Introduction

From the late 1940s until well into the 1960s, East German officials and the East German press attacked the influence of American popular culture on East and West German youth. First targeting westerns, gangster movies, and jazz, then rock 'n' roll, East German authorities claimed that American imports destroyed the German cultural heritage, that they "barbarized" both East and West German adolescents, and made them prone to fascist seduction. Particularly in the first half of the 1950s, many West Germans reacted defensively to these suggestions and sometimes wondered whether East Germans better protected their youth. West Germans, too, worried that the "hot rhythms" of American music or the "sex appeal" of movie stars like Marlon Brando posed threats—either to West German adolescents or to the broader project of West German reconstruction, or both. By the late 1950s, however, city officials were opening jazz clubs for adolescents all over West Germany, and Defense Minister Franz-Josef Strauß announced that jazz was a proper music for the West German army. West Germans now flaunted their own openness, criticized East Germany's continued repression of American influences, and ridiculed East German assertions that, for example, rock 'n' roll posed a political threat. Within ten years, the German Cold War had undergone a significant transformation, one in which cultural consumption played a central role.

This study investigates how and why, in the postwar period, East and West German encounters with American popular culture were crucial to (re)constructions of German identities in the two states. The project places the conflicts between adolescents and authorities over American cultural influences in the context of the legacy of National Socialism and the emerging Cold War. The Nazis had banned much of American popular culture, and after 1945, American movies, jazz, rock 'n' roll, dances, and fash-
ions remained hotly contested in East and West Germany. The study focuses on the most controversial U.S. imports, which constituted, at the same time, the most debated aspects of consumer culture for both East and West Germans.

Two interconnected concerns shaped battles within and between the two German states over American influences. First, East and West German authorities perceived American cultural imports as a threat to established gender norms. Second, in responding to American popular culture, which often had roots in African American culture, Germans confronted their own notions of racial hierarchies. Arguments between adolescents and authorities over American influences were contests over moral, cultural, and political authority; they illuminate the complicated ways in which East and West German authorities used conceptions of racial and gender difference both to contain Americanized youth cultures in their own territories and to fight the Cold War battle. In spite of many ideological differences, authorities in both German states made their citizens' cultural consumption central to their political reconstruction efforts.1

After 1945, with the Allied occupation and the opening of its market, West Germany experienced an unprecedented influx of American goods, from nylon stockings to popular music. The impact of these imports was by no means restricted to West Germany; especially via Berlin, it reached both sides of the Iron Curtain. Until the construction of the Wall in August 1961, a constant stream of people flowed back and forth between East and West Berlin. Large numbers of East Berliners and East Germans shopped and enjoyed themselves in West Berlin. Sometimes whole East Berlin school classes would cross into the Western sectors to watch movies. Many East Berlin boys and girls frequented West Berlin music halls, and young people from all over the GDR (the German Democratic Republic, or East Germany) would go to West Berlin to buy "boogie-woogie shoes" with thick soles, jeans, leather jackets, or records (in spite of prohibitive exchange rates). At home some of them would tune into Western radio stations, especially AFN (American Forces Network) and Radio Luxemburg, to listen to the latest American hits. And even after the building of the Wall, radio broadcasts and visitors continued to transport American popular culture into East Germany. Thus, America's impact was felt in both Germanies.

Given its increasing pervasiveness in daily life, American popular culture held an important place in East and West German attempts to regulate the cultural consumption of their citizens. While the two German sides of the Cold War developed their political and cultural visions in constant ref-
erence to each other, both German states also had a common focal point with America. Both Germanies were facing the difficult task of constructing national identities out of the rubble left by National Socialism and World War II, and under the conditions of the emerging Cold War separation. It was frequently in relation to the United States—long recognized as the most developed consumer culture—that each Germany laid claim to a German heritage and tried to define what it meant to be German.2

The divided city of Berlin was at the front lines of these battles. For each side, Berlin provided a showcase of its respective political, economic, and cultural systems. Because the two Germanies and their respective allies competed visibly for the allegiance of Germans in this city, Berlin is a major focal point of this study. Neither West nor East Berlin was strictly representative of all of West or East Germany, but what happened there reverberated throughout the two states.

