

# The Myths of Vietnam

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*Contending versions of the Vietnam War and the antiwar movement began to develop even before the war ended. The hawks' version, then and now, holds that the war was winnable, but the press, micromanaging civilian game theorists in the Pentagon, and antiwar hippies lost it. . . . The doves' version, contrarily, remains that the war was unwise and unwinnable no matter what strategy was employed or how much firepower was used. . . Both of these versions of the war and the antiwar movement as they have come down to us are better termed myths than versions of history because they function less as explanations of reality than as new justifications of old positions and the emotional investments that attended them (Garfinkle, 7).*

Pro-war or Anti-war. In the generation alive during the 1960s and 1970s, few, if any, Americans could avoid taking a position on the United States' role in Southeast Asia. As the above quotation from Adam Garfinkle suggests, positions taken in the 1990s, over twenty years after hostilities ended, serve both as an explanation for the U.S. defeat and justification for the positions taken during the war. The hawks' view justifies those who served in Vietnam and appears to give meaning to the deaths of the 58,000 Americans who died there. Those who protested the war or evaded the draft can tell themselves that their actions were justified because the war was immoral, unwinnable and just plain stupid.

American combat involvement ended in 1973. Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese in 1975. Even though the U.S. military forces pulled out of Vietnam 25 years ago, the United States continues to be haunted by the specter of Vietnam. Even the most cursory review of the 1980s and 1990s reveals shadows of Vietnam. A few brief examples:

- Controversy over the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, D. C.
- Frequent references to Afghanistan as the U.S.S.R.'s Vietnam.
- George Bush's promise not to make Kuwait "another Vietnam" in 1991.
- Bill Clinton's attempts to avoid military service and whether those attempts were justified.
- Comparisons between Gulf War Syndrome and Agent Orange-related health problems among veterans.

- Continuing questions about whether N.A.T.O. involvement in the former Yugoslavia could become "another Vietnam."

While the controversy over the war has often been reduced to simplistic pro-war or anti-war arguments as illustrated in the opening quotation, a more nuanced reading of post-war literature shows many more areas of controversy. All of these controversies cross over from hawks to doves and back again. Much of the post-war controversy over Vietnam can be summarized in four "myths".

The first myth is that the micromanaging civilians in Washington lost an otherwise winnable conflict. A second myth deals with the degree to which the radical, countercultural anti-war movement forced President Nixon to end the war. A third is the "Rambo" myth which claims that American prisoners of war were kept in captivity in Southeast Asia after the cessation of American military involvement and may still have been imprisoned into the 1990s. And lastly, we will examine the myth that the US government would never knowingly harm its soldiers.

These four myths have been examined in numerous books published since the end of the war in 1973. Five specific works, each of which primarily addresses one of these four myths, also comment on the other myths as well. The books are *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (1995) by Robert S. McNamara, former U.S. Secretary of Defense and three books by academics: *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (1995) by Adam Garfinkle, M. I. A. or *Mythmaking in America* (1992) by H. Bruce Franklin, and *Waiting for an Army to Die: The Tragedy of Agent Orange* (1989) by Fred A. Wilcox. After Wilcox's book was published, Admiral Elmo Zumwalt conducted an independent investigation into the Agent Orange issue on behalf of the Secretary of Veteran's Affairs. His original report, published in 1990, confirms the conclusions of Wilcox's study and serves as a unique source on the government's role in covering up the Agent Orange issue.

This paper will address the four myths in chronological order beginning with myths about how the war started and was fought, how it ended and finishing with the aftermath, both short and long term, for the United States and its veterans.

### **Micromanaging Civilians**

For any myth to gain credence, it must contain a kernel of truth. In all of these myths, there is some basis in fact. This is especially true in the first myth, that of the micromanaging, meddling civilians from the Pentagon. In the American government, civilians do control the military. One of the leading civilian managers, especially during the primary escalation between 1965 and 1968, was the Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara. His memoir of Vietnam, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and*

Lessons of Vietnam, was first published in 1995. McNamara's memoir of his days as Secretary of Defense and his involvement in Vietnam is a confession of the U.S. government's obtuseness and incompetence in prosecuting the war. Even though McNamara ultimately sides with the doves' argument that we should never have become involved militarily in Vietnam, he wrote his book because "I do not believe, on balance, that America's political leadership have been incompetent or insensitive in their responsibilities and to the welfare of the people who elected them and to whom they are accountable" (McNamara, xx).

One of the chief problems with civilian management of Vietnam was the total lack of any high level officials who possessed any real knowledge about either Vietnamese history or the Vietnamese people. McNamara writes, "I had never visited Indochina, nor did I understand or appreciate its history, language, culture, or values. . . . Worse, our government lacked experts for us to consult to compensate for our ignorance" (McNamara, 32). McNamara is sure that the generals would have fared no better than civilians if they had been given *carte blanche* to prosecute the war. The military commanders did not understand the war they were fighting any better than the civilians and recommended policies that were disastrous. McNamara believes that while the civilians in Washington were not as well informed about the situation in Southeast Asia as they should have been, the military leadership in Vietnam was just as incompetent and equally ignorant of the history and true nature of the situation they faced. For example, McNamara quotes General Bruce Palmer, Jr., Army Vice Chief of Staff, "Not once during the war did the JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] advise the Commander-in-Chief or the Secretary of Defense that the strategy being pursued most probably would fail and that the US would be unable to achieve its objectives" (McNamara, 108).

An important principle of American democracy is civilian control of the military. The military forces exist to serve the needs of the people as expressed through their elected officials, not the other way around. McNamara makes a compelling argument for civilian control of the military even as he accounts for the monumental failure of coordination between diplomacy (the State Department) and military action (the Department of Defense) in 1968 (McNamara, 295-302). Even though the military and diplomatic bureaucracies did not mesh their objectives and strategies in the 1960s, in theory they should have. In Vietnam, this collaboration between the State Department and the Defense Department should have begun at the beginning in 1963 and determined what the fundamental objectives in Vietnam were.

The most elemental question regarding U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia is why we went in the first place. Should the President and his advisors have foreseen the futility of a land war in Asia? McNamara now believes that they should have seen at least some of the problems. He identifies five basic questions that were never asked:

Was it true that the fall of South Vietnam would trigger the fall of all Southeast Asia? Would that constitute a grave threat to the West's security? What kind of war -- conventional or guerrilla -- might develop? Could we win it with U.S. troops fighting alongside the South Vietnamese? Should we not know the answers to all these questions before deciding whether to commit troops? (McNamara, 39)

Answers to these questions would have provided a clear rationale for entering into the war and guided a coherent military strategy for prosecuting it. Without a clear rationale for involvement the government could not clearly explain the reasons for continuing hostilities. In the end, the only reason the U. S. did not withdraw appeared to be the vain posturing of two presidents, neither of whom wished to be labeled as the first American president to lose a war.

The question of goals and accomplishment leads to the other half of this myth. The first question asks whether the civilians in Washington undermined the military command in Asia. The second question also needs to be discussed, whether the war was in fact winnable. The keystone of the hawks' argument is that the war was winnable. The doves were convinced then and are still convinced that the war was not winnable, in fact they claim that "winnable" could not actually be defined. A corollary to this question is: Winnable by what means, military or diplomacy? By 1968, McNamara had come to the conclusion that a military victory was unlikely. He writes, "[t]he fact is I had come to the conclusion, and had told him [President Johnson] point-blank, that we could not achieve our objective in Vietnam through any reasonable military means, and we therefore should seek a lesser political objective through negotiations" (McNamara, 313).

While Robert McNamara ultimately saw the military effort in Southeast Asia as futile, other analysts of the conflict have different opinions. Adam Garfinkle, a scholar at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, argues that the central problem is that the war's tactics were at odds with the stated political goal of the conflict. Garfinkle states that the U.S. had two goals in Vietnam: "to stop Communism and relatedly, to produce a self-sustaining, democratic South Vietnam" (Garfinkle, 30). The United States subverted its own aims by using search and destroy tactics which only served to drive the peasants into the arms of the Viet Cong and destroyed the nationalist credentials of the South Vietnamese government (Garfinkle, 27, 30; see also McNamara, 112). Garfinkle believes that if the U.S. had chosen tactics that truly supported the goals quoted above and was willing to put the kind of time and investment into South Vietnam that were invested in South Korea, the conflict was definitely winnable (Garfinkle, 26-30).

Garfinkle agrees with McNamara that U.S. goals for the war were unclear. He disagrees with "McNamara's Lament" and holds that the civilians did indeed strangle

the military commanders on the ground. If the military commanders did not understand the goals and objectives of the war, it is because the civilians did not communicate them. The mismanagement of McNamara's whiz kids and those civilians who followed them in the Pentagon were ultimately responsible for the loss of the war (Garfinkle, 299-302).

The civilians in Washington did often try to manage the war, perhaps too minutely. They believed that they were looking at a global picture, whereas the generals on the ground often were looking only at their limited tactical picture. But the United States did not lose the Vietnam War due to inept civilian control of a brilliant military command, but at least in part to a failure of both civilian and military leadership to understand the nature of the conflict and to match military tactics with political goals and assumptions. The failure of the American military and civilian leaders to mesh tactics and politics not only resulted in military failure in South Vietnam, but also in political opposition from a vocal segment of the American people.

### **The Anti-War Movement: Prolonging the War?**

Segments of the population have vocally opposed military involvement in all of the United States' foreign wars. Vietnam was no exception. The Vietnam anti-war movement raises several interesting questions for historians. Did the radical anti-war movement inspire President Nixon to end the war and bring the troops home? Even before Nixon's presidency, what impact did protesters have on President Johnson and his advisors? What impact did the movement have on average Americans and did it influence their opinions about the war?

