Introduction

Defining the German Problem

> I wanted simultaneously to understand Hannah's crime and to condemn it. But it was too terrible for that. When I tried to understand it, I had the feeling I was failing to condemn it as it must be condemned. When I condemned it as it must be condemned, there was no room for understanding.[1]

Eight months after Pearl Harbor, Princeton opinion analyst Hadley Cantril found that American views of the German enemy were characterized by "a lack of crystallization and a high degree of suggestibility." He warned in a confidential report for the Roosevelt administration that "the implications of this for the postwar world are clear – almost anything can happen."[2] Two years later, with American troops close to the German border, it appeared that this alarming state of public opinion had not significantly changed. Informing his superiors in the British Foreign Office of the American governmental and public debate on "what to do with Germany" – recently sparked anew by the leaked Morgenthau Plan – the philosopher Isaiah Berlin wrote: "Out of this brief storm has come at least a lightning flash which has illuminated the public landscape, revealing a state of wide ignorance and perplexity. If the Administration genuinely desires to support a stiff post-war settlement, it still has time, and now also the opportunity, to educate its people accordingly."[3]

Contrary to commonly held beliefs, even after Americans had entered the war against Nazi Germany, popular views of that country did not coalesce

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[1] Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 157 (transl. Carol Brown Janeway).

[2] Office of Public Opinion Research (OPOR), "The Nature of the Enemy," Confidential Report prepared for the Bureau of Intelligence (BOI), Office of War Information (OWI), 13 August 1942, Box 11, Papers of Philleo Nash, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO [hereafter cited as HSTL]. Hadley Cantril was the director of the OPOR at Princeton University. For a similar assessment of public opinion at this time, see James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom, 1940–45* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), 272ff.

[3] *Washington Despatches, 1941–1945: Weekly Political Reports from the British Embassy*, ed. H.G. Nicholas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 426, entry for September 30, 1944. Since spring of 1942 Isaiah Berlin had been entrusted with writing the first draft of these dispatches "on changing attitudes and movements of opinion in the USA"; see Berlin's introduction to this volume and Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 109–30, esp., 124f.

into a well-focused image of the enemy.[4] Instead Americans engaged in often-heated debates, both in governmental and in public circles, on the "nature of the enemy" and on "what to do with Germany." Public support for a specific solution to the "German problem" could be rallied only with the help of a preceding, well-orchestrated propaganda campaign promoting the appropriate messages concerning the nature of the Nazi threat.

Cantril and Berlin were only two among many voices at the time who were critical of what they saw as the administration's failure to educate the American people about the nature of the Nazi regime. In particular, intellectuals, journalists, but also government officials worried throughout the war that Americans did not display the right attitude toward and did not have the proper image of the main fascist enemy. War correspondent Cecil Brown, for example, reported in *Colliers* in December 1943:

Confusion over what we are fighting to eradicate from the world and what we propose to substitute in its place prevails throughout the country . . . I asked hundreds of people from coast to coast: 'What is Fascism?' . . . people could not agree, or had no idea whatever.[5]

As unsatisfying as this state of affairs, sometimes described as confusion and on other occasions as a cacophony of conflicting voices, must have been to those interested in a purposeful mobilization of the American people, it was precisely the fluidity of public understanding and the complexity of elite conceptions of National Socialism that produced an array of insightful and valid arguments, effectively shaped American warfare, and constructively informed its postwar planning.

This book identifies and traces the emergence of the main explanatory models and narratives that Americans formulated to characterize the Nazi regime. An equally important theme is the governmental effort to focus these views and the problems it encountered. The study has as its title an injunction from the time – "know your enemy" – to highlight two aspects in the American response to Nazism. First, it expresses the general wartime consensus that one has to properly understand one's enemy to win not only the war but also the peace. Second, this particular enemy image illustrates the larger point that ideas shape and structure action. How Americans conceptualized an overseas reality both enabled and limited policy decisions pertaining to warfare and postwar planning. Long before the Third Reich declared war on the United States and the country officially entered World War II, the American public was well aware of the totalitarian regime in the heart of Europe. Yet assessments of its significance for the "fate of Western civilization" – and for American national security more specifically – dramatically varied. Thus, before exploring in greater detail the wartime debate proper, we must turn our attention to the years between 1933,

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4 John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1976), 45–52; John Snell, *Wartime Origins of the East–West Dilemma over Germany* (New Orleans: The Hauser Press, 1959); Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945–1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
5 Cecil Brown, "Do You Know What You're Fighting," *Colliers* 112 (11 December 1943): 14.

when the German chancellor and the American president arrived in office, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. As Thomas Wolfe's example suggests, the key models of comprehending and representing the Third Reich were already in place by the outbreak of the war in Europe.

