offered what he believed was the "lowest common denominator" for peace. He asked only that Russia not attempt to dominate Europe so as to compromise American access to its resources and markets. The choice for cooperation was thus Stalin's to make. He would communicate Russia's intentions through his postwar European policies. If he genuinely subscribed to communism-in-one-country, he would not undertake to control the governments of Eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup>

For Bess, how Roosevelt could make this offer without a concrete commitment from Stalin defied logic. "Stalin extracted a downpayment from us at Teheran," he wrote.

When Mr. Roosevelt did not challenge Russia's claims in Eastern Europe, when he did not protest Stalin's interpretation of the Atlantic Charter as applied to Russia's border regions, the settlement in Eastern Europe—so far as the United States is concerned—went by default.

Roosevelt's foreign policy hung, Bess insisted, on an idea, a vague hope which Stalin had already exploited to his advantage. Roosevelt's peace, he concluded, could please neither idealists, who objected to "the sacrifice of principle for the purposes of international compromises," nor realists, who found the price Stalin exacted for cooperation far too high.<sup>14</sup>

For Walter Lippmann, a sphere-of-influence approach was, given unresolved ideological differences, the only viable postwar foreign policy

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<sup>13</sup> Davis, "Roosevelt's World Blueprint," p. 110; "What Really Happened at Teheran," part 2, *Saturday Evening Post*, May 20, 1944, pp. 44, 46; "What Really Happened at Teheran," part 1, pp. 13, 37.

<sup>14</sup> Demaree Bess, "The Cost of Roosevelt's 'Great Design,'" *Saturday Evening Post*, May 27, 1944, pp. 17, 90, 92.

option for the United States. He arrived at this conclusion, however, only after a transformation in his thinking. Writing in 1943, Lippmann called for a foreign policy in the national interest, not one based on "some kind of abstract theory of our rights and duties." World War II, he explained, marked a turning point for Russian-American relations. Before the war Russia had been "a potential friend in the rear of potential enemies." With Germany's elimination as a great power, Russia would become "the greatest power in the rear of our indispensable friends." Consequently, Russian-American postwar relations would always involve a potential a clash of their national interests.<sup>15</sup>

In Lippmann's opinion, Russian-American postwar relations awaited their first test over the disposition of Eastern Europe. Russia would not accept, he explained, any attempts to install pro-western governments there, or any efforts to rebuild it as a bulwark against Russian encroachment. Americans would not accept Russian domination of the region. The best hope for American interests, he concluded depended on "whether the border states [would] adopt a policy of neutralization, and whether Russia [would] respect and support it."<sup>16</sup>

As the war's outcome became more certain, Lippmann revised his opinions. Americans' vital interest, he asserted, lay in the prevention of any great power establishing a "conquering empire" in any part of the Pacific and Atlantic basins. "Since a conquering empire upon the oceanic shores is our inevitable enemy," he explained, those nations which resist conquest are our natural allies. Their freedom from foreign domination is a vital interest to

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<sup>15</sup> Walter Lippmann, *U. S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1943), pp. 137, 140, quoting DeWitt Clinton Poole, "Russia and the United States," pp. 144-149.

<sup>16</sup> Lippmann, *U. S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 147, 152.

the United States. Lippmann thus proposed spheres of influence for the United States and Russia in the postwar world. Russia and America, he continued, would have peace or confrontation depending upon their respect for each other's sphere of influence. When one reached into the orbit of the other for allies, it would sow the seed of future conflict.<sup>17</sup>

For Lippmann, agreement on great power spheres of influence provided the only means of collaboration between powers with irreconcilable ideological differences. Russia and the United States, he explained, could not conduct their diplomatic relations on a reciprocal basis. Russia did not allow free communication between Russians and Americans. It allowed its citizens to know only what it wanted them to know about other nations, and other nations to know only what it wanted them to know about Russia. In the United States, the citizens could support or reject the diplomatic decisions of their government, but Russians had no such means of appeal. Under these conditions, Russia had the advantage of secrecy and surprise while the United States found itself constrained by its more public diplomacy. In these circumstances, Russia could insulate its citizens from outside propaganda. The democracies remained "inhibited by their own principles from protecting themselves conclusively against being subverted by totalitarians." Russian-American diplomacy existed, then, not on the basis of "true collaboration," but as a "*modus vivendi*, only compromises, bargains, specific agreements, only a diplomacy of checks and counter-checks."<sup>18</sup>

Russia had, however, offered signs that it would give up its totalitarian ways. Since 1941, it had disavowed revolutionary communism. In 1936, it adopted a constitution "democratic in character and contain[ing] a bill of civil

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<sup>17</sup> Walter Lippmann, *U. S. War Aims* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1944), pp. 53, 135.

<sup>18</sup> Lippmann, *U. S. War Aims*, pp. 139-141.

rights," though these provisions had not been brought into effect. In the time since the two powers had formalised their wartime alliance, Russia had made additional offerings of support for democracy outside of the Soviet Union. It completed an agreement for "mutual assistance and post-war collaboration" with Czechoslovakia, in which each embraced "the principles of mutual respect of their independence and sovereignty as well as non-interference in the internal affairs of the other state." Stalin had offered the same terms to any other state bordering the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics under threat from Germany. These and other official agreements, Lippmann maintained, committed Russia "to support democratic institutions abroad." They obligated Russia "against totalitarian institutions outside of the legal frontiers of the Soviet Union."<sup>19</sup>

Having declared its commitment to democratic principles, Lippmann continued, Russia had eliminated in theory the ideological conflict besetting Russian-American relations. Yet the conflict did exist, for Russia had not put its democratic constitution into effect. In the West, he pointed out,

when practice does not correspond to principle, when there is a double standard of morality—one for use abroad and one for use at home—we can be charged, and indeed we do charge ourselves in free discussion, without violating our principles or with hypocrisy.