Popular belief credits the anti-war movement with ending the war. To call this a myth does not deny that there was a vocal anti-war movement, which had captured a fair share of media attention from the late 1960s until the war's conclusion in 1973, or in any way cast aspersions on the sincerity of the beliefs of those who participated. While popular wisdom, glazed with the patina of 30 years of memories might argue that the movement ended the war, Adam Garfinkle believes that popular wisdom does not square with the facts. *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impacts of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* argues that in fact the anti-war movement probably extended the war and increased the number of casualties. Garfinkle argues that the anti-war movement was a fringe hysteria with no real political power. The protesters alienated the majority of Americans and any politician who seemed to be pandering to the "hippies" would have lost, not gained, political power. The anti-war protesters were a nuisance to be ignored or swatted, not a serious political movement to be courted and listened to.

Garfinkle outlines a number of reasons for this nuisance theory and why the movement remained a fringe movement instead of forming a coalition with working class Americans that could have commanded serious attention from Washington politicians. The myth that the movement ended the war arises from the incontrovertible fact that in the end, the American people did register vocal opposition to the war and urged Nixon to get out. The facts that first there was a radical, countercultural movement and then the citizenry registered opposition is taken to be cause and effect. To counter this cause and effect reasoning Garfinkle argues that "the war would have been even more unpopular than it was, sooner than it was, among a broader and more politically salient segment of the American people had radical protests not occurred" (Garfinkle, 13, emphasis in the original). He concludes that ultimately, the television coverage of the war which allowed Americans to see the futility of the war and the ineptness of the political and military authorities moved President Nixon in spite of the activities of the radical fringe. He even goes so far as to state "in the broadest sense, the war was lost because the American ship of state itself had lost its bearings" (Garfinkle, 267). Given the events of the ensuing two years after the war ended, as Watergate unfolded and brought down a president who had been elected in a landslide, Garfinkle's judgment is sound.

The real impact of the anti-war movement was not in ending the war, but in dividing the American people over the nature of government itself. By repudiating 200 years of workaday democracy (and by extension, alienating the people who believed in their government) in favor of a communal, utopian nirvana, extremists helped elect Richard Nixon to the presidency twice and set the stage for the election of Ronald Reagan (Garfinkle, 18, 214-215).

The counterculture of the 1960s and '70s is still influencing American society and politics as the U. S. closes out the 1990s. Examples include Bill Clinton, the first president from the Baby Boom generation, a lightning rod for all the Vietnam-era controversies. History courses at SUNY-Binghamton on the Vietnam conflict enjoy high enrollments. Such examples occur in our culture over and over. Vietnam and the controversy over the war is such a deep part of America's collective consciousness that it will take at least another generation for the specter of Vietnam to recede into the woodwork of American history. Even as the controversies over Bill Clinton's military service and other issues continue, there is yet another myth of Vietnam which needs to be examined. What happened to those men who did go and fight? Did all of those alive at the end of the war come home? Another vocal segment of the American public thinks not.

### **Rambo vs. the Bureaucracy**

The third myth concerns the fate of the MIA/POWs in Vietnam. It asks a legitimate question: At the conclusion of hostilities in 1973, did the U.S. government knowingly abandon U.S. servicemen imprisoned by communist forces anywhere in Southeast Asia? This was not merely a question for the military or civilian authorities, but for a large number of American citizens. Since the end of the war, occasional news reports of supposed POW sightings in Southeast Asia continue to reinvigorate the controversy. Movies such as the Rambo series have created an entire mythology of government cover-ups and perfidy. H. Bruce Franklin examines this myth in his 1992 book *M. I. A. or Mythmaking in America*.

The kernel of truth in this myth is that there were over 2,000 servicemen who never returned from Southeast Asia, dead or alive. As wars go, this number of unaccounted soldiers is relatively low, for example, over 78,000 are unaccounted for from WWII and over 8,000 from the Korean conflict (Franklin, 11). At least half of the Vietnam unaccounted for were known to be dead, but for various reasons their bodies could not be recovered and sent home. Most of the others could be reasonably assumed to be dead as soon as they were classified as missing in action. The military services kept separate records of men classified as MIA and POW. Only cases with documentable evidence of capture were labeled POW. Franklin argues that Richard Nixon changed the definition of "missing in action" and also changed the rules of war to generate domestic support for his war policy. President Nixon conflated these two separate categories to attempt to inflate the numbers of those who might be held by the Communists. By increasing the numbers, it would be easier to arouse public support for efforts to free those men, i.e. generating more support for continued military operations (Franklin 96-99).

After campaigning on a "secret plan to end the war," Nixon used the POWs as hostages to convince the American people to back continued escalation of hostilities. Franklin writes,

The POW/MIA issue served two crucial functions in allowing Richard Nixon to continue the Vietnam War for four years, even though he assumed office almost a year after the nation had shown its desperate desire for peace. It was both a booby trap for the anti-war movement and a wrench to be thrown into the works of the Paris peace talks. (Franklin, 74)

It attempted to derail the anti-war movement by changing the objective of the war. Americans were no longer fighting to save the Vietnamese from Communism; they were fighting to free their sons, brave men captured by Communist forces in Asia.

This change of objective also worked in Paris. Nixon required that the North Vietnamese and all other combatants release prisoners as a condition of peace.

Conventional peace negotiations usually call for prisoner of war releases as a result of ceasing hostilities. By claiming that the POWs were "hostages" of the North Vietnamese, Franklin argues that Nixon stalled peace negotiations. The counterweight to this scenario was built in its very premise. As one wife of a POW stated, "[i]f it is true that they [the POWs] will not be released until the U.S. gets out, then why don't they set a date and get out now? . . . Why should one more man die on the battlefield or in the prisons?" (Franklin, 60-61)

Once the Paris Peace Accords were signed, Operation Homecoming was staged to welcome home the POWs. President Nixon received the returned POWs at a White House dinner to boast that all the prisoners of war had been returned. (Franklin, 75) As far as Richard Nixon was concerned, the POW/MIA story was finished. He had been reelected, the war was over and the prisoners were home. But myths like POW/MIA are like Pandora's Box, once created they tend to take on a life of their own. The myth of abandoned servicemen in Asia was only just building steam in 1973. In the 1980s, the myth reached its zenith in popular culture, especially as seen by the "Rambo" movies starring Sylvester Stallone as a Vietnam veteran on a mission to rescue his abandoned brothers in arms.

The rise of the Rambo myth in popular culture is another phenomenon examined by Franklin. By pitting decent, brave American GIs against their own government, the American people could acknowledge that the war was a mistake, but still not feel guilty about their own involvement. This myth works for the American people in the same fashion as Hiroshima works for the Japanese, it turns aggressors into victims. The American POWs are double victims, captured by the "evil Vietnamese communists" and then abandoned by their own government. The American people are only guilty of believing their own officials (whom they elected), not of destroying an entire culture and of killing thousands of innocent civilians.

Media attention to mythical POWs in Vietnam during the 1980s diverted attention from a very real group of abandoned servicemen. In the 1970s and '80s significant numbers of Vietnam veterans began to fall ill with cancers and other diseases and found they were begetting deformed children at an alarming rate. When they turned to the government that flew the MIA/POW flag and had pledged to go to any lengths to return even one POW from Asia, these equally brave men were told to get lost.

### **The Aftermath of Vietnam**

Fred Wilcox's book, *Waiting for an Army to Die: The Tragedy of Agent Orange*, discusses the fate of those who thought they survived 'Nam only to come home and develop cancers, give birth to deformed children and suffer other bizarre health problems. The myth that the government would care for war-connected illnesses is



based in fact. There is a cabinet secretary and a whole government bureaucracy devoted to veterans' affairs including veterans' hospitals in most major cities. Truth turned into myth as the government sought to avoid all responsibility for health problems associated with use of the defoliant known as Agent Orange. This herbicide contained dioxin, one of the most toxic substances known to man.

Agent Orange and other herbicides were used to clear vegetation around U.S. positions and to clear mangrove forests in order to deny the enemy jungle camouflage. This military objective was designed to help the soldiers by protecting them from jungle ambushes. This strategy undoubtedly saved the lives of many American and South Vietnamese soldiers. Agent Orange was sprayed from airplanes, helicopters, boats, and backpack sprayers over South Vietnam from 1962 to 1971. There was no attempt to avoid human contact during or after spraying because "the Department of Defense (DOD) did not consider herbicide orange toxic or dangerous to humans and took few precautions to prevent exposure to it" (Zumwalt Report, 4) In a blistering report to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. estimates that 4.2 million American soldiers might have been exposed to Agent Orange during the nine years that widespread spraying took place.

Admiral Zumwalt's report deals with the macroscopic picture of Agent Orange. On a microscopic level, Wilcox's book documents numerous cases of Vietnam veterans who went to Vietnam determined to do their duty and serve their country (most were volunteers, not draftees) who survived the immediate horror of combat only to come home and get sick. Veterans such as Ray Clark came home determined to put the war behind them and get on with their lives. When he became ill, he went to Veterans Administration for help. As an example of the treatment Clark and other veterans received, Wilcox reports that when Clark's urine tests contained blood, the doctors accused him of mixing ketchup with his sample. (Wilcox, 9-10) In Wilcox's work, repeated tales of VA indifference become a refrain as case after case of cancers, birth defects in veterans' children and other serious health problems escalate to a chorus of rage and frustration by the end of the book.