In an effort to understand what was happening in Germany and – more importantly – what it meant for their own country, Americans entered into discussions about the political preconditions and popular support for the Nazi regime. They evaluated the historical roots of National Socialist ideology in German culture, advanced conflicting interpretations of Nazi foreign policy aims, and deliberated on postwar prospects for German reeducation. These discussions took place within the government and among the interested public; they involved journalists, church leaders, businessmen, writers, diplomats and congressmen, experts on German history and politics, behavioral and social scientists working for either government agencies or private research institutions, and advocacy groups; the different views of Nazi Germany found expression in presidential addresses, committee and congressional deliberations, Hollywood movies, newsreels, magazine articles, radio shows, and public opinion polls.

The focal point of this study is the intellectual side of the American war effort: how was the enemy, Nazi Germany, imagined; how was it portrayed by foreign correspondents, by the president, and by America's propagandists? How was it understood by a wider audience? Throughout the war, public figures inside and outside government circles emphasized that this war had to be properly comprehended to be adequately waged and won. Expressing this view, journalist Dorothy Thompson wrote in her widely read column a month after Pearl Harbor: "Ideas are as necessary to win this war as weapons."[6]

Relevance of Public and Elite Opinion

Little effort has been made in the existing literature to view American official policy deliberations on Nazi Germany in the context of contemporary media and public controversies and to assess the reciprocal lines of communication and influence.[7] This book addresses the lacuna by exploring the connections

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[6] Dorothy Thompson, "On the Record: More About Germany," 2 January 1942, Box 9, Series VI, Dorothy Thompson Papers [DT Papers], Syracuse University.

[7] In addition to the earlier cited studies by Snell, Blum, and John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War: 1941–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), several recent monographs have deepened our understanding of specific aspects of the government's wartime campaign against Nazi Germany. Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade. Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War Against Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), provides an overview of the official perspective on Nazi Germany. The political scientist focuses on the president and his reading of and reactions to public opinion (primarily surveys) and the media. More specifically, on the propaganda campaign against the Third Reich with an emphasis on the bureaucratic dimension, see Clayton D. Laurie, *The Propaganda Warriors: America's Crusade Against Nazi Germany* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996). More interested in the "shadow warriors'" intellectual efforts is Christof Mauch, *Schattenkrieg gegen Hitler. Das Dritte Reich im Visier der amerikanischen Geheimdienste 1941–1945* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1999). Thomas Reuther's *Die ambivalente Normalisierung. Deutschlanddiskurs und Deutschlandbilder in den USA, 1941–1955* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner

between the public and the governmental debates on Germany. My main focus is neither the well-known administrative nor the highly publicized individual conflicts on "how to treat the Germans." Rather, by examining representative examples of American official and public understandings of the Third Reich, this study aims to elucidate the political and cultural underpinnings of how Americans saw themselves, their nation's role on the world stage, and, of course, the country that was to become their main adversary. The picture that emerges is a surprisingly multifaceted one that does not easily square with the conventional literature on American simplistic world views and Manichaean enemy images.

Obviously, public opinion matters in a democratic society.[8] The story of American diplomacy in the 1930s and 1940s provides ample evidence for the president's and other political-minded people's concern with popular attitudes, views, and interpretations. A pertinent and well-researched example is the so-called isolationist sentiment in the United States of the 1930s. Moreover, Franklin D. Roosevelt is well known for his intense interest in and adroit handling of public opinion and the media.[9] Opinion research, however, was still in its infancy at the time. Thus, contemporary public opinion polls in this book are primarily used to show what opinion-analysts and the government believed Americans were thinking.[10]

Verlag, 2000) is mainly concerned with the postwar changes of American official images of Germany. Goedde, *GIs and Germans*, explores the transformation of the American postwar image of Germany from a societal and cultural history perspective. Benjamin L. Alpers' study on *Dictators, Democracy, and American Public Culture. Envisioning the Totalitarian Enemy, 1920s–1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003) delineates the broader context of my own study. Finally, sociologist Jeffrey K. Olick provides a good survey of the Allied wartime debates and the German postwar responses in *In the House of the Hangman. The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943–1949* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