No such charge is made by Russians in Russia, and the world is left to guess why, despite her constitution, the Soviet Union is still in fact a totalitarian state under the dictatorship of the Communist Party.<sup>20</sup>

Americans, Lippmann, explained, could only hypothesise about Russia's foreign policy intentions. They could only speculate as to whether Russia had forsworn revolutionary communism, or if Russia professed democracy "in bad faith for the purpose of deceiving and ruling mankind." They could not elaborate a basis for effective Russian-American diplomacy by arguing the

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<sup>19</sup> Lippmann, *U. S. War Aims*, pp. 142-144.

<sup>20</sup> Lippmann, *U. S. War Aims*, p. 146.

issue at home. Russia alone could settle it, perhaps before the fighting stopped, but necessarily when the war ended, by choosing, or choosing not, to bring the 1936 constitution into force. He concluded:

[W]e must go to the Russians; the key to the door is in their hands. Speaking to them frankly as allies who mean to be their friends, we must ask them to commit the world of the future to the cause of democratic freedom. We may hope and we may believe they will not refuse. The proof that they have accepted they alone can give—in the measures they take when the war is over to validate their own constitutional promises, and to make free, equal, and reciprocal the exchange of news and opinion between their own people and their present allies.

If they refuse, we can still do our very best to get on with them, persisting through the ordinary channels of diplomacy in the effort to prevent a third World War. But if they refuse, it will be better not to deceive ourselves, and to become relaxed in the semblance, which will have little reality, of a universal society for the maintenance of peace.<sup>21</sup>

Lippmann did not stop there. He disavowed the interventions—in Cuba, the Philippines, and Panama—that had sullied American diplomacy. He proposed that Americans give up such petty diversions and reach for world power on behalf of all the world's peoples. “[D]emocracy is nothing if it is not a positive faith and a way of life,” he insisted. The history of American foreign relations had shown, he wrote,

that the great lasting commitments of the United States in the outer world are confirmed, in the last analysis, not by treaties and declarations but by the fact that they enlist the American democracy as the champion of democracy. When this democratic impulse becomes separated from the strategic and economic realities of the world, it leads us to quixotic and sentimental interventions, to disappointment, frustration, and cynicism, and into grave trouble. But this is the dynamic purpose which drives the American nation on. ...

It expresses in its intent, however much we may fail to be practical and prudent in our acts, the highest interest of the United States, which is to live in a world environment which contains no dangerous and alien powers.<sup>22</sup>

Lippmann thus dismissed plans to deindustrialise and democratise Germany. They represented just another quixotic intervention which could only, in the end, discredit the United States. Nonetheless, in the spring of 1945 Germany loomed large in Americans' concerns for the peace. At the

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21 Lippmann, *U. S. War Aims*, pp. 150-151.

22 Lippmann, *U. S. War Aims*, p. 154.

Yalta Conference, the Allies agreed to partition Germany into four occupation zones, and to settle later the other conditions of the occupation. In the *Post*, Demaree Bess noted that postwar conditions in Europe would render the German people dependent on the Allies "even for barest survival," yet the Allies had resolved "to destroy all industry which could be used for military production and, in the words of the Yalta communiqué, 'to remove all Nazi and military influences from the cultural and economic life of the people.'" Broad objectives such as the "control of all German industry which could be used for military production" he observed, could be interpreted as "the elimination of all German industry, as Henry Morgenthau advocated, because practically all modern industry can be used for war production." Changes to Germany's cultural and economic life, he noted, could mean Allied control of almost all aspects of German life. "The Allies are the totalitarian victors," he concluded, "and they are imposing their own conditions, roughly described as 'unconditional surrender.'" Would Americans, he wondered, grasp their opportunity? "Germany is going to become a testing ground for various ways of life, including the American way of life," he insisted, and he hoped Americans would make a good showing.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Demaree Bess, "How Will We Govern Our Slice of Germany?" *Saturday Evening Post*, April 14, 1945, pp. 95, 96.

**Chapter 5**  
**Disappointed Idealists:**  
**The Pollsters Assess the Debate**

Over the course of the war, then, the wartime rhetoric of democratic ideals widened the scope of the public debate. It was not just about Germany's postwar future; rather, the discourse on Germany had become inseparable from discussions about American democracy, national character, Europe's future and relations with Russia. Was it, however, still a debate in which all Americans could participate meaningfully?

As World War II unfolded Hadley Cantril, the Director of Princeton University's Office of Public Opinion Research, watched with dismay the growing evidence that if Americans paid any attention to the problems of war and peace, they lacked a basic understanding of the central issues and they responded only in terms of their immediate interests. The wartime hope that an informed public opinion, stirred by an exhaustive public discourse, could improve democratic processes seemed a phantom. He complained, "One gets the impression that everybody is concerned about national affairs, that Americans are everywhere discussing our foreign policy and its implications. As a matter of fact, this impression is about 90 per cent wrong."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hadley Cantril, "What We Don't Know is Likely to Hurt Us," *New York Times Magazine*, May 14 1944, p. 9.

