

Davis, Belinda; Mausbach, Wilfried; Klimke, Martin; MacDougall, Carla (Hrsg.): *Changing the World, Changing Oneself. Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the US in the 1960s*. New York: Berghahn Books 2010. ISBN: 978-1-84545-651-1; 334 S.

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There are history books that simply document science on paper and there are, very rarely, history books that make the reader feel like a time-traveler. The respective anthology does so by presenting thirteen well-written essays by both seasoned professionals and young scholars whose writings demonstrate passion for their topic. The collection is completed by a discussion of former activists reflecting on their experiences in the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

In a series of several volumes Berghahn Books offers a powerful contribution to the currently much-discussed impacts of transnational protest history. Research beyond national borders has a longer history in the U.S., however German historians have been catching up in recent years.<sup>2</sup> The book at hand takes a transatlantic perspective that deserves its name. While often the transfer of ideas, practices and cultural habits is researched as a mono-directional process from the United States of America to Germany, the editors stress the necessity to look at a more circular approach to which they contribute.

The strong ties between the American student movement and its German counterpart – the dominant theme in the book – provided a common identity among protestors. As Wilfried Mausbach depicts in his intriguing essay, Germany's National Socialist past, the Holocaust in particular, served as a frame of reference for the U.S. actions in Vietnam. The transatlantic protest movement relocated Auschwitz to America's War in Vietnam. In this process, civil rights activists drew parallels between Jews in Nazi Germany and the racist oppression black people were faced with in America and as soldiers in Vietnam. Through this analogy German activists who were the sons and daughters of a generation of perpetrators saw an opportunity to combat

„fascism“ and thus „redeeming themselves of an inherited burden of guilt“, writes Mausbach (p. 43). Similarly, Karin Bauer argues that the young Ulrike Meinhof and others of her generation felt a necessity to protest and resist which „derived from the moral imperative to oppose policies that might endanger human lives“ (p. 176).

Directly related to the afore mentioned topic is Maria Höhn's essay that deals with the encounters of German activists with African-American soldiers stationed in U.S. military bases in southern Germany who numbered no less than 30.000 in the late sixties. Former SDS leader KD Wolff founded a „Black Panther Solidarity Committee“ (1969-1972) whose aim was to „create solidarity among those groups that could 'open a second front in the metropolis of imperialism'“ by highlighting the inherent connection between the anti-Vietnam War campaign and the Black Panther campaign (p. 219). Of particular interest is the fact that some German students were often self-righteous when dealing with German racism, considering it as a relic of the past. Thereby they ignored not only Germany's colonial history but also failed to reach out to Afro-Germans or so-called guest-workers, as Höhn critically points out (p. 230). This argument is supported by an opinion poll mentioned in Detlef Siegfried's essay: A mix of anti-Americanism and a „specifically German suppressive reflex and an urge to assuage guilt about the past“ (p. 199) comes to light when Germans were asked in 1964 if hypothetically, similar racial unrest under comparable circumstances to the situation in the U.S.A was likely in Germany. In general, the heavy weight of Germany's Nazi past becomes more apparent from essay to essay.

On a lighter note, Siegfried analyses the

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<sup>1</sup> The anthology originates from the larger project „Das Fremde im Eigenen: Interkultureller Austausch und kollektive Identitäten in der Revolte der 1960er Jahre“ and more specifically from a conference held in Heidelberg 2005 (report: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=849>).

<sup>2</sup> A superb overview on the state of the art concerning protest history of the „long sixties“ including its transnational context is provided by Philipp Gassert: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/2010-04-001>.

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self-created image of the „white negro“. Young people on their quest for authenticity in the age of „new sensibility“ appropriated certain lifestyle elements in an attempt to vanish racial differences by bonding on a cultural and not further defined class basis. They explored jazz and soul music, but chiefly blues, which they perceived as „the purest form of African-American music“ (p. 195). The German concert agency Lippmann + Rau brought the voices of the underprivileged from America to a German audience. Thereby, the importers of blues music „used well-established stereotypes of the ‘noble savage’ in order to create a positive resonance among the public“ (ibid).

How direct encounters within the international counter-culture decisively shaped young people is a central element of Belinda Davis’ piece which is primarily based on oral history. Through a variety of intercultural contact, e.g. school or university exchanges, trips to other countries with political organizations, or independent travel including hitchhiking, youths saw „a whole new world opening up“. This transnational experience was a „fundamental component in shaping the worldview of hundreds of thousand if not millions of young West Germans“, argues Davis, which was a central element of their politicization (p. 261).

Although the anthology’s strong focus on youth movements is put in question in the adjacent retrospective, its eligibility is proven throughout the essays. Young people represented a central target group to U.S. diplomats who observed the West German student movement with anguish, notes Martin Klimke.<sup>3</sup> Officials tried to counteract anti-American sentiments by trying to capture the hearts and minds of youths as future leaders in the imagined community of the „Free World“. In this context of Cold War ideology, the Freie Universität in West Berlin, the „Berkeley of West Germany“ (p. 136), played a critical role, as is further examined by Jeremi Suri.

Turning towards the late 1970s and early 1980s, Carla MagDougall convincingly explains the identity of West Berlin viewed through the eyes of U.S. foreign politics on the one hand and peace and anti-nuclear en-

ergy activists. The latter tried to redefine the U.S.-West German relationship (p. 93) and reclaimed their city as a refuge for „Andersdenkende“ (p. 87), i.e. members of the leftist-alternative milieu and squatters.<sup>4</sup> The case of Ronald Reagan’s visit to West Berlin led to a „radical reformulation of a city whose laurels had rested on its ritualistic ties to the United States“ (p. 84).

The anthology is very well-edited. The essays are coherent and build upon each other. Furthermore, it gives a lot of space to German terms that would not translate well, thereby staying true to the editors’ aim to include both cultures, here on a linguistic level.

Although one cannot help but notice the off-balance of U.S. influence – except for the first two essays about Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse by Detlef Claussen and John Abromeit – the overall target to approach U.S.-West German transfers in a less monolithic, but rather circular way is met. The book clearly contributes to a better understanding of transatlantic relations in the age of global protest. Particularly on the micro-level it presents a critical approach of the protagonists on both sides of the Atlantic that makes the reader aware of an interconnection or transculturality of each other’s past and present.

Sarah Gottschalk über Davis, Belinda; Mausbach, Wilfried; Klimke, Martin; MacDougall, Carla (Hrsg.): *Changing the World, Changing Oneself. Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the US in the 1960s*. New York 2010, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 20.01.2012.

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<sup>3</sup> Recommended for further reading: Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance. Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties*, Princeton 2010.

<sup>4</sup> The newest research on the alternative milieu in Germany and Europe (post-„1968“) is provided by this significant anthology: Sven Reichardt / Detlef Siegfried (eds.), *Das Alternative Milieu. Antibürgerlicher Lebensstil und linke Politik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Europa 1968-1983*, Göttingen 2010.