[8] Scholars from various disciplines have given different assessments of the relevance of public opinion for foreign relations. Melvin Small, "Public Opinion" in Michael J. Hogan, Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 165–76, and *Democracy and Diplomacy: The Impact of Domestic Politics on U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789–1994* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), esp. 52–79; Ralph B. Levering, *The Public and American Foreign Policy, 1918–1978* (New York: Morrow, 1978), esp. 19–36; recent trends in political science scholarship on foreign policy and public opinion have challenged an earlier "realist" consensus (Almond/Lippmann) that public opinion is volatile, incoherent, and uninformed and therefore *should* have no impact on the conduct of foreign policy: Ole R. Holsti, *Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), and Miroslav Nincic, *Democracy and Foreign Policy. The Fallacy of Political Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination. A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 173–201 and 274, more specifically in the context of Anglo-American reactions to the Holocaust: "Material presented by governments, the media and private sources was assimilated by ordinary people in an intricate way. The failure of many students of the Holocaust to recognize the complicated patterns of public opinion reveals a patronizing attitude to the populace of the liberal democracies."

[9] Richard Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society: The Roosevelt Administration and the Media, 1933–41.* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985); Betty Houdien Winfield, *FDR and the News Media* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Julian G. Hurstfield, *America and the French Nation, 1939–45* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1986); Casey, *Crusade.*

[10] For a brief overview of the early polling history in this country, see Seymour Sudman, *Polls and Surveys: Understanding What They Tell Us* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1988), ch. 2.

The intent of this study is not to answer the question of what Americans thought of Nazi Germany. Can there ever be a source base broad enough and a methodology sophisticated enough to answer such a question? Available are – apart from government documents – primarily public opinion polls and the popular media: press, radio, and film. Occasionally, more personal statements on the subject in letters to the editor or private correspondence are to be found. Apart from the bias contained in any collection, the polls and the individual statement mark the two extremes in the spectrum between the too broad and general and the unrepresentatively personal. I have relied extensively, but not exclusively, on the media, keeping in mind the warning that public opinion cannot be equated with published opinion, but also recalling the assessment of Richard Rovere, competent observer of American life in the 1930s and 1940s, that the magazines of that period "were, in effect, the popular literature of the nation, defending and reflecting the dominant views of the people, thus constituting both a source and a reflection of public opinion."[11]

In tracing the genesis, transmission, appropriation, and political relevance of American views of Nazi Germany, it is useful to distinguish between three levels: popular culture and opinion, elite discourse, and governmental debates. A noticeable gap existed between the surprisingly charitable attitudes among the larger public, primarily motivated by ethnic identification with Germans and often skeptical of the reported news from Nazi Germany, on the one hand, and the Roosevelt administration's more unforgiving views and the wartime need to create a compelling enemy image, on the other. It was precisely this tension between popular and official understanding that opened up the possibility for complex and fruitful arguments among American elites. A broad range of political, cultural, professional, and societal intermediaries played a central role in shaping popular understanding of Nazi Germany and also laid foundations for governmental deliberations. It included foreign correspondents stationed in Europe in addition to columnists back home; American businessmen with contacts in Germany and access to the president or the media; refugee scholars working for governmental intelligence offices, for Hollywood, or for advocacy groups; screen writers; novelists; academics; and professionals, in particular from the social and behavioral sciences, testifying before congressional committees and offering their expert comments in radio talk shows. These people, with privileged access to the government, the media, and German reality, processed a wealth of contradictory and complex information and made sense of it. They produced meaningful, albeit competing, interpretations of Nazi ideology and practice and its relevance to the United States.[12]

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[11] Richard H. Rovere, "American Magazines in Wartime," *New Republic* 110 (6 March 1944): 308–12.

[12] Robert B. Westbrook makes a strong argument for why we should analyze the views of intellectuals (elite) and ordinary people in a single context: "There need not be a sharp divide between the historical study of the ethical imagination of those to whom we are willing to grant the title of philosopher and those to whom we are not. Just as one can better understand the work of the former by understanding the life they share with the latter, so clues to the assumptions and tensions in the thinking of the latter can be found in the work of the former, where they are often more elaborated.... If the history of popular political theory finds its documents in strange places, so too it finds many of the best questions it poses to these document in the work