Cantril chafed that 30 per cent of survey respondents did not know the Japanese occupied the Philippines. "Out of 90,000,000 adults in the United States," he exclaimed, "27,000,000 don't know the Japanese have taken the Philippines; 50,000,000 don't know they have taken Wake Island." Forty per cent of Americans had not heard of the Atlantic Charter. Thirty per cent thought the United States had been a member of the League of Nations, and 26 per cent did not know one way or the other. Similar numbers did not know the basics of how the American government functions. For Cantril, figures of this sort meant that the average American's opinion was woefully uninformed. Americans' failure to inform themselves indicated that they did not comprehend the world beyond their own narrow self-interest. The thinking of "the man in the street," Cantril suggested, "is mainly personal and self-centered." Americans, in his opinion, did not understand the relationship of larger policy issues to their long-term personal welfare.<sup>2</sup>

Fifty-seven per cent of Americans, Cantril continued, "think we have a clear idea of what the war is all about, [but] nearly all of us define our war aims in negative terms—we're fighting against those whose power threatens the way of life we cherish." Most peoples, Cantril noted, valued "security, comfort and self-improvement." Americans, remote from the battle fronts, perceived little threat and thought only in terms of their everyday lives. Further, the war economy had so improved Americans' standard of living over depression conditions, that they had become "spoiled." Security for Americans meant "job security," not "social security." No idealistic slogans describing American war aims had caught on, Cantril lamented. "Slogans that click spontaneously are accompanied by gnawing grievances, a spirit of individual selflessness, not general satisfaction." Americans would not rally

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<sup>2</sup> Cantril, p. 9.

around higher war aims if they did not feel they were making extraordinary sacrifices, and fifty per cent believed they were doing "just the right amount" for the war effort, while the other half believed they had not been asked to do enough.<sup>3</sup>

American opinion in favour of postwar cooperation, Cantril maintained, was not based on "knowledge." Americans did not want international cooperation for the right reason—because without secure access to postwar trade the nation could not sustain in the long term the higher standard of living Americans had begun to enjoy. The poll data revealed that if Americans felt that their allies were letting them down, or if their choice for international cooperation entailed the possibility of a lower standard of living, they would revert to their prewar nationalism. Sixty-four per cent of Americans might say they would pay higher taxes and 86 per cent might say they would agree to postwar food rationing to facilitate postwar aid but, Cantril argued, "there is a high prestige value in answering these questions the unselfish way. People don't want others to think they are hard-hearted." He doubted that Americans would support any postwar program if they perceived it involved any deprivation for themselves.<sup>4</sup>

For Cantril, the accumulating public opinion data challenged the wartime belief that an enlightened debate brought before the larger American public would automatically capture everyone's attention and focus their thinking on the greater issues of their self-interest. His textbook on public opinion, published in 1944, stated that belief as a "law" of public opinion:

By and large, if people in a democracy are provided educational opportunities and ready access to information, public opinion reveals a hard-headed common sense.

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<sup>3</sup> Cantril, pp. 9, 32.

<sup>4</sup> Cantril, pp. 9, 32.

The more enlightened people are to the implications of events and proposals for their own self-interest, the more likely they are to agree with the more objective opinions of realistic experts.<sup>5</sup>

Americans' commitment to international cooperation was not hard-headed enough, in Cantril's opinion. Clearly, the press had made available a wealth of material on postwar issues, but the wartime experience which he had hoped would transform Americans' awareness of their self-interest from the personal to the national, had eluded them. This failure, he believed, held the potential to impair the United States' participation in the peace, a development that would ultimately undermine Americans' job security. He concluded that those who would have mass public opinion guide policy still faced a gargantuan task:

In the long run, narrow self-interest can only be cured by giving people the facts and by showing them the implications a set of facts or conditions have for their own personal welfare. ...

To be sure, there is no quick and easy way to public enlightenment. The baffling question is how to get people sufficiently interested in information to pay attention to it. Educators, editors, public servants and policy makers will have to put their heads together for the common good.<sup>6</sup>

The wartime emphasis on the struggle to overcome totalitarianism, then, did not move American democratic practice toward a new zenith. The advent of the polls, which had held out the promise that Americans' opinion on policy issues would become a more vital component of the policy making process, also failed to give democracy the "new purity and strength" that so many had hoped for. They were popular with the public, which eagerly searched the results to find out what its opinion was. They were sometimes scorned but never ignored by Congressional Representatives and Senators. Nevertheless, the fact of the polls' existence did not suggest to most Americans that the opinion they expressed might be somehow improved.

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<sup>5</sup> Hadley Cantril, *Gauging Public Opinion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 230.

<sup>6</sup> Cantril, "What We Don't Know," p. 32.

Further, the data the polls yielded suggested that public opinion surveys would not soon transform the techniques of self-government; rather, it confirmed representative democracy for the present. It also raised the pollsters' concerns that they may have given force to an opinion that might not always serve democracy well. Pollster Harry H. Field suggested,

Public opinion ... is not infallible. It has areas of ignorance and misunderstanding as well as knowledge and precision. ... It is unlikely to shed much light on problems that have not been widely discussed. Seldom can it deal with the details of policy—usually it is limited to far-reaching principles. ...