Given the emotional intensity of the *Waiting for an Army to Die*, one might wonder whether Wilcox's impassioned polemic against government indifference is substantiated by other sources. After *Waiting for an Army to Die* was published, a retired member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued his own scathing indictment of the VA's callous indifference to the needs of Agent Orange sufferers. Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., USN (ret.) commanded U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam from 1968 to 1970 and later joined the Joint Chiefs during the Nixon administration. In 1989, then Secretary for Veterans Affairs, Edward Derwinski, appointed Admiral Zumwalt as a Special Assistant to examine the Agent Orange controversy (1995 Congressional Testimony). His report, initially submitted in 1990, excoriated the VA and other

government agencies, especially the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for using poor science as well as succumbing to political pressure in order to justify denying medical and disability benefits to Agent Orange victims. The report found "evidence of political interference . . . by Administration officials" (Report, 9) and "the perpetration of fraudulent conclusions" (Report, 10)

Admiral Zumwalt recommended that the VA should grant full benefits to any Vietnam veteran or their children who exhibited symptoms of over 20 illnesses linked to Agent Orange. His study concluded that "it is as likely as not" that Agent Orange was a contributing factor to these illnesses and therefore under the Veterans' Dioxin and Radiation Exposure Compensation Standards Act (Pub. L. 98-541, Oct. 24, 1984, 98 Stat. 2727), the VA should give all benefit of the doubt to the veterans and take care of them. (Report, 15)

The controversy over Agent Orange illustrates what might be termed the "Vietnam Syndrome": The public waits and watches while the government tells them obvious lies and then these same leaders wonder why no one believes them when they do finally tell the truth. All of these myths were fueled in part by outright lies or at the very least, callous duplicity by government officials.

These myths did not affect only the United States back in the 1970s. These myths have had a direct impact on America's former enemies and allies in Southeast Asia and continue to affect both countries as a new century dawns. A discussion of the issues raised by these myths is necessary to resolve American and Vietnamese relations a generation after the war.

### **What About the Vietnamese?**

All of these myths are focused strictly on Americans and ignore the Vietnamese. "Vietnamese" includes all of the peoples of Vietnam, North and South including the Viet Cong. The first myth dealt with the American management of the war, ignoring the Vietnamese governments and military forces. By discounting both America's enemies as well as her allies, any analysis of what went wrong in Vietnam begins to sound like the "Who Lost China" arguments of the 1950s.

The anti-war movement myth deals only with American involvement in someone else's conflict, a fact not understood very well by either doves or hawks. The hawks completely misunderstood the nationalistic desires of the Vietnamese and the doves ignored the geopolitical implications of abandoning American allies in the South. Both hawks and doves painted overly simplistic portraits of the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese were not all evil, sadistic butchers even though some were, both North and South. The plight of the boat people and tribal peoples such as the Hmong

in the years following the war demonstrate that the Communists were not magnanimous heroes who forgave their enemies and forgot the costs of war.

The Rambo myth relies on demonizing the Vietnamese and completely exculpates the Americans of any guilt for the damage done to Vietnam. If all Vietnamese are "gooks" and all G.I.s are heroes epitomized by Sylvester Stallone or Chuck Norris, then Vietnam becomes the modern incarnation of the old fashioned western where the Indians are always evil and the Seventh Calvary will always save the day in the last reel. That model was inaccurate and racist in the case of the Old West, and the same problems exist in the case of Vietnam.

The fourth myth is no different. In seeking to insulate itself from responsibility to Agent Orange victims, the American government has not only avoided responsibility for the effects of Agent Orange on the Vietnamese people, but it has also ignored evidence of Agent Orange damage on soldiers from Australia. If anyone doubted that apparent government policy has been to deny or ignore the long-term aftereffects of war on veterans, the Gulf War Syndrome controversy in the 1990s has served to confirm the callousness and ineptitude of the Department of Veteran's Affairs

After examining these myths, the American people need to examine how they work together to shape public opinion. These myths are connected and continue to shape American culture in many ways. The Rambo myth believes that the US government conspired to abandon G.I.s in Southeast Asia. Once that belief has been planted in the collective consciousness, it is only logical to believe that the government might be conspiring to keep other information from the American people. Such events as the assassination of President Kennedy prompt heated debates as to the government's knowledge and actions. The actual and documented lies told by government officials combined with speculations about other lies that may have been told by seemingly all-powerful leaders breeds acceptance of outrageous conspiracy theories such as those promulgated by The X-Files.

Even if one does not go as far as taking The X-Files for gospel, government intransigence in the Agent Orange issue breeds a distrust of authority. The Agent Orange episode is like a bureaucratic squid covering the poor veteran in a cloud of black ink as it swims off to avoid confrontation. One might think that after the Agent Orange mess, the military services and the VA would have learned a lesson, but in the next war, the government was still making the same mistakes as in Vietnam. An article in the May 1999 issue of Vanity Fair argues that Gulf War Syndrome is indeed a real condition, given to the soldiers through experimental vaccines. Just as the use of herbicides in Vietnam was meant to help the soldiers by preventing enemies from using the jungle as camouflage, the use of experimental anthrax vaccines in the Gulf War was meant to protect soldiers from real danger of biological warfare. But just as

in Vietnam, when the measures that were meant to help soldiers backfired, the bureaucrats (both civilian and military) ran for cover and denied everything. In an open society such as the United States, the paper-pushers' mistakes eventually catch up with them and they have to admit they were wrong. But in the meantime, many innocent people have become gravely ill and have even died before these mistakes were exposed. In the end, these situations reinforce perceptions of a callous government which lies routinely to its citizens.

The answer to the Agent Orange and Gulf War controversies lies in the very mechanism that allows the myths to grow, an open society. Careful scholarship published in academic and popular media are the only way to distinguish the kernel of truth in the cloud of popular mythmaking. In both the university and the marketplace of ideas, scholars should study Vietnam and all that relates to U.S. involvement there and bring that information to their students and to the society. Each of the four books discussed have made a valuable contribution to this goal. They have been widely available, in fact, McNamara's book was a best seller. Franklin published an articles summarizing his conclusions in *The Nation*, *The Progressive* and *The Atlantic*. Admiral Zumwalt's report, which attempted to find out the truth about the effects of Agent Orange, has been published on a number of sites on the Internet. As passions about the Vietnam conflict fade with time, hopefully the clouds of myth will clear away and the truth embedded in them will become the standard wisdom about the war.

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# **The Ethnic Component of Germany's Ostforschung: The Interwar Years and Beyond By**

**Ute Ferrier**

Over the last century issues of ethnicity, citizenship and statehood have often been at the center of discussions concerning Germany's tumultuous history. Unlike the United States, Germany bases its citizenship predominantly on the legal principal of *jus sanguinis* meaning by right of birth or ancestry. Thus people who have German parents are automatically granted citizenship no matter where they were born or how long ago their ancestors left Germany, while immigrants who have resided in Germany for several generations are still denied this right. Refugees from the former Soviet Union who can prove German ancestry can gain citizenship immediately, even if their ancestors emigrated three hundred years ago. Often these immigrants, especially from the Asian republics, have only retained rudimentary knowledge of the German language and are ill-prepared to adjust to the highly modernized German society. By contrast, Turkish immigrants who have been working and paying taxes in Germany since the 1950s, cannot gain citizenship. Their children and grandchildren were born in Germany, they were educated in German schools and are often culturally more adjusted to German society than they are to Turkish society. There are few exceptions to this rule but the process and financial cost of becoming a citizen has been prohibitive for most.

. The concept of the ethnic nation (*Volk*) has its administrative roots in the nineteenth century when German states and municipalities sought to restrict poor relief to their local residents, thus excluding destitute transients from receiving aid. By the time the law on citizenship was passed in 1913 the question of "who was a German" had been heavily influenced by ideology. This law, which still forms the basis for citizenship in Germany today, not only determined that *jus sanguinis* be the national criteria for citizenship, it also extended this right to all ethnic Germans living abroad and made this right inheritable.

By comparison, the United States and France base their citizenship primarily on the principle *jus soli*, meaning that those who are born on the national territory (or its colonies) can obtain citizenship. In the United States this principle is taken to its extreme as it grants citizenship even to those who are born within its airspace; for example a person born on an airplane flying overhead can become a U.S. citizen on

those grounds. Most European states use a combination of jus sanguinis and jus soli; and in recent years the traditionally liberal state of France has made efforts to restrict immigration. However, it still grants citizenship to far more applicants than Germany does.

Some scholars have argued that Germany needs to review its immigration principles, especially given the fact that Germany has had a negative population growth for several decades now. Henry Ashby Turner, jr. has stated that Germany's immigration politics and popular opinion regarding this issue is based on two myths: the myth that immigration was historically foreign to Germany and the myth of the ethnic nation. Turner calls for the historical profession to enlighten the public and dissolve the myths. He even suggests that the terminology in the basic law (Grundgesetz) be changed from the "German Volk" to the "citizens of the federal republic."

In the past, this view that the nation consists of an ethnically and biologically closed society has had dramatic consequences, because the argument was partly used to justify discrimination against Jewish citizens and foreigners. Even today it affects the way Germany treats its immigrant population, estimated to be around fifteen percent of the population.

Historically the concept that the Volk rather than citizenry makes up the nation, strongly influenced politics, foreign policy and academia. The connection between the historians' guild and foreign policy is particularly evident in Germany's Ostforschung (Eastern Studies) between World War I and World War II. In this research project I will ask: how did German-speaking historians deal with ethnicity during the interwar years and what is the correlation between nationalist ideology, politics and historiography? To what extent was there a continuity or discontinuity in the scholarship after 1945?

## **Historiography**

As far back as 1871 when Germany was unified as the Second German Empire, the historical discipline was essentially historicist, it emphasized the politics of great men such as Bismarck and absolutely accepted the "primacy of foreign policy." This academic tradition remained until World War I. By war's end many Germans, including most academics, agonized about the new state of affairs and what was in store for the nation and the state. The destruction of the war and the consequent political instability undoubtedly influenced the world view of academics. Politics and historical writings are in this regard inextricably entangled.

The Weimar Republic (1918-1933) was Germany's first democratic attempt but the fact that the system had been imposed by the victors made it unpalatable for many. It

was difficult for the German elites to find a tenable cultural orientation for the new state. Otto Hinze wrote at this time that the Western alternative was that "of the victorious powers, who condemned us to defenselessness, to political impotence, to the drudgery of the bare minimum of existence, and thereby also injured our national and moral dignity at its most sensitive points." Therefore the Western alternative was "a moral impossibility" for Germans.

