CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-08543-5 — Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany
Andreas Agocs
Excerpt
More Information

Introduction: Antifascist Humanism and the Dual Legacies of Weimar

In July 1945, Berlin was in ruins. Only weeks earlier, the capital of the former Reich had experienced the traumatic violence and chaos of the early days of Russian occupation.[1] On Masurenallee, a major thoroughfare that traverses the affluent middle-class borough of Charlottenburg, one block is still taken up by the semicircular broadcast center, the Haus des Rundfunks. Built in 1931, the unadorned, functional design of the structure reflects the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) style of the Weimar period's Bauhaus modernism. The center's left-leaning architect, Hans Poelzig, lost his position after National Socialism came to power in 1933.[2] During the war, the building served as the seat of Joseph Goebbels's propaganda radio, the Großdeutsche Rundfunk, yet the compound somehow survived the bombings that laid so much else in the city to waste. The building's turbulent and contested history continued into the early postwar period. Even though Charlottenburg was to become part of the British sector of divided Berlin in early July 1945, the Soviets would hold on to and broadcast from the building at Masurenallee until 1952.[3]

Like so much in Berlin's architectural landscape, the Haus des Rundfunks embodies many of the contradictions, ruptures, and continuities of German history during the middle decades of the twentieth century: the close relationship between the arts and politics; the battle between left-wing and right-wing visions of modernity; and the influence

[1] For accounts of the year 1945 in Berlin, see Anthony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin 1945* (New York: Viking, 2002); Giles MacDonogh, *After the Reich: The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 95–124; Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

[2] See Matthias Donath, "Poelzig, Hans," in *Sächsische Biografie*, hrsg. vom Institut für Sächsische Geschichte und Volkskunde e.V., bearb. von Martina Schattkowsky, Online-Ausgabe: www.isgv.de/saebi/ (3.8.2014), accessed August 2, 2014. For Poelzig's role in the Weimar period's Neues Bauen (New Building) movement, see Sabine Hake, *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

[3] Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg rbb, Haus des Rundfunks, "Hier spricht Berlin," www.haus-des-rundfunks.de/, accessed December 27, 2014.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-08543-5 — Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany
Andreas Agocs
Excerpt
More Information

of global political power struggles playing out in Germany.[4] In July 1945, most inhabitants of the city probably had the more immediate realities of a lost war, lack of food and housing, and an uncertain future at the hands of the Allies on their minds. Yet on July 4, 1945, approximately 1,500 Berliners filled the Große Sendesaal, the main broadcasting room at Masurenallee, to attend the inauguration of an organization whose main objective was the resurrection of German culture. The Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands (Cultural League for the Democratic Renewal of Germany) was one of the first organizations that had been licensed by the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD). Its first president was the expressionist poet and Communist Party of Germany (KPD) member Johannes R. Becher, although the Kulturbund's member- and leadership included antifascist intellectuals from a wide range of political persuasions. The speeches at the inauguration were preceded by music by Beethoven and Tchaikovsky to underscore the theme of German and Russian reconciliation.[5] Becher shared the stage with, among others, a Protestant pastor and several professors and artists. In an emotional address, the Communist writer described the Kulturbund's goal of renewing German culture after the barbarity of the Nazi years. The coalition of antifascist intellectuals represented in the Kulturbund was to "resurrect" the "other Germany" by building on the "rich heritage of humanism, classicism, and the workers' movement."[6]

The ceremonial inauguration of the Kulturbund has been documented and described many times, especially in the historiographical literature of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Yet, the event still opens up questions that frame the analysis in the pages of this book. What motivated this heightened emphasis on the role of German culture so shortly after the war, in a defeated city that lacked the most basic material goods? Why did the antifascist intellectuals who staged the event seem to believe that their eclectic vision of German cultural renewal would connect with the masses and create a new, "other" Germany? And how did their project of a regenerated and reunified German culture play out against the context of the brewing Cold War confrontation that made occupied Germany its battleground and ultimately led to the country's division?