The public, of course, can be wrong. However leaders need to know what the public is thinking, be it right or wrong, if they wish to provide real leadership.<sup>7</sup>

Field was one of two other public opinion specialists who evaluated the trends in American opinion on foreign policy during the war. He headed the University of Denver's National Opinion Research Center. In January 1945, he outlined to the Institute of Pacific Relations his views on the postwar foreign policy initiatives Americans would likely support. Jerome S. Bruner, a former editor of the *Public Opinion Quarterly*, was Assistant Director of the Office of Public Opinion Research at Princeton University, and also undertook a wartime assignment for the Office of Strategic Services. He published a study of trends in American opinion in 1944. Bruner found, in the data on Germany especially, irreconcilable inconsistencies in the way Americans formed their opinions. He expressed his frank concern for their policy implications. Field argued that Americans favoured a lenient peace for Germany, but to make his case, he overemphasised the positive elements in the data, and he drew additional material from the public debate to substantiate his position. Rather than demonstrating that public opinion would support a specific policy direction for postwar Germany, his discussion

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<sup>7</sup> Harry H. Field, "American Opinion and Foreign Policy," American Council Paper No. 8, in *Institute of Pacific Relations Papers*, 9:1 (1945), p. 2.

reflected an underlying anxiety about the 'quality' of the public opinion he measured.<sup>8</sup>

In his analysis, Field mounted a defense of public opinion. He argued that Americans had not been persuaded toward harsh peace options by wartime discussions that traded on national character stereotypes. He found that until the invasion of Europe, Americans showed "a growing inclination" to find the German people "fundamentally mislead," as opposed to "basically war minded" (see Appendix, Table 1).<sup>9</sup> He also noted that when asked to define their enemies, 24 per cent of the respondents included the German people, while 74 per cent indicated the Nazi government only (see Appendix, Table 2).<sup>10</sup>

To supplement this data, Field quoted several opinions on American attitudes to Germans. Gallup, in a June 1943 release had stated that the majority of Americans felt "the German leaders should be punished for their crimes, nevertheless, without those leaders [they could] get along with the German people."<sup>11</sup> *Fortune*, Field continued, summarised the data provided by the Elmo Roper firm on American impressions of the German problem (see Appendix, Table 3):

"Americans ... are ... outraged not just with the Nazis but with the German people, and they are talking tough. ...

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<sup>8</sup> The polling sources from which Bruner and Field drew their data included the American Institute of Public Opinion, headed by Gallup, the *Fortune* Poll, conducted by Roper, the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Denver, and the Office of Public Opinion Research at Princeton University. Most of the data they used had been published.

<sup>9</sup> The author appreciates that the figures in the tables cannot be directly compared to one another owing to differences of question framing, and to statistical inequities resulting from the inclusion or omission of 'miscellaneous,' 'no opinion' or 'undecided' categories, and the allowance or disallowance of multiple responses. This discussion describes the arguments made by the pollsters as they reviewed their data, and the tables present the data largely in the patterns in which the pollsters organised it.

<sup>10</sup> Field, "American Opinion and Foreign Policy," pp. 24, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Field, p. 26, quoting a release from George Gallup, dated June 11, 1943.

"American opinion, which once held the leaders of Germany largely responsible for German aggression, has now apparently changed to a belief that the German people must also bear the blame themselves. After the outbreak of World War II, 66.6 per cent of Americans interviewed said "the German people are essentially peace-loving and kindly." But by mid-1942, 47.9 per cent thought that someone else would have started the war if Hitler hadn't. By June, 1943, only 4.2 per cent gave the trial and execution of leading Nazi officials as the sole measure they would recommend in dealing with Germany.

"It is certain that the Americans want to be firm with the German people on whom they now squarely lay the blame. But they do not want to destroy them. And they might return to their old emphasis on the good side of German character. ...

"Any workable solution ... must probably balance firmness with humanity."<sup>12</sup>

Field could not say definitively, however, that Americans would finish the war without giving up on the "humanity" criterion for the occupation of Germany. He worried that if Americans' opinion hardened any further, they could not achieve a durable peace settlement with their enemy. Vera Micheles Dean, he argued, had explained that the Allies could not win a "decisive' victory" if they did not

"emphasize over and over again that the Nazis, not the German people as a whole, are the enemy; that they have no intention of annihilating the German nation; but that the Germans will have to bear the responsibility for continued support of Nazism and execution of orders issued by Nazi leaders."<sup>13</sup>

Field ventured,

If the opinion of the people of the United States in their pre-invasion mood carries any weight in determining Germany's fate, the treatment accorded the people of Germany will be more kindly than that advocated by Sumner Welles ... and Henry Morgenthau.<sup>14</sup>

A majority of Americans, Field continued, favoured a "liberal," not a "harsh" program for the German people. Despite their increasing belief that the German people as a whole must take responsibility for the war, 64 per cent of Americans in 1944 favoured a "lenient treatment—a liberal attitude toward the German people (but not toward their Nazi leaders) ... active assistance ... or a reeducation program" (see Appendix, Table 4). Further, he

<sup>12</sup> Field, p. 26, quoting a *Fortune* news release dated January 3, 1944.

<sup>13</sup> Field, p. 27, quoting Vera Micheles Dean, "What Future for Germany?"