Historians for the most part remained conservative and antagonistic toward the new state, some firmly believed that democracy was a Western concept and consequently un-German. Thus politically most historians aligned themselves with the enemies of the republic or were at best "republicans of the head and not of the heart" (Vernunftrepublikaner). According to the conventional view of German scholarship during the Weimar Republic, the "prevailing approach was some variant of a hyper-individualistic historicism, characterized by an almost hypnotic and narrow orientation toward Ranke." Much of the scholarship criticized democracy and the constitution and expressed a strong desire to "revise" the Treaty of Versailles.

However, as Winfried Schulze points out, this notion that the historical methodology continued to be historicist is misleading. Although historians were reactionary, they were also highly disillusioned with the Prussian state and the state-centered historicism. Because their faith in the state had been shattered, many historians sought new methods of inquiry. This resulted in a paradigm shift, or rather in a return to an older, pre-historicist paradigm, the *völkische* conception of history.

Willi Oberkrome, who studied the methodological innovations and the influence of ideology in the German historical sciences (Geschichtswissenschaft) from 1918 to 1945, noted that especially the younger generation of historians moved away from the orthodox imperative of their older colleagues and based their inquiries primarily on what he calls transrational-romantic sources. The concept of the nation as a cultural-linguistic unity had been developed before World War I. Karl Ferdinand Werner, who examined the Nazi's concept of history (Geschichtsbild) and the historical discipline during the Third Reich, points out that Hitler did not have to invent the wheel, he could utilize several of his predecessors. For example, Viktor Hantzsch contributed an article on German migration to the multi-volume *Weltgeschichte* (world history) which was published in 1907. Here Hantzsch identified Germany's task for the twentieth century to unite Germans of the middle European language region economically and politically and to instill a sense of national identity in them, so that even if they are not members of the Reich that they would feel as members of the Fatherland. For Hantzsch such a feeling of solidarity should eventually develop in Germans across the world and bring about a Greater Germany that would transcend territorial boundaries.



After the devastating defeat of World War I and the humiliating terms of peace, Germany intellectuals responded to the crisis in several ways. They tried to make sense of what had happened and questioned what had gone wrong both internally and externally that could have made such a collapse possible. For many it was a time of soul searching. Some ideas that had been vague before the war were now clearly formulated. In 1935, Karl Alexander von Müller gave the keynote address at the tenth annual conference of the German academy in Munich. In his speech titled "Problems of the Second Reich in light of the Third" he noted that Germans became politically and historically aware before the war but that scholars only faintly apprehended what the purpose of the state and the future of the nation could be. World War I changed all that because the defeat was absolute: the entire state collapsed. From that time on questions regarding the nation or the state could no longer remain ambiguous. They were pressing and needed clear answers.

During the 1920s the national or *völkisch* movement gained momentum, because it presented a seemingly reasonable answer. The concept that Germans are one people no matter where they live became more widespread and was central to many new institutions. Immediately following the war numerous organizations were founded which sought to encourage *völkisch* movements at home and abroad. One such organization was the German association for the protection of Germandom in the border regions and abroad (*Deutscher Schutzbund für das Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtum*). Representatives of the association raised public awareness regarding Germans abroad. They no longer saw these Germans as foreigners but as fellow citizens who, because of their sacrifices, were entitled to special privileges from the German state. Implicit in this line of reasoning was the hope that maybe the borders of Germany could be expanded eastward, which would make up for some of the land lost with the Versailles Treaty. In the volatile political climate of the Weimar Republic, Germans tried to evaluate their standing in Europe, deal with the humiliation of Versailles, and regain some of Germany's former power. Scholars such as Walter Kuhn and Hermann Aubin argued that the Reich should take a stronger stance regarding its eastern borders.

This does not mean that there was consensus among academics on what course of action needed to be taken. Attitudes were rather diffuse. However, many who were attracted to the *völkisch* movement tended to have one belief in common: a deep skepticism of modernity which could flare into open animosity. For these scholars the Germans living in eastern and southeastern Europe represented an older agrarian tradition which they considered to be closer to what Germany ought to be. Germans in eastern Europe were largely unaffected by industrialization and urbanization, thus scholars bestowed upon them a "higher ethnic dignity" because they lived a lifestyle that was equated to the Paradise lost.

Scholars interested in German minorities studied their subject from a cultural and territorial point of view, combining the concept of cultural territory (Kulturboden) with that of national territory (Volksboden). German superiority lay at the foundation of these inquiries. Seemingly wherever Germans went they had well functioning established settlements from the jungles of Brazil to the tundras of the far North. Consequently if Germans did well in diverse environments, their successes could not be attributed to geographical location but to hard work, skill and determination.

The German cultural landscape does not result from the interaction of various natural causes, but is the work of people with definite natural abilities, who change nature according to their wills.

Scholars of the inter-war years saw this triumph of the will as a key to German success and they found examples to substantiate this belief from pre-history to the present. They also believed that Germans had a civilizing mission all over the world but especially in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, this sense of missionary obligation ought to compel Germans of all ages, especially the young.

When the young are taught from childhood about the civilizing tasks carried out by our people, when in their maturity they are informed about the German Kulturboden, when this is thoroughly studied at the universities, investigated by scholars, and held aloft by the whole, then a feeling of strength will develop in the nation, which will not merely be intoxicated with its 'gloire' or by cries of 'Hurra', but anchored in the soul of the nation.

For scholars it was self-evident that German Kultur had triumphed in eastern and southeastern Europe, in particular over "primitive Slavdom." It was a small leap to argue that since land cultivated by Germans, no matter where they lived, was Germanized that it was consequently part of the German nation.

As cultural commonality was extended to include territory, bringing ethnic Germans into the national fold became a necessity. Such ambitions, albeit only expressed by some, would in the end call for aggression. What started out as an intensified interest in ethnic matters evolved into territorial demands that were entangled with nationalistic ideals. The association for the advancement of the study of national and cultural territory (Stiftung für Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung) defined the national territory as those settlements containing an ethnically homogenous population, which clearly included large areas of the Czech Republic and Poland. Many academic conferences and symposiums were financed by the ministry of the interior and they were the foundation of most grand ethnographic projects of the 1920s and 1930s.

From the early 1920s on ethnic Germans became increasingly important to scholars. After Versailles there had to be a distinction between the "cultural nation" (Kulturnation) and the "state-nation" (Staatsnation) and the traditional methodologies were inadequate. Now that the Staatsnation had been destroyed, territorially confined, financially penalized and morally held responsible for World War I, there was little solace to be found there. However, the Kulturnation offered exciting possibilities among them studying the German nation and its cultural heritage without having to deal with the state's recent history. Studying Germans abroad meant, however, that new methods had to be mastered in order to carry out empirical research which was now in a regional context and had a cultural focus. Consequently ethnography (Volkskunde) and linguistics were consulted, as was the study of settlements (Siedlungsforschung) and regional social and economic history.

According to James van Horn Melton, this new "folk history" (Volksgeschichte) had a similar focus as the early Annales scholarship, albeit it has been given far less attention. "Like Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, folk historians were preoccupied with the study of peasant landholding patterns, demography, kinship, and popular culture." While their methodologies may have been similar, their politics were certainly not. Bloch and Febvre opposed fascism, while folk history originated on the far right of the political spectrum and identified with the pan-German movement that renounced the Versailles Treaty.

The outspoken conservatism of Volkskundler attracted the National Socialists. During the 1930s the party generally supported Volksgeschichte, even though the vast majority did not join the party. Prior to 1933 not one full professor had been a party member, nonetheless few lost their jobs or resigned because of conflicts of conscience. There was enough ideological agreement that the Nazis did not feel threatened and allowed conservative historians to remain. This does not mean that the Nazis were tolerant, nor that they succeeded in turning the discipline into one of its propaganda machines.

Although much research was state sponsored during the interwar years, historians apparently were not forced to publish in concert with state ideology. According to Werner the historical discipline was not coerced or forcibly aligned (Gleichschaltung) but that various individuals who expressed imperialist or racist views did so out of a conviction in "extreme ideals." Scholars may not have been compelled to publish works in line with Nazi ideology but frequently the views they expressed were in turn used by Nazi functionaries to their own purposes. Historians may not necessarily have been complicit in Nazi efforts but for the most part historians did not speak out against the regime. Instead of outward resistance many scholars increasingly kept to themselves and underwent what has been characterized as an inward exile.

Michael Burleigh agrees that there was little academic resistance to the Nazis but he articulates this failure in stronger terms. For him the "politicization and instrumentalization of a scholarly discipline under the Nazi regime" is clearly a deficit of "intellectual endeavor."

The experts did not challenge existing stereotypes and misconceptions; they worked within their boundaries and reified them through empirical 'evidence.' Dissident voices were silenced by authoritarian scholar-managers who policed the politics of their subordinates without government prompting. Anti-democratic professional structures served at once to perpetuate misconceptions and to facilitate government control. The politicians and bureaucrats had the measure of academic power-brokers.

According to Burleigh, academics who were involved in Ostforschung were not a lunatic fringe but part of the educated élite. Ministers and state secretaries based their decisions on the expertise of these scholars. For example, Hermann Aubin, one of the most prominent scholars of the 1930s, was sympathetic to the Nazis. In 1939 he wrote, "We must make use of our experience, which we have developed over many long years of effort. Scholarship cannot simply wait until it is called upon, but must make itself heard." Academics frequently cooperated with the government because they saw it as a means to legitimize their work. When the relationship between a scholar and the regime soured it was less because of resistance but rather "the result of political miscalculation, a naïve unawareness of the priority of ideology over scholarly exactitude or, more simply, a matter of being outmaneuvered by more practised political operators."