Ever more visibly, American music and movies provided models of dress and behavior for young East and West Germans in the 1950s. In the first half of the decade, East and West German authorities were mainly concerned about American westerns, jazz, and dances like the boogie. After 1955 the arrival of American “young rebel” movies like The Wild One with Marlon Brando and Blackboard Jungle with Sidney Poitier, along with rock ’n’ roll, exacerbated the worries of parents and officials about American influences. Especially unsettling were youth riots that shook East and West Germany in the years from 1955 to 1959. Although young men constituted the majority of rioters, the public visibility of many young women as fans of American film and rock ’n’ roll stars further heightened anxieties.

In East and West Germany, adolescents’ embrace of American popular culture caused anxiety because commentators linked consumption, sexuality, and femininity. These links have characterized discourses on consumer culture since the nineteenth century, when observers all across Europe began to comment on the voracious female shoppers in the new department stores who appeared to gain sexual pleasure from their activities. The links drawn were often rhetorical and did not mean that men did not venture into department stores, or for that matter, did not go to the movies. Nonetheless commentators have responded to almost every phenomenon of mass consumption, whether movies or dance fads, by reaffirming the usually negative connections with femininity. During the early days of cinema before World War I, bourgeois male German observers, for example, expressed worries about and fascination with what occurred on and off the screen. Alleging that prostitutes dominated movie audiences, these commentators also reported that they themselves felt sexually stimulated;
movies thus threatened, as Heide Fehrenbach has put it, their “masculine powers of discrimination.” Men like the Dandies of the nineteenth century, who showed too much interest in fashion, were quickly criticized as unmanly. At the same time particular “male” forms of consumption developed in the bourgeoisie. Since the nineteenth century, collecting in particular has been an acceptable leisure pursuit for men, and indeed has usually not even been labeled “consumption.” And also since the nineteenth century, the negative connotations of consumption have been at opposition with its important “positive” function—that of representing, through the display of goods, one’s family, one’s class, and, increasingly, also one’s nation and one’s self. This tension certainly persisted in Cold War Germany.

In fact, the alleged connections between the consumption of mass culture, the oversexualization of women, and the feminization of men were particularly worrisome to East and West Germans in the 1950s. After the defeat of National Socialism and in the face of the Cold War, authorities in both states saw the success of reconstruction as dependent on reconfiguring and revalidating Germanness. Defining normative gender roles was important to these reconstruction projects.

Many Germans understood the war and postwar years as a period of gender upheaval and even crisis. Women clearly outnumbered men in the population. During the war, women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers, and once fighting had ended they were largely responsible for maintaining their families. Many German men did not come back from the war, many others returned with physical or psychological wounds, and some simply hid. While Germans did not discuss the atrocities that German men had committed as soldiers in the Wehrmacht, particularly on the Eastern front and in parts of Europe occupied by the Nazis, there was a widespread sense that men had failed as the defenders of and providers for German women and children. Commentators in East and West began to worry about overly powerful women and weak men. In all zones, climbing divorce rates and liaisons between German women and occupation soldiers exacerbated such worries. These visions of overly sexual or overly strong women and weakened men coexisted with the specter of young men—whether postwar black marketeers, juvenile delinquents, or underground members of the Hitler Youth (so-called werewolves)—whose aggressive potential had not been tamed in the name of the state. Such aggressive young men appeared as another threat to the renewal of social stability.