<sup>14</sup> Field, p. 29.

suggested, surveys indicating that Americans favoured harsher peace options (see Appendix, Table 5) had used a different question. They asked about the treatment of Germany, not the German people.<sup>15</sup>

Field's analysis, and the wording of the questions and responses in the surveys, reveal the extent to which the imagery of national character coloured the public debate. The responses for the polls on perceptions of the German people (see Appendix, Table 1) gave Americans a choice among two negative options—the Germans being a people that “always want to go to war” or “are too easily led”—and the more positive possibility that the Germans “do not like war.” The first two options entailed that the German people were morally incorrigible or morally weak, the latter that they were morally the same as other peoples. By August 1944, the two negative options had captured 74 per cent of American opinion.

Among the analyses of the German national character considered in the third chapter of this essay, Douglas Miller's summarised Germany as a “breeding ground for criminals and adventurers.” He did not believe Germans could become good world citizens. Henry Morgenthau claimed that the “traditional German will to war goes back as far as our own traditional will to freedom,” and that Germans had the will to renew their attempts at world conquest. Sumner Welles argued that Germans believed in “German militarism as the supreme glory of the race” and that a new generation would have to come to maturity before Germany could be trusted with democracy. Emil Ludwig argued that Hitler expressed the essence of the German national character. These four analyses emphasised the Germans' moral weakness or moral incorrigibility. Richard M. Brickner's paranoia diagnosis drew heavily upon national character stereotypes to describe its symptoms,

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<sup>15</sup> Field, p. 30:

but only by arbitrarily equating psychological weakness with moral weakness can his assessment be placed on the scale suggested by the poll question on perceptions of the German people.

Among the analyses which held that some Germans were not Nazis, national character descriptions were an important part of Vera Micheles Dean's approach. Nevertheless, she argued that Germany had many good people who could be counted upon to remake Germany for world citizenship. James P. Warburg rejected national character arguments. He maintained that all peoples held the potential for fascism and saw Germany's problem as monopoly capitalism gone to extremes. Walter Lippmann reached a similar conclusion, but while he believed that conditions in Germany had led the people to adopt fascism, Warburg believed fascism, as the ultimate end of monopoly capitalism, had victimised the people. Of these analyses, Dean's might fit under the rubric "German people do not like war," but, based on the premise that not all Germans are Nazis, and generally not based on arguments from national character, they fit better on the scales suggested by the polls on which Germans are the enemy (see Appendix, Table 2).

Though Field argued that 64 per cent of Americans preferred a lenient treatment of the German people, in the public debate, analysts making peace proposals based on national character—Brickner excepted—specified measures consistent with the more severe survey options for policy directions. All prescribed a thorough disarmament. Welles proposed to partition Germany into three separate countries, and to maintain controls on Germany's industry and economy until Germany was democratised. Morgenthau and Miller favoured converting Germany to agricultural subsistence. Ludwig demanded punishment for the German people, including a partial deindustrialisation, political guardianship, and labour

reparations. Brickner advocated treating Germany as a psychiatric patient, thus he implied that Germany would experience controls, but not deprivation. Overall, their proposals for Germany's postwar treatment are consistent with the policy options favoured by 66 per cent of Americans who, in 1944, preferred to "supervise and control," or "be severe" with Germany (see Appendix, Table 5).

Those who held the opposing view of the Germans, however, were not reluctant to impose controls. They did not suggest that the German people should avoid responsibility for the ravages of the war, but they believed that excessively harsh methods would recreate the conditions that had brought Germany to fascism and war. All proposed an immediate disarmament, but none wanted to see the German industrial base reduced. They wanted the fascist regime dismantled, but recommended that Americans assist Germans in the reestablishment of self-government only if the Germans so requested. Warburg and Lippmann proposed controls sufficient to ensure that Germany would fulfil terms such as these, and Dean went one step further, suggesting that the Germans, to protect their interests, participate in the supervision of any occupation and control initiatives.

Field's analysis entailed that while many Americans had embraced national character stereotypes, they had not let those views dominate their reasoning about proposals for the treatment of the German people. Seventy-four per cent of Americans saw the German people as morally deficient to some degree, but 64 per cent of Americans, he insisted, advocated leniency and assistance. Americans favoured harsher solutions for "Germany" the nation (see Appendix, Table 5), not the German people. Then, 66 per cent responded in favour of controls or severe measures. Field's argument turned on a problem of question framing—whether the pollster asked about

Germany or Germans. To ask about the country removed the issues one step from their very human connection and led to a far greater number of respondents failing to understand the moral implications of their responses. Americans, he believed, wanted a responsible peace with the German people, one that balanced firmness and humanity.

For Jerome Bruner, firmness and humanity amounted to an impossible combination. Americans, he argued, could have one or the other, but not both. From his review of public opinion data, he assembled a list of policy proposals Americans favoured for Germany:

1. The enemy must be punished severely for breaking the peace. The punishment must be in full. Whatever our opinions about enemy people, however much we feel compassionate towards them, our sympathies must not deter us from setting stiff terms.

2. In providing for punishment of enemy nations, we must be careful that our treatment of enemy peoples be humane. "Treat them kindly" is our motto.

3. The leaders of enemy nations, the dictatorial men responsible for starting this war and for prosecuting it with ruthless savagery, must be dealt with severely—that means prison if we are kindly and death if we are just. Hitler particularly must be shown no mercy.

4. On what shall become of enemy nations as political entities ... we are not yet decided, though we rather favor letting them exist whole. We are sure, however, that they must not remain strong nations after the war. They have, in essence, read themselves out of the councils of the Great Powers. Until they can prove that war is not their only means of dealing with international problems, they should have little voice in international decisions.