Managers at the SS (Schutzstaffel) recognized that the conquest of Eastern Europe could be facilitated through research institutes, which not only provided a useable rhetoric but also supplied statistical and cartographical locations of people. "Deportations, resettlements, repatriations, and mass murder were not sudden visitations from on high [...] but the result of the exact, modern, 'scientific' encompassing of persons with card indexes, card-sorting machines, charts, graphs, maps and diagrams." Ostforschung thus provided the regime with an ideological excuse and a scientific foundation to carry out its goals.

Because Ostforschung was used to justify eastward expansion, it was charged as being the handmaiden of Hitler and after 1945 it had to be rehabilitated. Volksgeschichte, the most innovative methodological current of the interwar years, had been deeply discredited for its political complicity and scholars who had been accused of Nazi affiliation could now hardly be considered cutting edge. As the leadership changed hands, those who had been least compromised by the Nazis became dominant figures in the discipline, namely Friedrich Meinecke, Gerhard Ritter, and Hans Rothfels, who because of their historicist leaning had rejected Volksgeschichte. Once again the

paradigm shift was rather a return to an older paradigm; this time a return to political, diplomatic and intellectual history. "This paradox helps to explain why, in the short run at least, the defeat of Germany in 1945 did more to restore the hallowed traditions of German historicism than it did to revise them." Besides this methodological shift, the German historical profession remained nonetheless conservative and some have argued that after the war there was more of a continuation than a discontinuation. For example, in what became the Federal Republic (West Germany), most historians who held positions under the Nazis kept their jobs after 1945. Even those twenty-four professors who were suspended because they had been incriminated were by and large readmitted into the discipline in the 1950s. On the other hand, the vast majority of those who had been exiled under the Nazi administration, failed to return after the war.

Although some historians attempted to analyze what had happened, there was no drastic break, no *Stunde Null* (hour zero), no slate wiped clean. Several historians publicly expressed their anguish over what had happened during the war, but as Stefan Berger noted, "much of the alleged critical stock-taking was little more than a rhetorical smoke-screen of lament, behind which the same old national apologias, somewhat toned down in volume, could and did continue. No national vacuum emerged in the immediate post-war years, neither in historiography nor in the public debate at large." According to Berger, there was initially no effort made to examine the role historians played under the National Socialists. Gerhard Ritter, President of the Association of German Historians founded in 1948, considered "efforts at belated self-accusation or self-justification" to be superfluous. "Continuity as far as possible, revisionism as far as necessary-that was the guiding principle of post-war German historians."

One noticeable change did, however, take place. In light of the recent imperialist disaster, historians could no longer condone a Germanocentric approach. After the war German historians tried hard to get Germany back into the European fold and scholarship at that point showed considerable pan-European tendencies. In the late 1950s this "Europeanization of German history was of crucial importance for the reemergence of social history." In 1958 the *Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte* was created in Heidelberg, which was to play a key role in Germany's postwar social history. The majority of historians responsible for the *Arbeitskreis* were linked to the *Volksgeschichte* of the interwar years. The term *Volksgeschichte* was discontinued and instead replaced by *Strukturgeschichte* (structural history). The change was more than cosmetic. It also entailed a marked shift in the attitude toward modernity. The peasants were no longer romanticized and industrialization was no longer seen as the demise of society. The *Volk* was no longer the focus of the inquiry, instead it was

replaced by the concept of the "mature industrial society." This shift also made the transformation from a Germanocentric view to a philo-European one easier.

Theodor Schieder, who is considered to be one of the towering intellects of the time, had practiced *Volkskunde* in the interwar years. After 1945 he adopted a structural approach to history but remained fundamentally interested in political history. After World War II, Schieder trained hundreds of students, among them Hans-Ulrich Wehler. Schieder's approach eventually led the way to "social history of politics" which later became associated with the Bielefeld school. This historiographical overview demonstrates a clear connection between politics, ideology and historical paradigms. The political conditions after World War I, led many historians to move away from historicism to embrace *Volksgeschichte*. After World War II, *Volksgeschichte* had to be adjusted and during the 1950s historicism again predominated. However, in the 1960s and 1970s many scholars of the historicist school retired and the discipline moved in the direction of historical social science. Methodologically this new paradigm was built on the foundations of *Volksgeschichte*, even though it was no longer anti-modern and prescribed to a European rather than a German vision. The paper will now examine how the historical discipline impacted the way in which the history of the Germans in southeastern Europe was written.

## **Regional Context**

In southeastern Europe problems surrounding ethnicity and nationalism have been evident since the concept of the nation-state had become influential in the early nineteenth century. In this historically multi-ethnic region ethnic relationships were particularly strained during both world wars, when different ethnic groups which had co-existed under one administration now fought on opposite sides. Yugoslavia, which became a state after World War I, was the most complicated of the interwar states because it contained the largest and most varied number of pre-1918 units.

From the Austrian half of the late Habsburg Empire, Yugoslavia inherited Slovenia and Dalmatia; from the Hungarian half, the formerly quasi-autonomous subkingdom of Croatia-Slavonia and the explicitly Hungarian districts of the Vojvodina; and from the joint Austro-Hungarian administration, the province of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Macedonia and the Sanjak of Novibazar had been Ottoman imperial territories until the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. Finally, there also entered into the new Yugoslavia the hitherto independent kingdoms of Montenegro and Serbia.

Ethnic conflicts were thus latent in the new Yugoslav state and by the eve of World War II ethnic differences remained unreconciled. Yugoslavia is particularly pertinent to this study because it contained a sizable German minority, the Danube Swabians (*Donauschwaben*) who were almost entirely expelled after World War II. It is

particularly instructive to examine the role Nazi ideology played in the events leading up to expulsion.

The Danube Swabians represent one of several groups who were resettled in Europe during the twentieth century. It has been estimated that during and after World War II around thirty million Europeans were forcibly resettled. About half of these were moved at gun-point by the Nazis and constitute the reorganization of Poland and the Soviet Union. Massive uprooting of people, however, dates back to the end of World War I and the collapse of three multi-ethnic empires: the Habsburg Empire, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire. As new nation-states were created from these empires, minorities were moved about in order to accommodate new territorial boundaries. Rogers Brubaker has termed this trend "ethnic unmixing." In the case of the former Austria-Hungary an estimated seven million Germans instantaneously became minorities in 1919. Of the one and a half million Danube Swabians who had been administered by the Hungarian half of the empire, about half a million remained under Hungarian jurisdiction while half a million each fell to Romania and Yugoslavia. The disintegrating Russian and Ottoman empires experienced immediate ethnic unmixing; in contrast many Germans of the former Hungarian Empire remained. Mass migration in southeastern Europe, however, was merely postponed. It would take place after World War II. When it did, the Danube Swabians were proportionately the most severely affected.

Most of the scholars who have tried to understand the demise of the Danube Swabians have focused on the events surrounding the war itself. The Danube Swabians had the highest civilian casualty rate of any German group and as such are seen as victims who bore the brunt of retaliation against Germans. The bearing Ostpolitik had on Nazi policy has generally been documented and the fact that academia was severely discredited after World War II attests to this fact. Germany's Ostpolitik clearly had an ethnic component which justified eastward expansion on the grounds that Germans had a civilizing mission and that the nation's territory must be expanded to encompass German minorities living in Eastern Europe. However, prior to the 1980s few historians and ethnologists have questioned how responsible German scholars were in contributing to the rise of German nationalism abroad, which ultimately had catastrophic consequences for ethnic Germans in eastern and southeastern Europe. Nazi functionaries frequently used the work of academics, therefore the way in which issues such as ethnology were treated in academia was more than a heuristic exercise, more than the shaping of a historiography. It also had a bearing on historical events because it contributed to people's self-concept and consequently influenced their actions.

Arguably the way in which scholars studied German enclaves in southeastern Europe was politically motivated and not necessarily reflective of how these German

minorities viewed themselves in their predominantly multi-ethnic environment. This discrepancy seems to be the case regarding ethnic identity: while ethnologists and historians stressed how rooted in the German culture these minorities were, many Germans in southeastern Europe actually took pride in the fact that they were able to coexist as an integral part with other cultures.

In the interwar years ethnologists predominantly categorized German groups in southeastern Europe according to national-linguistic criteria. Their studies focused on continuity and on how the German language and culture was retained. From this point of view Germans lived as minorities in German-speaking enclaves in the midst of a foreign environment henceforth the study came to be known as Sprachinselforschung, which means the study of linguistic islands.

Walter Kuhn, pioneer in the field, published his book *Deutsche Sprachinselforschung* in 1934 and became professor of *Volkskunde* (ethnology) in Breslau two years later. Kuhn elaborated on the metaphor of the island by depicting it as being in the midst of a violent ocean. The foreign nations (*Volkstum*) represent the ocean which threatens the existence of these German islands. Furthermore, Kuhn considered these islands as a territorial extension of the *Volksboden* or national territory.

Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, a fellow ethnologist, openly criticized this approach, as laying the foundation not only for a flawed but dangerous methodology. The view that Germans in Southeast Europe were separated from the German nation and surrounded by a foreign *Volkstum* does not reflect the intercultural exchange that existed. These Germans shared a common existence with their Serb and Magyar neighbors with whom they interacted on a daily basis. Serbs often worked on German farms and Germans frequently sent their children to Magyar schools. All the farmers participated in the country fairs, where they displayed their farm equipment and their animals. They also met one another each week at the market. In the town of Szekszárd where the population was approximately half German and half Magyar, the church service on Sunday would be held alternately, one week in German and the other week in Magyar.