Enemy Images and the Culture of War

The American wartime image of Germany as an enemy had to be constructed from various ideas and sources. The American public was not predisposed to hate or fear Germany – even after that country had declared war on the United States. Those Americans – for example, foreign correspondents or government officials – who had recognized the aggressive potential of the Third Reich already during the 1930s and who worried about popular indifference or naiveté even more intensely after Pearl Harbor, could not simply tap mental resources of latent popular animosity. They had to explain to a mostly skeptical society why Germany posed a threat to their country. The fact that the activists – inside the government and beyond – did not stick to the same script did not help the effectiveness of their educational campaigns. Different interpretations of the nature of the Nazi regime and of its relevance for the United States competed for public acceptance. The level of acceptance that certain paradigmatic conceptions of Germany achieved within American society depended on how they fared in domestic tests of plausibility and political appeal and on how effectively they could be integrated with preexisting views of Germany.

The methodological literature on the role of images and in particular enemy images in international relations is legion.[13] Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, a shift occurred from a preoccupation with misperceptions and other distortions of reality to a recognition that any human understanding of reality can take place only within a culturally configured context.[14] Whereas the political scientist acknowledges that interpretations have to be accepted as real, the intellectual historian goes one step farther: "without human ideas, symbols or interpretations, reality as we know it disappears from the world."[15]

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of philosophers." "Fighting for the American Family: Private Interests and Political Obligation in World War II" *The Power of Culture: Critical Essays in American History*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 195–221, here 197.

[13] A useful overview is Ragnhild Fiebig-von Hase, "Introduction," Fiebig-von Hase and Ursula Lehmkuhl, eds., *Enemy Images in American History* (Providence: Berghahn, 1997), 1–40. My own understanding has been informed by Knud Krakau, "Einführende Überlegungen zur Entstehung und Wirkung von Bildern, die sich Nationen von sich und anderen machen," in idem and Willi Paul Adams, eds., *Deutschland und Amerika: Perzeption und historische Realität* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1985), 9–18. On the psychological foundations of enemy images see Kurt R. and Kati Spillmann, "Some Sociobiological and Psychological Aspects of 'Images, of the Enemy,'" in Fiebig-von Hase/Lehmkuhl, *Enemy*, 43–63. The political scientist Yaacov Y.I. Vertzberger, *The World in Their Minds. Information Processing, Cognition, and Perception in Foreign Policy Decisionmaking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), laid out an ambitious, methodologically rigorous approach to images and information processes with a view to helping policy makers avoid misperceptions of reality.

[14] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), 81 and 90, knew all about this cultural configuration several decades earlier: "We imagine most things before we experience them . . . we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture."

[15] Lloyd S. Kramer, "Intellectual History and Reality: The Search for Connections," *Historical Reflections* 13 (1986): 527f. Ole R. Holsti, "Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy,"

Clifford Geertz describes "ideology as a cultural system" and explains its function as a map for unfamiliar social and political realities and as a matrix for the creation of collective consciousness.[16] All individual and collective expression is possible only within a general idiom structured and informed by a specific social, political, and cultural framework. Images and interpretations are procedures to render a world of infinite complexities intelligible by producing finite concepts and by creating meaning. Our primary use of images is to construct through them the reality in which we then operate.

But as this study shows, images form only part of our comprehension of the world. People understand reality by telling stories about themselves and others. We invent or adapt narrative structures to organize our knowledge and experience. We do not directly act on the world but on certain ideas and beliefs that we hold about the world in which we live.[17]

National stereotypes – which constituted a part of the broader, more complex debate on Nazi Germany – are characterized by their longevity and their resistance to change. Only dramatic and cumulative events result in revisions. Certainly the Nazi dictatorship, war, and genocide qualify as such. Yet the Holocaust hardly affected the American image of Germany during the war, and it took even longer before its impact and that of other atrocities and perversions of the Third Reich became fully visible in American images of Germany. One reason for this tenacity lies in the fact that heterostereotypes (i.e., images that one group or nation holds of another) are for the most part not based on direct, personal experience but rather on "secondary experiences" such as the reception and adoption of images and opinions presented in the national media, textbooks, movies, political debates, and literary texts. More difficult to determine, but no less powerful, is a third layer in which national images are rooted: the subconscious acceptance of norms and ideas prevalent in one's immediate social environment, family, school, neighborhood, church, or ethnic group.[18]

Images carry the imprint of the culture that produces them. Accordingly, they tell us as much about their own culture as about the one that they depict. This relation between self and other plays an important role, too, in this study

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in John C. Farrell and Asa P. Smith, eds., *Image and Reality in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 16–39.