5. Above all things, the enemy should be stripped of every vestige of military power, be completely disarmed.

6. The best way of seeing to it that enemy nations do not rise to attack us again in the near future is to police them.

7. One feature of the treaty must be reparations. The enemy has caused death and destruction to others and must be made to pay until it hurts. That is only just—an eye for an eye.

8. The Axis nations must be stripped of the land they have gained through conquest.<sup>16</sup>

This package of proposals, Bruner argued, stemmed from a basic lack of knowledge on the part of the American public. "[O]ur humaneness," he argued, "is neatly divided from our understanding of the way in which

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<sup>16</sup> Jerome S. Bruner, *Mandate from the People* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944), pp. 138-139.

treatment of Germany ... will affect the German ... people." Americans did want humaneness. In response to a July 1942 survey on how to treat the German people, 61 per cent said to "treat them kindly and with consideration," 19 per cent wanted "kindness backed by firm treatment," 12 per cent advocated "an 'eye-for-eye revenge'" and 9 per cent were "indefinite or unsure." In October 1942, 63 per cent of Americans were willing to guarantee the German people that the United States would prevent Germany's victims from exacting revenge upon the German people.<sup>17</sup>

Simultaneous with desiring humaneness, Bruner argued, Americans wanted economic firmness in part to punish Germany, but also to prevent any renewal of German aggression. In September 1943, 70 per cent of Americans said they believed a defeated Germany would begin planning for another war. In July 1942, 43 per cent of Americans responding to a question on whether Germany should pay the cost of the war wanted the Allies to attempt to collect from Germany "as much as it is possible to get, even if it breaks them." Nine per cent said no costs, 38 per cent chose "something in between," 10 per cent had no opinion.<sup>18</sup>

Americans, Bruner continued, did not understand the consequences of steep economic penalties for Germany. They did not appreciate that the burden of reparations had created the economic conditions that had brought the Nazis to power. In a survey conducted in Colorado, Bruner explained, 63 per cent of respondents disagreed with a statement that reparations had contributed to the Nazi rise, 19 per cent agreed, and 18 per cent were unsure. When this same group was asked about collecting the cost of the war, 52 per cent wanted to collect as much as possible, "even if it breaks them." A sub-

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<sup>17</sup> Bruner, pp. 141-142.

<sup>18</sup> Bruner, pp. 141, 142-143.

group of the 52 per cent was given additional information to determine if they might change their opinions. Asked if collecting reparations caused a depression in Germany, should the United States continue to collect and risk hurting its international trade, only 55 per cent of the subgroup agreed. Given the additional option that perhaps the United States could instead strip Germany of all the lands it had gained since the Nazi rise and punish all the leaders, the number of subgroup respondents still wanting to collect reparations payments dropped to 38 per cent.<sup>19</sup>

These results demonstrated to Bruner that Americans had not received meaningful information about the German problem during the war. He complained,

At a time when there has been the greatest moral compulsion to bring all important available information to the people, survey after survey has indicated that facts such as these are not, except in distorted form, reaching the bulk of the American people. ...

And so there indeed is the rub in humaneness. To put it concisely, we are abstractly humane, economically tough.<sup>20</sup>

An uninformed American opinion, Bruner surmised, supported a policy direction that could only recreate the conditions that brought Hitler to power. To prevent a renewal of German aggression, Americans would have to help rebuild Germany. Without adequate information, they could not see "the constructive problem of rehabilitating the enemy."<sup>21</sup>

For Americans, Bruner noted, "the 'humane view of things' [was] almost a substitute for a political ideology." Humaneness, however, did not prevail in Americans' thinking on postwar Germany. Their interest in preventing a renewal of German aggression predominated. Bruner's observations of

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19 Bruner, pp. 143-144.

20 Bruner, pp. 144-145.

21 Bruner, pp. 149, 152.

wartime public opinion on foreign policy issues led him to draw conclusions about how Americans assessed their nation's foreign policy needs:<sup>22</sup>

*Apparent self-interest is the primary fulcrum on which opinion on foreign policy turns.* Given a situation involving America's relations with other countries, it is our habit to look first and longest at what we get out of it. Apparent self-interest changes with time and is subject to fashions. The extent to which apparent *national* self-interest becomes identified with *collective international* self-interest will determine, of course, the degree to which we shall all become world citizens.

*Our desire for action in foreign affairs is influenced only secondarily by abstract ideological doctrines.* Barring the operation of self-interested motives, ideological factors *do* prevail. They prevail to the extent of enlisting our sympathies. But action and sympathy are not the same thing. Public opinion will reach a fever pitch for action on any particular issue in proportion to the dramatic co-incidence of apparent self-interest and morality. Where moral scruple and apparent self-interest conflict, the latter and not the former tends to govern.<sup>23</sup>

Most Americans defined their interests in terms of their daily lives, and saw them as well served by occupation proposals for Germany that took immediate and decisive steps to prevent any renewal of aggression. Less inclined to consider their interests at the national level, Americans' reactions to international events might not, the pollsters concluded, support policy measures in their best interests over the longer term. Americans' greater self-interest in the postwar world, these pollsters understood, lay in postwar cooperation to keep the peace.

The pollsters saw in the public opinion data the evidence that Americans' perception of their self interest had not risen to the heights of the wartime ideals. For Cantril, Americans had not forgotten the depression years, and they would not support any peace plans that threatened even remotely to dislodge the fragile sense of security that full employment in wartime had brought. Bruner appreciated that Americans might be persuaded to accept softer peace terms for Germany only if they saw their

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<sup>22</sup> Bruner, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Jerome S. Bruner, "Public Opinion and the Peace," in John B. Whitton, et al., *The Second Chance: America and the Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 179-180.

own interests threatened by a hard-line policy. Americans' first priority in the postwar world would be their own lives, not the welfare of other peoples.