Attempts to resolve the gender crisis of war and occupation are indicative of differences and similarities between the two new Germanies.
constitutions of both German states guaranteed the legal equality of men and women, but each state fulfilled this mandate differently. Whereas in West Germany, women did not achieve legal equality within marriage until the late 1950s, and illegitimate children did not gain full legal recognition until 1969, East German laws had instituted these rights by 1950. In West Germany, legal equality for women and men proved compatible with the promotion of the so-called housewife marriage, in which wives stayed at home, preferably with children, while their husbands earned the family income. Politicians and social scientists, across party lines, hailed this ideal nuclear family as the one institution that had not been tainted by National Socialism and as the best guarantee for postwar social and political stability. Indeed these families, which were far from the reality for a great number of West Germans, would serve as a contrast to and line of defense against the encroachments of both Communism and American-style consumer culture.\(^8\)

The East German government, under Soviet pressure, actively encouraged women to enter the workforce and also guaranteed “equal pay for equal work.” Like West German politicians, GDR leaders located their vision in the context of the Cold War. Already in the 1950s, they had announced that “equal standing” for women was an important achievement that proved the superiority of socialism over the capitalist system. But even though East German married women and mothers entered the workforce in significantly higher numbers than West German women, a gender division of labor persisted. Women were more likely to be employed in “maternal” occupations, including education, welfare, and health care. Even when more women entered technical education programs and jobs in the 1960s, they continued to shoulder the main burdens of homemaking.\(^9\) And in the aftermath of National Socialism and war, in East Germany too the family appeared as a haven of stability. As in West Germany images of women constructing a homey place were a staple in the illustrated press.\(^10\)

The position of the family as an apolitical refuge, however, was never unproblematic for a regime that sought to undertake a fundamental transformation of German society in the name of socialism. Whereas “reprivatizing” the family in West Germany meant strengthening the role of the father both in legal terms and in public imagery, this did not happen to the same degree in East Germany.\(^11\)

Nevertheless, similarities in gender norms and sexual mores in the two Germanies did not simply disappear with the Cold War. The fact that illegitimate children enjoyed equal rights and that single mothers received preferential treatment in procuring daycare in the GDR shows that pre-
marital sex and single motherhood were somewhat more acceptable there. At the same time, women’s rights were clearly limited. As in West Germany, access to abortions was very restrictive after 1950. Authorities in both states established heterosexuality within marriage and in the service of reproduction as the explicit norm for men and women. And most East and West German women, like German women after World War I, considered their dominant role as providers for their families during the disruptions of the war and immediate postwar years to be temporary. Although East German officials urged women to engage in wage labor, leaders in both states constructed ideals of male protectors and asexual female caretakers.

Young men and women with a strong taste for American music and fashions challenged these norms and exacerbated East and West German concerns about the consumption of American popular culture. Although young men were frequently the focus of debates about young rebels, authorities in East and West Germany invoked American and German women as instigators of the youth rebellion and also made them key to containing the problems they associated with consumer culture. And yet, in spite of all these worries, the 1950s were also the years of the “economic miracle” in West Germany, and the years when competition over which state could better provide its citizens with consumer goods became a central feature of the Cold War. Perhaps as never before, the negative connotations of consumption coexisted in uneasy tension with its ever more important social, national, and indeed international function. This led to many attempts to rechannel and redefine the consumer habits of adolescents.

In the first half of the 1950s, many similarities existed between the cultural visions of the two Germanies. In often vehement rejections of American culture, both sides conflated uncontrolled sexuality, African American culture, and German lower-class culture, and linked all three to fascism. West Germans, in spite of their military and political alliance with the United States, were trying to separate themselves from Bolshevism in the East and from the allegedly emasculating powers of American-style consumer culture in the West. East Germans, who did not have to negotiate between their hostility toward consumer culture and westward political integration, even more explicitly directed their cultural policies against the “American way of life.”

In the second half of the 1950s, West German strategies for containing Americanized youth cultures changed, and in turn transformed, the Cold War battle between the two Germanies. Facing young rioters with a penchant for American fashions, West German social scientists and politicians,
influenced by American thinkers like David Riesman, increasingly accommodated the consumption of American popular culture. While East German authorities continued to attack and repress American influences, U.S. and West German policies toward East Germany now employed some forms of American popular culture as a Cold War weapon—to integrate their own adolescents and to delineate the communist "other." The cultural consumption of American jazz, for example, became part of the vision of liberalism and pluralism that West German authorities sought to transmit to both their own citizens and their Cold War enemies to the East.