*Sprachinselforschung* overemphasized one aspect of culture-language-and consequently implied that the Germans abroad had greater cultural connection to Germany than the communities in which they existed. However, the Danube Swabians were not isolated minority groups whose primary ties were with Germany. On the contrary, they lived in open and fluid societies in which people did not necessarily group together along ethnic lines. They also distinguish themselves along religious and occupational lines, thus the Swabians from the Banat identified as Catholics together with the Bulgarian and Magyar minorities in distinction to the Orthodox Romanians and Serbs. As farmers or day laborers they shared similar life



experiences and economic interests. The fact that some of them were German speaking is not sufficient to understand their communal life or their identity. Danube Swabians did not live as isolated islands. Living next to one another and with one another was more predominant than living against one another.

This is not to downplay the real tension that existed in the interwar years, when nationalist sentiments were on the rise across all of Europe. By the time Nazi rhetoric infiltrated the Balkans, nationalism had become a divisive force in the region. The Danube Swabians played an important role because they "were not just another minority in the grip of ethnically different host nations, but organic parts of Germandom, one of the largest, most respected and feared community of peoples in the western world."

G. C. Paikert, who served in the Hungarian Ministry of Education in Budapest from 1934-1944, was responsible for the schooling of national minorities during these years. In his book about the Danube Swabians and Hitler's impact on their patterns, he notes that up until World War I the host countries seemed to benefit from the Danube Swabians, who made lasting cultural and economic contributions. "As to their overall record in their adopted Heimat [homeland], there can be no doubt that until the coming of the Hitler era the bulk of it was constructive."

In the case of the Danube Swabians in Yugoslavia, they committed two grievous errors: they had a negative attitude toward the Yugoslav state and they embraced Nazism. The former came in response to Serb chauvinism and coercive assimilation practices. Prior to World War I, the Serbs and Germans were both minorities under Hungarian administration. This relationship, however, drastically changed when the Yugoslav state was formed and the Germans were suddenly a minority within a Serb-dominated state. In the early 1920s the Swabians suffered several legal setbacks. Their property rights were curtailed, German schools were nationalized, German political parties outlawed and cultural associations declared illegal.

These crackdowns by the Serb government served to strengthen cohesion among the Swabians. The city of Neusatz became the center for Germans of the former southern Hungary. Here the daily newspaper *Deutsches Volksblatt* was published and the cultural association, the *Schwäbisch-Deutsche Kulturbund* was founded in 1920. The *Kulturbund* was active for four years and had 55,000 members in 128 villages in the Vojvodina and Syrmia before it was declared illegal in 1924. The Germans in the Vojvodina had provided for the education of their children, which was a common feature among migrant Germans, but in 1922 all schools were nationalized and the Swabians thus lost control over the education of their children. The same year Dr. Ludwig Kremling and Dr. Stefan Kraft founded the *Deutsche Partei* (German Party) which became illegal by 1929. In addition to these struggles over minority rights, the

region experienced an economic crisis in the early 1930s. Thus the quality of life deteriorated for many Danube Swabians.

After the German Reich and the Yugoslav government had improved their relations in the mid 1930s, political conditions improved for the German minority in Yugoslavia. In 1931 a compromise had been reached regarding German schooling. However, it was too late to quiet the discontent among the younger generation. Disillusioned by their economic and political condition and the setbacks they had suffered during the previous decade, the younger Swabians were increasingly susceptible to Pan-German rhetoric. By the mid 1930s the Volksgruppe experienced an internal crisis. The younger generation, which came to be known as the Erneuerer (renewers), wanted allegiance to the Reich. The older generations had been raised under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and saw a political allegiance with Germany as dangerous. By 1938 this split made unified political actions impossible. The two factions attempted a reconciliation but the rift widened once Nazi ideology infiltrated the Kulturbund and NSDAP organizations took over at the beginning of the war. The Erneuerer were encouraged by the annexation of Austria and pushed the older generation aside.

Initially the younger generation had reacted in response to their deteriorating conditions but their activities increasingly invited reprisals. Through their anti-Yugoslav attitudes they gave the Yugoslav state an excuse to take further discrimination measures. Actions that had been an effect now became cause for future actions. "Ultimately there formed a vicious circle of hopelessly alienated relationships with the host country, in an age already explosive with both revolutionary new isms and reactionary intolerance."

While about one third of the Danube Swabians embraced Nazi ideology, the rhetoric of German superiority was not uniformly accepted. The churches in the Vojvodina resisted because the Nazis' exclusionary rhetoric could not be reconciled with their theology. Pastors held sermons in which they denounced race-hatred as anti-Christian. Catholics were frequently the target of Nazi hate-rhetoric and consequently some of them were particularly outspoken. Adam Berenz, a Catholic clergyman, published the newspaper Die Donau (the Danube) from 1934 until its publication was halted by the Hungarian government in 1944. During this decade Berenz wrote over eighty articles against race-ideological propaganda and the activities of the Erneuerer (renewers) who were aligned with the Nazis. The literature of resistance is thus part of the historiography and suggests that the doctrines emanating from the Reich did not go unchallenged.

Some of these attitudes of racial superiority made their way East, especially when party officials traveled to the German enclaves in the Vojvodina in an effort to establish and promote party organizations. It has been noted that during the 1930s

there was an increased presence of representatives from Germany in the Vojvodina. Often these officials were invited to festivities such as the anniversary of the founding of a particular village. In the 1930s, many communities that had been established during the 1780s, celebrated their 150th anniversary and invited Germans from the Reich to join in the celebration. German functionaries thus did become more visible in these communities. Marching bands paraded down main street and the Danube Swabians celebrated their success not with their Serb and Magyar neighbors but with non-resident Germans. This could not have been a reassuring sight for Serbs who at the same time were subjected to increasing Pan Slav rhetoric. Johannes Weidenheim, a Danube Swabian from the Batschka, reflected on these practices and concluded that this growing presence of Germany was disturbing the balance in the villages and was sowing nasty seeds of animosity. This increased Nazi presence intensified tensions with Slavic and Hungarian neighbors who watched the intrusion with suspicion. Coexistence in multi-ethnic communities was thus effectively undermined by Germans from the Reich.

On the eve of World War II the party had a significant hold on the region. After the German army occupied Yugoslavia in 1941, Berlin upstepped nazification efforts. The Swabian leadership in Croatia and Serbia were now one hundred percent Nazi and they received orders directly from Berlin. The Swabians were reorganized "along the Nazi patterns of the Reich, complete with Arbeitsdienst (Labor Service), Frauenschaften (Women's Division), Deutsche Jugend (German Youth, that is Hitler Youth) and all the rest of the customary Nazi formulae." Germans also received orders to report to the Waffen-SS for military duty.

The Danube Swabians ultimately sided with the German occupiers instead of the Serb partisan resisters and this allegiance in the end turned out fatal. As Paikert has pointed out, the Danube Swabians had lived in the region for two hundred years, first under Austrian and then under Hungarian rule. They had been under Yugoslav sovereignty for only two decades and had legitimate grievances against that state for violating their minority rights which had been granted under the Convention on Minorities Rights by international, binding agreements. "To expect the Swabians to side with Yugoslavia against their German brethren would be to expect too much, even if Nazi indoctrination and propaganda had not been as intensive as they were by that time." That of course is not to excuse any atrocities that took place during the war, of which all sides are apparently guilty.

During German occupation the Serbs resorted to guerrilla warfare. By 1944 the tide turned and Tito's Partisans regained control over Yugoslavia. On November 21, 1944 Tito's AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council of the Yugoslav People's Liberation) declared all Germans as stateless and outlaws, stripping them of citizenship and confiscating their property. The liquidation of Yugoslavia's German minority was complete. For Tito it

was of no consequence what the political background of the individuals were, if they were ultra-Nazis or apolitical persons. With one stroke he rid the state of a potentially formidable bourgeois class, repatriated the most fertile land and the most valuable properties. Because many Swabians had been compromised during the occupation, he had popular support.

Since most of the German men had already been drafted, the majority of Swabians who bore the brunt of these measures were women, children and the elderly. Those who could not leave on time were interned in concentration camps. "In Rudolfgrad along, of the 33,000 Swabian internees almost 10,000, including women and children, that is nearly one-third, died between October 1945 and March 1948." Thousands of interns were shipped to the Soviet Union for forced labor. Until the concentration camps in Yugoslavia were dissolved, nearly 70,000 Swabians died. Another 28,000 died as a result of the war, which brings the total for Swabians in Yugoslavia to 98,000 roughly 20 percent of the population. These losses left deep scars on the psyches of the survivors.

The Danube Swabians were, of course, not the only victims of the war; they were but one of many expellee groups. At the end of the war Germans from all over eastern Europe, including Russia and Poland, fled before the encroaching Russian army. The suffering was immense for millions of Europeans and life would not regain a semblance of normalcy for several more years. These dramatic experiences also impacted the scholarship.

After World War II the study of Germans from eastern and southeastern Europe diversified significantly and extended beyond academia. The trends of the main stream scholarship has been discussed earlier. However, the literature that has been published by the expellees themselves has a sub-current of its own. By this time nearly fifteen million Germans had become expellees and much of the literature centers around these formidable experiences. In the case of the Danube Swabians, West-German government agencies and Danube Swabian organizations have extensively documented the atrocities Tito's Partisans committed against the German minority in Yugoslavia. In a four volume series of several thousand pages about 80% of the Danube Swabians are accounted for, including information about where, when and how they died as well as who the survivors were and where they relocated to. The series also contains recollections from survivors.

Many of these publications were partly financed by the state, partly by the various local organizations and several were exclusively financed by the individual authors. After the war it seemed most pressing to compile as much information as fast as possible, consequently there was little discourse on how the historical and anthropological disciplines may be restructured or how the collected data ought to be

analyzed. Some of the works published in the 1950s are hauntingly reminiscent of the attitudes prevalent during the 1930s.