The American public's vision of the postwar world bore little relationship to the pollsters' own, and the policy for Germany that public opinion supported was the antithesis of the policy they believed would best serve the interests of the American people over the longer term. They expressed their frustration with American public opinion, especially with its failure to define its interest in national, rather than in personal, terms. They also pointed to the elite's failure to provide appropriate leadership. It had failed to put before the public all the information on the German problem necessary to forming an appropriate opinion, and it had failed to show Americans how the various policy options would affect their interests. It had failed to conduct a sagacious public debate, one that would outfit Americans to guide their nation's postwar policy for Germany.

### 5.1 Conclusion

In their analyses of public opinion, the pollsters again confronted the central problem of democratic policy making: the public's opinion should guide policy making processes, but to give its valid consent, public opinion should be informed and rational. That the larger public might pronounce upon each policy problem had long been the ideal for, rather than the reality of, democratic practice, especially in the realm of foreign policy. Owing to the emergence of the mass media, the public's role in policy making had gradually increased. The circumstances of a war between a democracy and a totalitarian regime, together with the new science of public opinion measurement, refocused attention on the public's ability to guide policy, and these developments made the cultivation of a public opinion capable of

influencing policy an essential part of the war effort. They also entailed that the elite would no longer exert a direct influence on policy formation, but would instead argue their views before the mass public, which would pronounce upon them through the new mechanism of the polls.

The thousands of pages on the German problem offered by the popular and academic presses attest to the extent to which the elite, in its new role, rallied to the service of democracy. Still, for the pollsters, the public debate had not prompted public opinion to chose the right foreign policy options. The right options, the pollsters believed, would reflect wartime democratic ideals. They would uphold American democratic values and, in that way, serve the long view of the nation's interests. These ideals, boldly expounded in the wartime rhetoric, had motivated the public debate. The pressures and propagandistic tendencies inherent in the wartime situation, however, distorted the discussions. In the public debate, too many comentators arguing their postwar policy positions could see the German people only as the wartime enemy. They portrayed Germans as inherently antidemocratic and eternally aggressive. Their ideas dominated the debate and led the public to favour policy options for postwar Germany that betrayed the wartime ideals.

Their data, the pollsters found, confirmed the debate's failure to foster a public opinon fit to guide foreign policy decisions, but they were not impartial in their assessments. They held their own views about what constituted an appropriate postwar policy for Germany, and they believed that a correct public opinion would conform to those views. In this sense, they were deeply involved in the public debate. Their rules about what constituted a valid public opinion—for example, Cantril's principle that an appropriately enlightened public opinion would approach "the more objective opinions of

realistic experts”—their understanding of the relationship between public and elite opinions—for instance, Field’s suggestion that public opinion could be wrong, and thus in need of leadership—and their observations about how opinion on foreign policy had functioned during the war—such as Bruner’s that “apparent self interest,” and not even “apparent national self interest,” let alone “collective international self interest” governed Americans’ responses to foreign policy issues—reveal that the pollsters were not about to abandon their own elite values as to what constituted an appropriate foreign policy. They expected, as Harold Lasswell, for example, had also hoped, that all Americans’ understandings of policy issues could be raised to the standards that they, as members of the elite, took as correct.

The pollsters, then, could not conclude that public opinion had become capable of guiding foreign policy. The public had revealed itself to them as inferior in both its values and in its susceptibility to the distortions in the public debate. This conclusion confirmed Walter Lippmann’s earlier critique of public opinion, which the wartime zeal for democracy had temporarily eclipsed. Lippmann, as thoroughly involved in the public debate as the pollsters, had advanced an argument that perhaps best anticipated the postwar realist outlook on foreign policy problems. He had appreciated that if Russia disappointed American expectations at the peace table the same wartime mentality that had distorted the public debate could instantly transform the wartime ally into an enemy. He expected the worst between the two powers should Russia follow a postwar policy of revolutionary communism and the United States pursue its foreign policy expecting that all nations could and should become democratic. He had discovered still another problem with American public opinion: its volatility. The critics of American public opinion had joined in a chorus of denunciation. They viewed American

public opinion as bigoted, self-seeking, narrow-minded, capricious and, worst of all, unrealistic. The solution, Lippmann, Kennan and other realists believed, lay in subordinating public opinion to the guidance of expert foreign policy strategists. They, the best and the brightest, would be also the few and the well educated.

## Appendix

TABLE 1

Perceptions of the German people.

Which of the following statements comes closest to describing how you feel, on the whole, about the people who live in Germany?\* (percentage of respondents with an opinion)

	Feb. 1942	Sept. 1942	June 1944	Feb. 1944	Aug. 1944	Dec. 1944	Feb. 1945
The German people do not like war. If they could have the same chance as people in other countries they would become good citizens of the world	45	36	32	28	26	26	26
The German people may not like war, but they have shown that they are too easily led into war by powerful leaders.†	32	39	46	47	45	37	37
The German people will always want to go to war to make themselves as powerful as possible.	23	25	22	25	29	37	37
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Undecided	7	7	3	3	3	4	4

\* Asked by the National Opinion Research Center

† On the February 1942 survey this alternative read: The German people are like all other people. If they could really choose the leaders they want, they would become good citizens of the world.