These transformations in the reception and mobilization of American popular culture were accompanied by changing visions of racial differences, in particular between Germans and African Americans. Although many post–World War II attacks against Americanized youth cultures employed racial slurs and stereotypes, "race" has hardly been a category of analysis in histories of the German post-Nazi period. Indeed, scholars are only beginning to explore the significance of race in Germany's encounter with the United States. Conflicts over American popular culture make it possible to examine how East and West Germans transformed their history of constructing racial hierarchies when the defeat of National Socialism had discredited a German national identity based on biological racial superiority. The issues of race and ethnicity deserve particular attention in the study of two societies grappling with the legacy of the Third Reich.

Since the nineteenth century, Germans had made race central to German national identity. German visions of racial hierarchies had manifested themselves most forcefully in anti-Semitism, but many Germans also saw blacks (along with other groups like Gypsies) as racially inferior. While racism fueled all nineteenth-century European imperialism, German colonial rule in Africa was notoriously harsh, provoking such revolts as the Herero and Maji-Maji uprisings between 1904 and 1907, which were brutally crushed by German troops. In the 1920s, Germans were unified in their antagonism toward blacks when the French occupation army in the Rhineland included many Senegalese. The Nazis forced children of unions between these soldiers and German women to undergo compulsory sterilization. Anxieties surfaced again, when African American soldiers came to Germany as part of the American occupying forces after World War II. Debates over American popular culture, and in particular its African American influences, also reveal that after 1945 many Germans continued to define Germanness in racial terms. East and West German authorities rejected many American movie and music stars and their German fans as transgressors of racial and gender boundaries.
Yet the terms in which Germans interpreted "cultural difference"—between Germany and the United States, as well as among different groups within Germany—changed. This study traces the shift from a biologically based understanding of human differences, with links to eugenics, to one that believed differences to be rooted in psychology. Eugenics as a "scientific" way of managing the reproduction of a "healthy" nation had permeated German debates on social policy as well as on culture since the turn of the century. Some of the terms linked to eugenics persisted in the years after 1945. For example, a West German youth expert described rock 'n' roll dancers as "wild barbarians in ecstasy," while East German authorities criticized the East and West German adolescents who adopted "decadent" and "degenerate" American styles of dancing allegedly rooted in brothels and gangster hangouts.\(^{21}\) The use of terms like "degenerate" marked adolescents' deviations from norms of male and female respectability as unacceptable by invoking, often implicitly, a racial logic that believed Germans to be superior to Jews, blacks, and other groups like Gypsies.

However, National Socialism and its racist population policies that culminated in the Holocaust discredited eugenics. The horrors of National Socialism also coincided with and fostered the rise of a new antiracist social science discourse in the United States and Great Britain, often with participation of German émigrés. By the 1950s, West German social scientists, many of them drawing on American models, analyzed differences between groups of people in psychological terms. Although communists looked on the social sciences with much suspicion, these developments also had an impact east of the Iron Curtain. By the 1960s, expressions associated with eugenics had largely disappeared from East and West German discussions of social or cultural phenomena, such as juvenile delinquency or adolescents' fascination with American imports. Along with the acceptability of ideas about racial hierarchies based on biological differences, the idea that "race" mattered at all in Germany also vanished.\(^{22}\)

Talking about race is not easy in the context of postwar Germany where people do not perceive themselves as "raced": Most East and West Germans reject the notion that German identities after 1945 were in any way racial. Indeed in both Germanies the term "race" became taboo. Yet, even this denial shows how potent the issue of race and racial hierarchies remained in the postwar period. This study not only traces how a terminology based on biological hierarchies disappeared, it also suggests how a psychologically based discourse could reaffirm and even reassert racial hierarchies.