The majority of the expellee leadership in the immediate post-war years was markedly conservative. In the 1950s the West German government under Adenauer made efforts to unite the various expellee organizations under one umbrella organization. Theodor Oberländer, who headed the ministry for the expellees (Bundesvertriebenenministerium), had a strong fascist past and had been a member of the Nazi party. This ministry supported expellee organizations and their publications which were quite influential in the decade following the war. By 1958 expellee organizations published over 350 periodicals and became an important expression of post-war culture. Expellees made significant financial contributions to these organizations as long as they had hope of returning to their former homes. In the early years they even had their own party, the BHE (Block der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten), which had notable support during the early 1950s. Their aim was to secure equal citizen rights for ethnic Germans, a fair distribution of the war burden and full integration of ethnic Germans into Germany and Europe. By the early 1960s most of them had resigned themselves to the fact that they would not be able to return and at that point few even desired to give up the material security they had found in Germany. Consequently expellee publications dropped.

The fact that the government would appoint a former Nazi to coordinate refugee organizations and that in the decade following the war much of the popular literature remained conservative is indicative of a larger phenomenon. While there was much confusion and considerable soul-searching in the postwar years, there was also a lot of continuation. Coming to terms with Germany's recent past was difficult and for many people the most important thing was to get through the initial pain and get on with life. Some were not ready or willing to acknowledge Germany's responsibility for the war and continued to look for the blame elsewhere.

For example, Josef Senz, a survivor and chairman of the work study group of Danube Swabian teachers, showed unambiguous antagonism against Hungarians and Slavs. In his book *Die Donauschwaben und ihre Nachbarn* (Freilassing, 1959), Senz did not reflect on the Nazis' involvement in the war nor did he consider that ethnic groups in southeastern Europe hated Germans because of what Germany had done during the war. Instead he was puzzled about where the hatred of Germans was coming from and characterized the Magyars as driven by a fear based on delusion (aus irrigen Wahnvorstellungen zehrenden Angst). For Senz nationalism was always brought on by others and by weaving in religious themes he further removed himself from accountability. In this case the focus on the self and the lack of reflection about Germany's guilt was a national trend that also resonates in the literature on ethnicity. Senz was extreme in some of his early writings and does not reflect the general tone

of the scholarship but it is noteworthy that his work was not edited before publication. In his later works Senz carried a much more conciliatory tone.

Other authors were considerably more empathetic in trying to understand the point of view of the other ethnic groups. Johann Weidenheim saw cultural differences without designating national superiority or inferiority to either group. In his book *Die Donauschwaben--Bild eines Kolonistenvolkes* which he co-authored with A. K. Gauß in 1961, he represents German contribution without overemphasizing it. Weidenheim thus seems to be kin to those who were willing to abandon a German-centric vision for a pan-European one. Weidenheim was not alone in these efforts to overcome the estrangement between Germans and their eastern neighbors.

A desire for conciliation was apparent as early as 1950 when the representatives of the expellees formulated the expellee charter (*Charta der deutschen Heimatvertriebenen*). In this charter, they renounced any efforts of revenge or retaliation. This highly publicized political statement was widely recognized as the first of its kind in West Germany. "The Charta was the first important document of peace in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany." It again reflects the pan-European tendencies that were also evident in the academic writings at that time.

Germany's efforts to come to terms with its past and to redefine its role in Europe have also found expression in recent books about the Danube Swabians. For example, the exhibition catalog *Die Donauschwaben: Deutsche Siedlung in Südosteuropa* published by the Innenministerium (department of the interior) in Baden-Württemberg makes use of several statistics and stresses that cooperation among these multi-ethnic communities used to be the norm. As Konrad G. Gündisch states in the introduction, the purpose of the book was to show the suffering and achievements of the Danube Swabians but also to document the coexistence with other communities in order to "contribute to an appreciation of a common European history and the understanding between the nations of the East and West."

In retrospect, the postwar scholarship has been diverse and includes a wide range of approaches, from statistical analysis and demographics to diary accounts of survivors. Some of this literature, including numerous recollections published by the authors themselves, clearly exists outside of mainstream academia. Nonetheless some generalizations can be inferred from this multiplicity. German history and historiography in the twentieth century cannot be separated from the cataclysmic events of the two world wars. After World War I some historians tried to move away from the historicist tradition and sought new meaning in the ethnic nation. The underlying *völkisch* ideology in turn was utilized for political and expansionist purposes. The consequences were disastrous and after World War II scholars again made an effort to distance themselves from the troublesome paradigm. Yet while

some of these major trends are evident, older currents and undercurrents remained and existed simultaneously. Scholars simply could not wipe the slate entirely clean. They continued to fall back on older methodologies, even though they altered them and made them more suitable for the times. Thus in the postwar historiography conservative elements were retained while some innovative elements were incorporated. The desire to once again be a part of the European community, necessitated a change of focus and this turn away from a national agenda was also reflected in the expellee literature.

In recent years efforts have been made to overcome national identities and prepare Europeans for a truly European Community. This has proven difficult; indeed there seems to be evidence that many Europeans cling all the more tenaciously to regional identities. Even as some have declared that the era of the nation-state is over, it is not clear that internationalism can take its place. Ethnicity as a means of group identification is likely to remain important at least in the immediate future. This of course lends itself to be used by those who seek to consolidate political or territorial power. Even today ethnic identity is being mobilized for nationalistic purposes in Europe. The recent civil war in Yugoslavia stands as a stark reminder that this chapter is not yet concluded. It also shows that history is still being manipulated to serve political or territorial ambitions. As such historians are not merely passive observers who record the history of their people. Instead they actively participate in the making of that history, and they do so in more ways than one.

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# Politics of the Stage: Theatre and Popular Opinion In Eighteenth-Century Paris

**Kimberly Meeker**

The eighteenth century is widely reputed to have been the Age of Theatre in France. A unique form of entertainment and mass communication, theatrical productions brought together representatives from all degrees of social and economic status in one building to share a common experience. Despite an attitude that emphasized the glorification of French culture, the government viewed the theatre primarily as a form of entertainment and sought to prevent any deviation from this main emphasis. Although plays were monitored through censorship of scripts, the agents of authority made little attempt to shape popular views on specific political issues through drama. In contrast, practitioners of bourgeois drama aimed at converting the theatre into a schoolhouse for moral values and virtue in social interaction. Parisian audiences, especially those standing in the open parterre area in front of the stage, often used the theatre as a forum for voicing their own opinions on political issues. Far from being mindlessly molded by any agenda of the French playwrights or royal patrons, the spectators claimed for themselves the capacity to pass judgment on the plays presented on the stage. The Crown's formal regulation, the playwrights' didactic intention, and the spectators' vocal reactions created an interaction of control, manipulation, and political articulation in eighteenth-century Parisian theatre.

From the popularity of amateur productions among the moneyed and elite to the general trend of rising ticket sales at public theatres, drama played an important role in the social life of eighteenth-century France. According to registers of attendance at the Comédie-Française from the 1750 to 1774, that playhouse averaged approximately 168,000 spectators each year. Since the theatre offered an opportunity to impress people of every rank, the French government could not neglect this aspect of life. The Crown assumed that the productions called for regulation, that troupes required consistent personnel, and that theatre crowds needed supervision. In 1680, Louis XIV granted monopolies on stage production to the Académie Royale de Musique for opera, and to the Comédie-Française and the Comédie-Italienne for French and Italian language drama, respectively. The avowed purpose for establishing these theatres was "to perfect the representation of the lyric and dramatic arts for the greater glory of the French state." This objective promoted plays that extolled the monarchy and

perpetuated the powerful system of privilege. In 1706, the king charged the Paris police with maintaining control and order in these playhouses.

The Crown supported the three royal theatres financially and governed their management until the end of the ancien régime. The First Gentlemen of the Bedchamber directed the administration of the Comédie-Française by hiring and dismissing personnel, and by composing rules regulating everything from requiring actors to accept their assigned roles to demanding that players be punctual for rehearsals. The actors were considered servants of the king, with the expectation that they would entertain at court and accept the disciplinary actions of royal authority. With the Crown providing royal patronage, the actors served the king first, and only secondarily answered to the public. Although the theatre troupe counted on ticket sales to underwrite the largest share of its productions, the Crown's monetary patronage provided a continuous subsidy to compensate the actors and a justification for extensive royal control over administration. In spite of the cultural function of the theatre and its support from the state, the Roman Catholic Church denied actors the benefit of religious rites, and the occupation carried the penalty of excommunication. Voltaire highlighted the hypocrisy of the religious and social stigma placed on actors whose vocation was patronized by the nobility and sanctioned by the law.

The reality of a state theatre demanded that the productions would promote the monarchy and the Roman Catholic Church. Playwrights were personally obligated to obtain official approval for their works. Dramatic censorship was the responsibility of the Lieutenant-General of Police, who delegated the task of reading and approving the manuscripts to a man of letters known as the censeur de la police. The rules of censorship revolved around the Church, the Crown, and political notables. Plays could not mock or violate Roman Catholic beliefs and ceremonies, nor was drama allowed to satirize living public figures or resort to personal attacks on the monarch. If the censor had reservations about a play, he could refer the case to a higher authority in the Church or the state. On occasion, the king took a personal interest in delaying or condemning a play. Even foreign ambassadors could be invited to give endorsement of a play referring to their country. Approval of a manuscript could require the consultation of bishops and court officials, making censorship an important matter of state and potentially an international affair.

State censorship aimed to eliminate references and situations that would arouse the political passions of the audience, either positively or negatively. While the quality of the monopoly theatres' productions reflected French achievement and generally supported the values of a system of monarchy and social privilege, the censors steadily avoided

references to contemporary political situations. Government officials generally concurred with the assessment of the theatre as an "innocent diversion for [the] people from certain blameworthy activities." While welcoming the theatrical element for personal entertainment, the Crown did not exhibit a desire to appeal to the masses by using drama to sway public opinion on specific political topics. The French state refused to invite popular comment on the conduct of government. Because the monarch controlled the deployment of royal prerogatives and official policies did not require popular approval, the Crown probably viewed use of the theatre to generate political sentiments among the populace as unnecessary.