Like the building that provided the setting for its inauguration, the Kulturbund ties into many of the turbulent and contradictory themes

[4] For more on the relationship of architecture and memory in German history, see Hake, *Topographies of Class*; Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory, 1870–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
[5] Toby Thacker, *Music after Hitler, 1945–1955* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 35.
[6] Archiv der Akademie der Künste Berlin, Nachlass Becher, 39/3, Blatt 7, Bl. 8.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-08543-5 — Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany
Andreas Agocs
Excerpt
More Information

in twentieth-century German history. The hopeful atmosphere at the Kulturbund's inauguration does not mark the beginning of the project of Germany's cultural renewal, and neither did the spirit of nonpartisan "antifascist humanism" survive unscathed into the years that followed. Rather, the establishment of the Kulturbund fell amid a period of intense and shifting debates on German identity and culture that played out between the beginning of the twentieth century and the late 1940s. This book traces the attempt by a group of German intellectuals – first in German exile communities, then in occupied Germany – to represent and "renew" a vaguely defined "humanist" German cultural tradition in response to both National Socialist propaganda and the anti-German sentiment that had built up in the world as a result of the war. Meant to heal the wounds and rifts opened by dictatorship, war, and exile, however, the idea of an "other" – and implicitly better and more unified – Germany ended up, after the hopeful speeches at the Kulturbund inauguration, as a rhetorical tool to distinguish the emerging East German state from its Cold War counterpart to the west.

In 1945 and into 1946, three years before the German division, the Kulturbund was still a nonpartisan coalition of antifascist intellectuals, even though the representatives of the KPD were steadily extending the party's influence. The leadership of the early Kulturbund, men such as the Communist Becher or the Christian Democrat vice mayor of Berlin, Ferdinand Friedensburg, embodied the experiences of a generation who had lived through the tumultuous upheavals of the first half of the twentieth century. Transcending their ideological and party differences, they shared a condemnation of fascism and Nazism, an appreciation of classical German culture, and an acceptance of a collective German need to atone for the crimes committed in the country's name. In addition, they believed in the responsibility of intellectuals to mobilize the masses in the cause of a "renewed" German culture, purged from the distortions and perversions of Nazi cultural policy.

The Kulturbund was modelled on the cooperation between bourgeois-liberal intellectuals and Communist Party activists in antifascist exile German "culture leagues" – both inside and outside Europe – since the 1930s. These loose coalitions introduced ideas of cultural renewal into antifascist mass politics, and they gave voice to the idea of an "other Germany" – a distinctive German Popular Front movement claiming to represent the heritage of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Heinrich Heine, and other classical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers. Their broadly defined and eclectic vision also drew from early twentieth-century ideals of pedagogical reform, Marxist materialism, and the rhetoric of Protestant martyrdom. The "classical" heritage of German

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-08543-5 — Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany
Andreas Agocs
Excerpt
More Information

culture was supposed to be the tonic that would heal Germany from the destructiveness of the Nazi legacy and the divisions it had created since the early 1930s. However, between the early 1930s and the late 1940s, the concept of the "other Germany" experienced multiple conceptual evolutions and intellectual front lines, first between German and Allied interpreters of German history, then, after 1945, between German former exiles and "inner émigrés," and, ultimately, between German intellectuals in the East and those in the West. Not surprisingly, the Kulturbund and its project of antifascist humanism did not survive as a pluralist, "nonpartisan" organization. Even before the foundation of the GDR as a Soviet client state, the Kulturbund would become a "mass organization" under the direction of the communist Socialist Unity Party (SED), which in turn exercised its pressure with the massive support of the Soviet occupation authorities. The pages that follow expose the ironic fractures that led from a movement aimed at restoring unity among German intellectuals to a discourse that entrenched the German division. As it turned out, the idea of an alternative German cultural tradition – born as a response to the Nazi appropriation of national traditions and driven by the need to find common ground between liberal and communist antifascists – was all too perfectly suited for the intellectual confrontation of a nation about to be divided.

At this narrative's center is a diverse cast of characters who shared a common involvement in the Kulturbund. They include the KPD functionary Alexander Abusch, who mediated between exile literary communities and the Moscow-based KPD during the war, and who decisively changed the dynamics of the Kulturbund after his return from Mexico to Berlin; Johannes R. Becher, the expressionist poet and later minister of culture of the GDR; Ferdinand Friedensburg, the leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in the Soviet Occupation Zone, who surprisingly found much common ground with German communists and the Soviet occupation authorities; Günther Weisenborn, the writer and former anti-Nazi activist, who made it his mission to preserve the legacy of the German resistance; and Wolfgang Harich, the young and provocative Marxist philosopher and journalist, who would become one of the leading dissidents in the early GDR.[7]

Even though the voices of the "other Germany's" male representatives are more prominent in these pages – and in the archival and published sources they are based on – their antifascist humanism was not a movement without influential and vocal women. The antifascist novelist Anna

[7] Ernst Niekisch, Georg Lukács, and Ernst Bloch, among others, also played key roles in the concept of socialist humanism but are not discussed in this work.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-08543-5 — Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany
Andreas Agocs
Excerpt
More Information