In investigating the visions of German civilization that made young male and female rebels appear to be extraordinary threats in both Germa-
nies, this study explores how gender norms were intertwined with concepts of racial and class difference. Jazz and rock 'n' roll were controversial because East and West Germans saw them as African American or African American–influenced music that undermined the respectability of German men and women. Conversely, asserting gender norms frequently served to distinguish civilized Germanness from the alleged threats of African American culture.23 Moreover, commentators in both Germanies frequently associated adolescents' adoption of American styles with working-class culture. In response, West German elites sought to assert bourgeois respectability and bourgeois culture as an antidote to adolescent rebelliousness. For East German socialists the links between American influences and working-class culture posed special difficulties, since they saw peasants and workers, led by the party, as the main agents in the desired social and political transformations. Taken together, the discussions of American influence on German youth show the complicated intersections of gender, sexuality, class, and race in East and West German constructions of national identities.24 Conflicts over Americanized youth cultures in the 1950s were part of a long trajectory of naming, containing, and rejecting "difference" in order to bolster domestic and international dominance.25

The end of the Cold War has fully opened the post-1945 period for comparative historical inquiry. This study uses newly available sources in East Germany and is one of few to look at East and West Germany together: it traces the flow of cultural styles from West to East, compares reactions on both sides, and explores struggles between them. While it draws on frameworks developed in gender and (sub)cultural studies, it also investigates the significance of state intervention, showing how opposing political systems contained youth rebellions. This approach is especially promising, since cultural studies have left East Germany largely unexplored.26 Further, when examining differences between the two systems and their institutional frameworks, it is also important to show continuities between the two, which have been largely ignored in both political discourse and scholarship. The totalitarianism paradigm in the West, which posits a close analogy between socialism and fascism, and the fascism paradigm in the East, which declares fascist regimes and capitalist liberal democracies equivalent and which dominated in the Communist Bloc, have often rendered any similarities between state socialism and liberal democracies invisible. Careful attention to the constant interaction between East and West makes it possible to analyze the dynamics of socialist oppression and to investigate the fissures that the economic miracle and a liberal political culture obscured in the West.
Comparisons with the United States inform this project on several levels. For one, Germans reacted strongly to American influences because of their respective assumptions about right and wrong in U.S. culture and society. American popular culture did not have a uniform or unifying effect, but since it was commercial and mass-mediated it made America into an ever more important reference point for both Germanies. Second, the study details the impact of U.S. social-science research and U.S. government policies. It examines their impact on West German attitudes toward East and West German youth cultures and on West German Cold War policy. Third, comparisons of reactions to youth cultures between the two Germanies on the one hand and the United States on the other make it possible to tease out the specific visions of culture and politics that all three developed.

In spite of the significance of the 1950s youth rebellion, many scholars of postwar East and West Germany have completely ignored youth cultures and have seen intellectuals as the only ones who resisted Babbitry or conformity in the 1950s. The existing accounts of 1950s youth cultures have also underestimated their significance. Jost Hermand, for example, has claimed that in West Germany, rock 'n' roll for the younger generation was considered rebellious; however, he has used the Marxist idea of negative cooptation to conclude that this image of rebellion channeled the dissatisfaction of the lower classes, and their potential political resistance, into the arena of compensatory entertainment. Most Western analysts of East or West Germany, both politicians at the time or scholars since, have failed to look at 1950s youth cultures as a source of resistance, although adolescents rebelled in public and private and sometimes experienced severe persecution. Timothy Ryback has rejected the notion that rock 'n' roll could have assumed any political significance for East Germany, other than highlighting the repressive stance of East Bloc authorities. His interpretation echoes liberal assessments that have evaluated 1950s West German youth cultures not as misguided resistance but as apolitical from the outset. Kaspar Maase has recently tried to reclaim the significance of West German youth cultures in the 1950s and has shown how important American cultural influences were in changing conservative value systems in West Germany: young working-class men, he argues, used American popular culture to develop a "civil" identity. Yet Maase, too, has explicitly located the actions of male adolescents in the "semiotic wars of everyday life" and "not on the political stage." Western Marxists and liberals alike have missed significant aspects of 1950s youth cultures.