[16] Clifford Geertz, "Chapter 8: Ideology as a Cultural System," in id., *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 193–233. More relevant for the study of international relations is Michael H. Hunt, "Ideology," in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 221–40.

[17] Jürgen Straub, ed., *Erzählung, Identität und historisches Bewußtsein* [*Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität* Vol. 1] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), cf. in particular the contributions by D.E. Polkinghorne, J.S. Bruner, J. Straub, and K.J. Gergen; Clifford Geertz, "Learning with Bruner," *The New York Review of Books*, 10 April 1997, p. 23f. The psychologist Jerome S. Bruner has demonstrated the relevance of these procedures in the development of children. During the war he worked for the OWI.

[18] For a synopsis relevant for this study, see the beginning of Chapter 1. Cf. also Wulf Schmiese, *Fremde Freunde. Deutschland und die USA zwischen Mauerfall und Golfkrieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 21–8.

of American responses to Nazi Germany. American ethnic self-identification and basic political assumptions shaped that understanding and put significant limits on what many Americans could believe and imagine about German behavior and intentions.

The most basic definition of an enemy image requires the combination of a perception of alterity with a sense of fear: "'Others' are classified as 'enemies' if their appearance is coupled with some kind of extreme threat perception."[19] This truism already provides an important clue about why American wartime images of Germany were so ambiguous: many Americans thought they knew and understood Germans. Germans were thought to be basically "like us." Considering the growing and fashionable body of literature on "otherness" – not only in times of war, but also as a more durable cultural phenomenon – the striking and defining characteristic of American popular images during the 1930s and 1940s was precisely that Americans did not recognize an "other" in the German people but rather themselves. Consequently, Americans had to be convinced by those who identified Nazi Germany as a threat to the United States that there was something newly ominous about that nation.

Up to the very end of the war effort, U.S. propagandists paid their respects to the lingering positive associations that the enemy country could evoke: the final American wartime propaganda film, carrying the message not only of Germany's utter destructiveness and depravity but also claiming historical roots for this collective "character deformation," spliced footage from the newly liberated concentration camps and other scenes of extreme horror with touristy material showing girls dancing in Black Forest costumes, symphony orchestras, and charming landscapes with smiling people. The film argued that Americans had allowed themselves to be fooled by Germany's attractive surface before, only to be shocked by its brutal behavior afterward. It admonished the viewers not to be so forgetful this time and to recognize once and for all Germany's potential for disaster.

Those Americans who sought to create an enemy image of Germany at the beginning of World War II had at their disposal an older enemy image of that country manufactured only a generation earlier. However, that proved to be more harmful than useful to the propagandists of the new war. The previous enemy image had had to be constructed, too, and a lot of intellectual and organizational effort on the part of the Creel Committee and beyond, in particular among intellectual and academic circles in the United States, had gone into that process (Chapter 1). Yet, over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, a majority of Americans, as public opinion polls showed, came to reject that propaganda and believed that the stories of German atrocities had been made up or exaggerated and that they had entered the war partly in response to British hate propaganda on Germany and domestic warmongers. The enemy image of Germany was partly discredited – partly eclipsed by the emergence of a young democratic republic in lieu of Kaiserism.

[19] Fiebig-von Hase, "Introduction," 2f. and Spillmann and Spillmann, "Psychological Aspects," 50.

The lessons that most Americans drew from the past did not pertain to Germany's inherent militarism but were a critical reflection of their own nation's misguided idealism or the Wilson administration's missteps in the past war-waging and peacemaking efforts. Many Americans decided that they had to be on guard, not against German authoritarianism and aggression but against domestic propagandists and weapon manufacturers. Thus, the surviving images of Germany were at best equivocal.[20]

American propagandists in World War II knew about the tension, ambiguity, and fluidity in these earlier popular views. Accordingly, they first turned to another prop to focus the enemy image of Germany anew: conspiracies.[21] They portrayed the peril that arose from Nazi Germany as a carefully prepared, long-hatched plan to wage a war of aggression for an uncontested rule of the world. During the war, this formula was best illustrated in the 1944 Paramount movie *The Hitler Gang*. After the war the "conspiracy" construct played a crucial role in the charges brought against the Nazi elites in the war-crime trials of Nuremberg. This presentation of the German menace reinforced an existing popular preference as well as a central liberal tenet: to differentiate between the people, on the one hand, and their government, the regime, and the conspiring elites, on the other. For the most part American officials and public commentators referred to the "Nazi gangsters." Only late in the war and with considerable encouragement from European Allies did official U.S. propaganda pick up the theme of continuity in German military traditions and of the deep roots of Nazi ideology in German culture and history to underline the enormity of the menace and of the postwar challenge.