Since the official censorship restrictions applied only to the privileged playhouses of Paris, plays banned in the capital could be produced in the provinces if local authorities granted permission. Playwrights whose works might be denied the approval of the censor on political grounds or rejected by the privileged players for artistic reasons could also seek production by the boulevard troupes in Paris. Jean-Baptiste Nicolet opened the first boulevard playhouse in 1760 as alternative entertainment. Here the actors were hired individually by the owners of the theatre, rather than performing in a troupe supported and administered by the Crown. Boulevard theatre was generally dismissed by royal officials and policy makers as a form of entertainment beneath their concern. If French authorities had actively attempted to use the theatre to influence the masses, they would not have ignored this portion of the Parisian public who attended plays. Instead, the regulators were satisfied to control the content of plays produced in the privileged theatres, which they viewed as direct representatives of the monarchy. After 1769, the authorities introduced means of inspecting proposed scripts for boulevard theatre productions. Rather than being monitored for quality or political purposes, censors screened new plays for infringement of the artistic monopolies held by state theatres. Boulevard troupes continued to perform low caliber drama, while many plays deemed to demonstrate aesthetic taste or redeeming moral value were appropriated for performance at one of the three privileged theatres.

In these major playhouses, seating was divided into several sections. Less expensive seating included the amphithéâtre directly opposite the stage, and the highest balcony, or paradis. In the parterre, between one-half and two-thirds of the audience members paid twenty sous, roughly equivalent to a day's wages for a laborer, to stand in an open area in front of the stage. The nobility and wealthy bourgeois occupied the elevated loges on the sides of the theatre.

Aristocratic tastes dominated the French theatre of the eighteenth century, and the patronage of the Crown continued to be instrumental in determining theatrical plots and

stage settings. Playwrights operated in a society that revolved around the French court, and its tastes in drama shaped the themes and presentations. Correspondingly, most dramatists catered to royal and aristocratic preferences in order to obtain influential positions at court and in the Académie Française. These authors typically produced classical tragedies and comedies of manners featuring characters of noble birth. During the years before the Revolution, audiences were increasingly drawn from diverse status levels, as a greater number of plebian members of society, who had been exposed to drama at the boulevard theatres, purchased tickets for the privileged playhouses. Students, professionals, army officers, and others who lacked the means or inclination to purchase a seat filled the space in the pit. Reflecting the heterogeneous composition of these audiences, some plays that were originally applauded by the court at Versailles failed to receive plaudits from the audiences of the capital's public theatres. Parisians did not blindly accept aristocratic tastes, but expressed their own satisfaction with or disapproval of the plays they watched. As the century progressed, a system of market values emerged to compete with the tradition of aristocratic sponsorship. For many men of letters, dramatic popularity in public performance was becoming more important to a playwright's reputation and income than patronage. Dramatists later in the century, such as Denis Diderot, Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, and Louis-Sébastien Mercier, wrote moralistic comedies and tragedies in an attempt to influence more diverse metropolitan audiences.

While the Crown was mainly concerned with the policing and censorship of the theatre, bourgeois dramatists made a more direct attempt to influence the thinking and behavior of their audiences. Diderot viewed drama not only as entertainment but also as a method of promoting Enlightenment beliefs based on the idea of human perfectibility. Mercier argued that the theatre should endeavor to appeal to the masses, not just to the upper classes of society. A social reformer with many egalitarian ideas, Mercier reasoned that drama should have less emphasis on refined tastes and be more accessible to common contemporary interests.

Advocates of the bourgeois drama viewed the theatre as an ideal didactic medium for representing the illusion of an alternate universe in which morality was rewarded and good ultimately triumphed. These theorists assumed that their audiences could be enlightened because of the essential goodness of humans and their ability to learn virtue. The playwright became the educator by instructing citizens in the ideals of charity, mutual aid, honest work, and liberty. The dramatists worked for an illusion of reality, emphasizing realism of production and influencing people through emotions. As the didactic impact of plays increased, Diderot envisioned the theatre replacing the

church as a teacher of virtue. The shared theatrical experience performed a service of uniting people in a sense of common humanity. In the playwrights' vision, bourgeois theatre could function as an ideological instrument of cultural change, creating new ways of thinking and communicating in a perfected social order by shaping virtue on a personal level. Through identification with the characters on stage, the audience would internalize a moral lesson, which could then be translated into changed behavior.

In an attempt to influence theatre audiences more intimately through character identification, bourgeois dramatists endeavored to present players from all social standings in contemporary settings. These theorists created the *drame*, a new type of drama that intermingled characteristics of domestic tragedy with moralizing comedy. They used realism to enhance theatrical illusion and exploited sentimentality to amplify the moral lessons by manipulating the spectators' emotions. According to Mercier, the purpose of the theatre was to create an awareness of injustice and inhumanity. He advocated the use of lines in a play to influence political or social sentiment by commenting on issues that would be understood by the audience. For instance, Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* included satirical passages illustrating the abuses of the contemporary social system. The 1770 production of Mercier's *Le Déserteur* exemplified the inclusion of propaganda techniques to influence the political debate on capital punishment for desertion from the army. While several individual *drames* were popular in the public theatres, most specimens of the new drama received a cold reception. These realities seemed to limit the prospects of Diderot's notion of the theatre as the ultimate didactic medium. Theatre-goers refused to absorb passively the moralizing influence of all plays with which they were presented, opting to employ their own criteria in judging this new form of dramatic work. Audiences apparently demanded that moralistic plays also be entertaining or artistically pleasing.

The patrons in the parterre, due to their number and their proximity to the stage, had a distinctive influence over the reception of a play. These theatre-goers used applause and catcalls to voice their reaction to a performance, and the written reviews of plays frequently included the response of the audience. A play's reception on one night could therefore bias the reactions of future spectators, highlighting the degree to which audience approval was instrumental to a production's success or failure. At times, the "cabal" of the parterre were paid by the author to applaud his plays, or bribed by rival playwrights to heckle a new production. While the use of monetary incentives may have been exaggerated, rumors of cabal bribery were another indication of the importance of the parterre reception. The parterre patrons also became a voice of political opinion. The crowds were safe in their anonymous expressions of assessments of the play and



in conveying their political sentiments to the Crown. Special government agents relayed audience reactions to their superiors. In response, the authorities could withdraw a play or cut the offending lines, but there was little fear of personal reprimand.

After the censors had combed a script for offending phrases, situations, and insinuations, the theatre patrons' shouted responses could give even banal lines contemporary significance and pertinent political weight. The audience, especially members of the parterre, used vocal responses and applause to signify the relevance of a play to current issues. In a 1787 performance of an adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, for instance, the line, "A nation is silent when it condemns its king," was met with thunderous applause. The effectiveness of the audience reaction was unmistakable, and authorities endeavored to delete that line from future presentations of the French version of *Antigone*. In addition to using plays to make contemporary applications, audiences also had a limited control over the plays produced in the privileged theatres. A theatre company statute required the troupe to have a second play ready to perform in the instance when a given play was rejected by the audience. Thus, spectators claimed the right to question authority indirectly by refusing a play that had been approved by the state.

As the playgoers gradually assumed the attitude of consumers with rights and privileges, the standing parterre became a subject of debate in the second half of the eighteenth century. Seating the parterre was an attempt by the government and by intellectuals to influence theatre-goers and their vocalized reception of the works presented. The parterre was crowded, noisy, and highly excitable, as well as potentially volatile and violent. The pit's unsanitary and uncomfortable conditions were viewed as deleterious to sound judgment of plays. These denizens did not always value the same cultural tastes as the more refined people of the upper classes who sat in the loges. Beginning in 1751, armed soldiers with loaded weapons policed the theatres, but the parterre could not be controlled effectively. Jean François de La Harpe, Jacques-François Blondel, and other influential intellectuals believed that there should be more control in the popular theatre. Reformers called for restored order by installing benches in the pit area. Theatre ticket prices could be raised to encourage more middle class attendance, with the social undesirables relegated to the paradis seats far from the stage and from the view of the rest of the spectators. According to these architects and dramatists, seating the parterre would create a more predictable and tractable audience. Seated audiences would be safer for the public and would provide more control for the playwright. Authors voiced their confidence that artistic merit would be rewarded when plays were judged more rationally.

In contrast to the quest for limitation and control, other intellectuals argued that installing seats would threaten the bastion of republicanism that the parterre's denizens incarnated. A play's reception by the pit was, in essence, a male consensus that represented equality. The parterre could pass judgment on the work of the playwright, and indirectly on the monarchy that supported the theatre. Proponents of these arguments for a standing parterre depicted seats as an encroachment of liberty. The parterre crowd nightly formed a consensus in an atmosphere in which all patrons stood on an equal level, regardless of social status. Advocates of these ideas concluded that justice and reason were inherent in the decisions of the parterre expressing its majority opinion.

Although aspects of monopoly, regulation, and manipulation on the part of the government and playwrights shaped the theatre of eighteenth-century Paris, spectators used public performances to voice their own artistic and political opinions. The Crown adopted a defensive approach to influencing popular opinion by editing politically charged materials rather than sponsoring its own specific propaganda. Government leaders consistently ignored the opportunity to mold the views of the patrons of the boulevard theatres. Prompted by the ideals of human perfectibility, some playwrights took an interventionist approach by creating the bourgeois drama to persuade the masses through an internalization of the moral lessons played out in a contemporary setting. The parterre represented an increasingly diverse share of the audience, critically judging theatrical productions rather than mindlessly accepting the delivery of the actors. This vocal and notoriously self-willed group insisted on endowing performances with political significance. Their collective voice became a force in demanding greater individual rights and freedoms in eighteenth-century France.

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