As this study suggests, current assessments of the 1950s rebellion as nonpolitical are the result of a Cold War liberal understanding of culture in
West Germany.\textsuperscript{31} In the late 1950s, many West Germans ceased to see American influences as a danger, while East German authorities continued to fight them. The West German view that culture was not a central site of political struggle emerged in the years after 1957 when scholars and politicians like Helmut Schelsky and Ludwig Erhard employed psychological theories to explain rebellious adolescent behavior and to define it as nonpolitical. While recent scholarship has shown the interpenetration of culture and politics, this project considers the historical and political significance of efforts to define culture as nonpolitical—and thereby to affirm a division between culture and politics that liberalism assumes. The move on the part of West German Cold War liberals to define culture as nonpolitical did not simply amount to a “depoliticization” of culture, but rather was a renewed politicization of culture on different terrain.

The book investigates how this reframing of the consumption of popular culture as nonpolitical was related to efforts to accommodate and alter adolescent behavior. Scholars have usually left girls out of the histories of the 1950s.\textsuperscript{32} Making gender and race central categories of analysis, and including young women, changes our understanding of politics and culture in the 1950s. The consumption of American popular culture and German reactions to it were important forces in changing gender mores in the two Germanies as well as in transforming the Cold War battle between East and West.

Americanization has in recent years become a contested framework for the study of West European and specifically West German postwar history. Some scholars view Americanization as a process of modernization by which the United States, through its political, economic, and cultural presence, manages the successful development of liberal democracies, market economies, and consumer cultures abroad.\textsuperscript{33} Other studies of Americanization have analyzed American cultural influences abroad as a form of cultural imperialism. American culture in this view is a manipulative tool that bolsters American economic and political hegemony and that eliminates diversity.\textsuperscript{34} This book pays attention to the baggage Germans brought to their encounters with the United States; it shows that the meanings of American culture abroad are often multivalent.\textsuperscript{35}

With its focus on Americanized youth cultures in both East and West Germany, this study moves beyond the tropes of liberation, negative cooptation, colonization, or fascistization that have characterized many debates among cultural critics, social theorists, and politicians in the past and that many scholars have reaffirmed since. Conflicts over American cultural influences were an arena of contest and negotiation within changing rela-
tions of power: between the sexes, between adolescents and parents, between adolescents and the state, and between different social groups within the two German states, as well as between the two Germanies and their allied superpowers. This study only begins to untangle this complicated web. It focuses on how the politicization of culture in both states was interlinked with the reconstitution of gender and racial norms that were central to (re)constructions of Germanness on either side of the Iron Curtain. Battles over the meaning of American popular culture in the 1950s were sites for the reconfigurations of culture and politics in the two Germanies, even though the two states conceived these relationships very differently.

Such an approach requires taking into account a broad array of sources ranging from foreign-policy documents to oral histories. In analyzing the various responses to American popular culture, the study relies heavily on published materials including movie and music reviews, newspaper and magazine reports about concerts or youth riots, and sociological studies. Tracing the constant interactions between the two Germanies and the impact of American popular culture within East Germany would have been impossible without the materials now available in the East German archives. These collections contain statements on cultural policies and their enforcement as well as on the reception of American popular culture by adolescents east of the Iron Curtain. For West Germany, reports by local social workers, sociological studies, and parliamentary debates yield useful insights, not only into youth policies, but also into changes in West Germans’ self-understanding in relation to both their Cold War enemy and the United States. Finally, records of the U.S. occupation of Germany, the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) include many reports about politics and cultural life in both East and West Germany; they also show the often contradictory means by which the U.S. government tried to influence policies and social change in postwar Germany.

The way the sources are weighted for each Germany says much about the different character of the two states. In East Germany, government and party reports from the local to the state-wide level contain a wealth of material on adolescents’ consumption of American culture and on the reactions of state and party authorities to this perceived threat. The reporting in the East German press usually conformed with these reports. In West Germany, by contrast, the most important source of information is social-science scholarship. The words of social scientists reverberated throughout the press and government statements and policies. Thus the public spheres in the two states were quite different. In East Germany the party largely
controlled the press, while there was more room for public conflict in West Germany. The same words uttered in East or in West Germany thus did not necessarily mean the same thing, and it is important to locate the speakers and actors in their political and institutional settings.