One of the central theses of this book consequently complicates the arguments in the standard literature on enemy images and on a particular style in American foreign policy. Much of that literature works from Kenneth Boulding's assumption that "the national image . . . is the last great stronghold of unsophistication. . . . Nations are divided into 'good' and 'bad' – the enemy is all bad, one's own nation is of spotless virtue."[22] More specifically for the U.S. context, scholars have offered important explanations to account for the Manichaean streak and crusading spirit in its foreign-policy rhetoric and culture of confrontation. George F. Kennan compared his country to a not very bright primeval monster – slow to wrath as a peaceful democracy, but, once roused, ready to destroy in blind determination and with little discrimination both its adversary and its own interests.[23] Historian Knud Krakau explains this escalating momentum with greater care. According to liberal internationalism or Wilsonianism, the international system is by nature peaceful and rational. Hence, the aggressor who violates peace, reason, and nature all at once puts

[20] Cf. David M. Kennedy, "Culture Wars: The Sources and Uses of Enmity in American History," in Fiebig-von Hase/Lehmkuhl, *Images*, 339–56.

[21] Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 3–40.

[22] Kenneth Boulding, "National Images and International Systems," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 3 (1959), 120–31, here 130.

[23] George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 66.

himself outside enlightened humanity and has to be punished with all neces-
sary might and, if need be, forcibly reformed.[24] Krakau emphasizes the elements
of self-imposed world historical mission and religiously grounded chosenness
and exceptionalism, which the diplomatic historian Anders Stephanson picks
up to weave into a compelling outline of American nationalism that shapes
foreign policy and military engagements – finding much self-righteous zea-
lousness.[25] The American war effort against the Third Reich nonetheless stands
as a notable exception to the general patterns Krakau and others have discerned.

Surely, among all of America's enemies, National Socialist Germany would
have fit the characterization embodiment of evil well. Yet, although President
Roosevelt on a few occasions used such religiously charged terms, pragmatic
calculations and political restraint prevailed in the official response, comple-
mented by skepticism and lingering empathy with the enemy population among
the larger public. Even wartime views of Germany showed little exaggeration
and defamation, and much information and deliberation. At the same time,
however, American assessments of the German enemy in World War II under-
estimated for the most part Nazi Germany's potential and reality. The issue
of disbelief was an important one at three junctures in American responses to
Nazism. Hope that the Nazi party's governmental responsibility would bring
about moderation prevailed in 1933 and beyond. During the so-called great
debate of 1939–41, most Americans remained skeptical of the interventionists'
claim that Nazi Germany was bent on a quest for world domination and con-
stituted a serious threat to their security. Finally, it was a year later, in 1942,
when the first substantiated information on the systematic murder of European
Jews reached Allied governments and the public, that the inability or refusal to
believe again played a crucial role. Germany's war aims and the crimes com-
mitted pursuing them were in fact worse than what most Americans imagined
and were ready to believe.[26]

Probing the Complexities of the Third Reich

Few historians appear to be surprised by the ease and rapidity of the mental
shifting of gears that turned America's most formidable adversary into a tool
and soon an ally against a new enemy, the Soviet Union. The rift in the anti-
Hitler coalition and the beginning of the Cold War are generally accepted
as the motivation behind America's altered views of and plans for defeated
Germany.[27] Yet the transformation from enemy into ally can be understood

[24] Knud Krakau, "American Foreign Relations – An American Style?" Erich Angermann and
Marie-Luise Frings, eds., *Oceans Apart? Comparing Germany and the United States* (Stuttgart:
Klett-Cotta, 1981), 121–44.
[25] Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny. American Expansionism and the Empire of Right* (New
York: Hill & Wang, 1995).
[26] I have sought to overcome a general weakness of "image" studies, namely the absence of
references to the historical reality of the discussed topic, often a result of an author's exclusive
expertise in U.S. foreign policy rather than in "area studies," by relating the debate of the 1930s
and 1940s to current scholarship on Nazi Germany.
[27] Goedde, *GIs and Germans*, offers an important corrective showing how personal postwar
relations between American soldiers and German civilians effected a change that accommodated
the respective wartime images of one's own nation and of the other.