Note: Field used the data from February 1942 to August 1944 only.

Source: Harry H. Field, "American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," American Council Paper No. 8, *Institute of Pacific Relations Papers*, 9:1 (1945), p. 24; Harry Field and Louise M. Van Patten, "If the American People Made the Peace," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 8:4 (1944-1945), p. 506; "The Quarter's Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 9:1 (1945), p. 93.

TABLE 2

## Is the Enemy the German People or Their Government?

	In the war with Germany do you feel that our chief enemy is the German people as a whole, or the German government?*			Do you think we should blame the German people themselves, or the Nazi leaders, or both the people and their leaders for the cruelties in this war?† (percentage of respondents)	
	Feb. 1942	Dec. 1942	Aug. 1944		Dec. 1944
People	6	6	8	German people	2
Government	75	74	63	Nazi leaders	58
Both	13	18	27	Both people and leaders	38
No Opinion	6	2	2	Undecided	2
Total	100	100	100	Total	100

\* February and December 1942 asked by the American Institute of Public Opinion. August 1944 asked by the Office of Public Opinion Research

† Asked by the National Opinion Research Center

Note: Field used only the December 1942 figures. This poll was conducted by his own research centre. Presumably, the results were not available when he submitted his paper to the Institute of Pacific Relations conference, which was held in January 1945.

Source: Harry H. Field, "American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," American Council Paper No. 8, *Institute of Pacific Relations Papers*, 9:1 (1945), p. 26; "Gallup and Fortune Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 7:1 (1943), p. 173; "Public Opinion Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 8:1 (1944-1945), p. 448; "The Quarter's Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 9:1 (1945), p. 95.

TABLE 3

*Fortune* Concludes in 1943 that Americans Now Hold the  
German People Responsible for War

Reviewing data from its earlier polls, *Fortune* magazine concluded that "American opinion, which once held the leaders of Germany largely responsible for German aggression, has now apparently changed to a belief that laying blame on Germany's leaders is not enough—the German people must also bear the blame themselves." (percentage of respondents)

<i>Fortune's</i> Conclusions	1939 (outbreak of war)	mid-1942	June, 1943
Germans unlucky in leaders	66.6 The German people are essentially peace loving and kindly.	44.1 Blame the war on Hitler	17.4 4.2 per cent gave the trial and execution of Nazi leaders as the sole postwar measure for Germany.  13.2 per cent gave penning Germany within her boundaries as the sole measure.
German people to blame	19.6 Fondness for brute force and conquest makes Germans a menace to world peace	47.9 Someone else would have started the war if Hitler had not	75.7
Total	86.2*	92.0*	93.1*

\* *Fortune* did not provide complete data in this summary. This table was assembled from a summary graph and the text of the analysis, both in *Fortune*.

Source: "The *Fortune* Survey." *Fortune*, January 1944, p. 64.

TABLE 4

## Perspectives on the Postwar Treatment of the German People

1943: How do you think we should treat the German people after this war?

1944: If you had your say, how would we treat the people who live in Germany after this war?\* (percentage of respondents)

	1943	1944
Advocated lenient treatment—a liberal attitude toward the German people (but not toward their Nazi leaders) ... active assistance ... or a reeducation program	67	64
Recommended strict supervision of economic and political life in Germany ... a probationary period ... isolation ... policing ... or disarmament	40	42
Favoured more severe measures ... definite punitive action ... cruelty ... or disarmament	10	8
Gave other suggestions or were undecided	9	6
Total	126†	121†

\* Asked by the National Opinion Research Center

† Some respondents made more than one suggestion.

Note: The error for 1944 is Field's.

Source: Harry H. Field, "American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," American Council Paper No. 8, *Institute of Pacific Relations Papers*, 9:1 (1945), p. 29.

TABLE 5

## Principles of Occupation for Germany

What do you think we should do with Germany, as a country, after the war?\* (percentage of respondents)

	Nov. 1943	Nov. 1944	May 1945†
Be lenient—rehabilitate, re-educate, encourage trade, start afresh (Place major emphasis on rehabilitating the Reich, reeducating her to take her place in the world as a responsible civilized nation)	17	12	8
Supervise and control—police, disarm completely, eliminate Nazis (Control or supervision by the Allies, with policing and reform of the country, but without any territorial dismemberment)	44	32	46
Be severe—divide her into small states, destroy her as a political entity, cripple her forever (Destroy her as a political entity, cut into small states)	21	34	34
Miscellaneous and undecided (Miscellaneous and No Opinion)	18	22	12
Total	100	100	100

\* Asked by the American Institute of Public Opinion

† On the May 1945 survey the question read: What do you think we should do with Germany as a country?

Note: Field used only the data for November 1943. The sources disagree as to the date of the November 1943 poll. The unbracketed wording for the responses is Field's, and is almost exactly the same as the wording given in the *Public Opinion Quarterly* for the May 1945 poll. The text in brackets appeared in the *Public Opinion Quarterly* for the November 1944 poll.

Source: Harry H. Field, "American Public Opinion and Foreign Policy," American Council Paper No. 8, *Institute of Pacific Relations Papers*, 9:1 (1945), p. 30; "Gallup and Fortune Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 7:1 (1943), p. 173; "The Quarter's Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 8:4 (1944-1945), p. 587, 9:2 (1945), p. 247.

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