Two overarching questions tie the chapters of this book together: How was normality defined in the two German states? And how were visions of normality enforced? The first question allows for an analysis of continuities and ruptures between different systems, in this case between the two postwar Germanies. When supplemented with the second question, this approach can also take into account the different institutional frameworks. These questions, then, will allow us to relate the construction of identities to the construction of institutions in the two Cold War German states. In short, they will help identify similarities and differences between opposing systems.

AMERICAN CULTURE IN WEIMAR GERMANY

The 1950s were hardly the first period that American popular culture seemed subversive to Germans. A rather extensive look back at the pre–World War II discourses on American culture is necessary in order to fully appreciate the postwar battles. In both East and West Germany, commentators drew on terms and images that had been central to discussions of American influences in the Weimar and Nazi years. The themes of youth, gender, race, decadence, and degeneracy that were important in the 1950s resonated with earlier attacks on and valorizations of the United States.

During the Weimar Republic, many Germans equated America with modernity—an association that raised both hopes and fears. Germans were not just fascinated with American management methods and automation; in big cities like Berlin, American popular culture, especially music and movies, made a splash. After World War I, American servicemen and Hollywood movies introduced Germans to American products and manners, and American-influenced fads such as the Charleston spread among some adolescents. By the mid-1920s, in the wake of the Dawes Plan and other American loan programs, “Americanization” and “Americanism” became buzzwords: Germans debated and adapted Taylorism and Fordism, consumed and discussed Hollywood movies or jazz music, and constructed and attacked American “types,” such as the American “girl.” Educated Germans tended to associate the United States with materialist Unkultur (“nonculture”) and found it lacking a long tradition or a spiritual life.
While American production methods were admired by various political camps, consumption proved much more divisive, raising anxieties about lower-class tastes, the feminization of culture, and the racial decline of Germany. Criticisms of American culture found adherents among all political groups, although nationalist conservatives and fascists were most vocal.36

Because of World War I, the German market was closed to American movies imports between 1916 and 1921, but only three years later, Hollywood gained dominance in the number of releases, although not in the number of viewers, in Germany. Not surprisingly, Germans quickly recognized it as the major transmitter of American products and an "American way of life." While many critics treated Hollywood films as "primitive" and "uncultured," and contrasted Hollywood sensationalism, sentimentality, and superficiality with German seriousness, others began to admire American society dramas and slapstick for their excellent acting, technical accomplishment, and dramatic impact and viewed them as serious competition for German movie production. In response, German movie producers engaged in a constant dialogue with Hollywood, some by attempting to maintain a distinct German national style, others by imitating the American star system or performance and production methods.37

Weimar critics and censors vacillated between seeing the "sensationalism" of American westerns and thrillers as harmless or as dangerous, because such movies encouraged lower-class men to crime and violence.38 The National Motion Picture Law was enacted in 1920 with the support of all major political parties. The law prohibited censorship for political or philosophical reasons, but stipulated that movies that might "endanger the public order, injure religious sensibility, function in a brutal or demoralizing manner, endanger Germany's reputation or relations with foreign countries" could be censored.39 Film censorship reflected intense anxieties about lower-class tastes and about the effect movies had on youth. In the 1920s the two censorship boards, which comprised representatives from education, the arts, the movie industry, and the state, declared a full third of movies off limits for adolescents under eighteen.40 For example, censors banned one U.S. movie, King of the Circus, as "a serious social menace among the lower part of the populace."41 Such criticisms were part of a tradition of associating American movies, lower-class culture, and overaggression among men—a tradition that would continue well into the post-1945 years.

German critics also faulted American movies for transmitting images of the American girl. Germans saw the American girl (they used this English word) not merely as a cinematic construction, but as an American reality. She was strong, fashionable, flirtatious, and often frigid. Movie images and
travel reports reinforced one another in disseminating this view: American women failed as housewives, but were "goddesses" in their homes; they had a disproportionate influence on culture and consumption; they fell for every fad and were involved in a disturbing body culture, cutting their hair into short bobs and hiding their curves in short, loose dresses. To many German commentators, they seemed not so much masculine as gender neutral, but a threat all the same. Conservative Adolf Halfeld, who published one of the most successful Weimar books on America in 1927 and who would join the NSDAP in May 1933, criticized American marriages as an "Amazon state in miniature." Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg concluded that the "apparent low cultural level of the United States" was a result of its domineering women.

"Girls" were of much interest to commentators, because they were discerning the presence of similar creatures, so-called "new women," in advertisements, department stores, and even some offices or factories of Weimar Germany. Worries about female sexuality were central to German images of both "girls" and "new women." Social commentaries and movies (for example the 1928 German production Pandora's Box with American Louise Brooks in the main role) associated "new women" and "girls" with oversexualization, lesbianism, and sometimes also Jewishness. Germans were fascinated with all-women dance troupes, such as the Tiller Girls (who were actually British). These dance troupes made their moves in synchronized unison, thus appearing as cultural manifestations of rationalization and the machine age, in short as a symbol of modernity. To many German observers they seemed, although scantily clad, curiously asexual, a manifestation of sexual dysfunction among American women who tried to attract men, but were unable to feel heterosexual pleasure. These "new women" and "girls" disturbed different groups for varying reasons. Conservatives affiliated with the churches were concerned that women had become sexually expressive at all, whereas leftist reformers worried that these women did not develop a healthy heterosexual life that would lead to stable companionate marriages. No matter whether Americanized new women really proliferated to the degree that some contemporaries thought, these images had lasting power: the German view of American women as egoistic, manipulative, overly sexual, and ultimately unerotic, like the connection between American culture and male aggression, would be central in German assessments of America and of modernity more generally well into the 1950s.

While Weimar Germans felt captivated by American modernity, they were also fascinated with the American "Wild West," which had been a
topic of interest in Germany since the nineteenth century. By the 1920s, many adolescents avidly consumed western movies and novels, particularly since bourgeois parents and educators looked down on them as low culture. Some groups of young male, often unemployed workers, the so-called “wild cliques” gave themselves “western” names such as “Trapper’s Blood.” The disdain for westerns made Wild West imagery also attractive to artists, including George Grosz, Carl Zuckmeyer, and Bertholt Brecht. They played at being American Indians or outlaw heroes and integrated such images into their pictures and plays, always aware that this western world existed only in novels or movies. As Beeke Sell Tower has put it, “They protested against German high culture as much as against the rarified ‘primitivist’ visions and posturing of many expressionist artists.”

Under the influence of American production techniques and of Hollywood movies, images of an industrialized and modern America became more prominent than images of the Wild West in the 1920s, but these two poles—America as the incarnation of modernity and America as the land of the wild frontier—coexisted and even informed one another. Fritz Giese, in his widely read book Girlkultur, for example, interpreted the alleged dominance of women in modern urban and industrialized America as a result of the frontier experience where women had been scarce and therefore grew in power until a Frauenstaat (women’s state) evolved.

Jazz quickly became another symbol of modernity for Weimar Germans, and black jazz performers confirmed German visions of America as at once “ultra-modern and ultra-primitive.” The music made it to Germany at the end of World War I as the Allied occupying forces brought records and sheet music into the country. Postwar German cities were gripped by a series of dance crazes, beginning with the fox-trot and tango in 1918, continuing with the shimmy in 1921, and culminating with the Charleston in 1925. Few American bands came to Europe, but German jazz fans could listen to German bands, some of which, such as the Weintraub Syncopators (who appeared in The Blue Angel), became quite accomplished jazz groups. Fans could also find the music in the revues in the big cities or on some late-night broadcasts by German radio stations, the BBC, and, after 1930, Radio Luxemburg. Nevertheless in the 1920s and 1930s, jazz was not the taste of the German (or American) mainstream.

Exoticizing America was a major thrust in German reactions to jazz. For many Germans, the few African American musicians who made it to Germany, such as Sam Wooding and dancer Josephine Baker (who, like Wooding, first arrived with the “Chocolate Kiddies” troupe) were attractive exactly because they were exotic; they were seen as improvisational, spon-