Seghers was part of the KPD circle around Abusch in Mexico as well as of the early Kulturbund, and she became an icon of the official GDR memory culture. The poet Ricarda Huch embodied many of the tropes of the "other Germany" even though she spent the Nazi years in "inner exile." A further study is needed to do justice to the role of women in the "other Germany and to its gendered aspects. But whether male or female, many of the intellectuals portrayed here combined a keen, even militant desire to redress the mistakes of Germany's past with a sense of cultural nationalism and, in some cases, shrewd political calculations and tactics. The unintended consequences and moral ambiguities of these individuals' project to represent a "better nation" offer a human perspective on the dramatic ruptures and subtle continuities in mid-twentieth-century European politics and culture.

Arguments and Themes

The narrative sketched thus far sets the stage for a number of interrelated arguments about twentieth-century German and European history. The first line of argument involves a new perspective on and assessment of antifascism. The widespread condemnation and demystification of antifascism was a necessary and perhaps inevitable outcome of the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s. As a result, for leading historians since the fall of the Berlin Wall, antifascism has been little more than a cynical smokescreen served to further Stalin's objective of binding intellectuals to his cause and expanding the power of Moscow-centric communist parties. According to the French historian François Furet, to name one of the most influential voices, the Soviet Union's model of communism "prolonged its tenancy thanks to anti-Fascism."[8] For Furet, antifascism – much like Marxism itself – was the misguided belief of sometimes well-meaning but ultimately naïve intellectuals in the utopian political vision of a united left, a blindness that Stalinist puppet masters in Moscow all too easily exploited.

[8] François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Deborah Furet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 24. Cf. Enzo Traverso, "The New Anti-Communism: Rereading the Twentieth Century," in Mike Haynes and Jim Wolfreys, eds., *History and Revolution: Refuting Revisionism* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 138–55; idem., *Á feu et à sang: de la guerre civile européenne, 1914–1945* (Paris: Stock, 2007). For a comparative study of the attraction of communism in general on Western European intellectuals after the war, see Thomas Kroll, *Kommunistische Intellektuelle in Westeuropa: Frankreich, Österreich, Italien und Großbritannien im Vergleich (1945–1956)* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2007). Also see *Témoigner entre histoire et mémoire. Revue pluridisciplinaire de la Fondation Auschwitz Bruxelles, No104 (July–September 2009): L'Antifascisme revisité. Histoire – idéologie – mémoire* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2009).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-08543-5 — Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany
Andreas Agocs
Excerpt
More Information

The rhetorical use and political function of antifascism in the GDR – a state that did not merely experience a "regime change," but disappeared altogether – became the subject of particular scrutiny; its official antifascism is usually seen as indicative of the shaky and flawed premises of the state's foundation. In his study of the founding of the GDR, Gareth Pritchard has demonstrated "how effective Stalinism proved at manipulating, exploiting and eventually neutralizing the idealism of the German Left."[9] Antifascism was, as Corey Ross sums up the interpretive findings since 1989, "nothing other than a propaganda coup that prevented internal criticism, encouraged a selective view of history, created and sustained a culture of enemy-hatred, prevented any genuine confrontation with the Nazi past, and that belittled or obscured 'communist crimes' such as the party purges or the incarceration of alleged 'political enemies' in the Soviet 'special camps' after the war."[10] Few scholars would completely discard the notion that antifascism was "a cynical attempt to create an alibi for the brutal Stalinization of East Germany [and other countries behind the Iron Curtain], and for an ongoing program of human rights abuses."[11] But pointing out that antifascism constituted a more complex, fractured, and dynamic phenomenon over the course of several decades is not the same as excusing or denying its use for the oppressive ends of twentieth-century communist dictatorships; after all, antifascism's failure is easier to diagnose for contemporary historians than for intellectuals whose experience of twentieth-century fascism's often murderous dynamics was direct and visceral.

While KPD ideology and the strategies of the Communist International (Comintern) provide important contexts, this book emphasizes antifascism's role as a *cultural* movement. Its political thrust intertwined

[9] Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR, 1945–1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 229.

[10] Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 178. Antonia Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus: Ein deutscher Mythos* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1993); Manfred Agethen, Eckhard Jesse, and Ehrhart Neubert (eds.), *Der missbrauchte Antifaschismus. DDR-Staatsdoktrin und Lebenslüge der deutschen Linken* (Freiburg: Herder, 2002); Dan Diner, "On the Ideology of Antifascism," trans. Christian Gundermann, "Legacies of Antifascism," *New German Critique* 67 (Winter 1996): 123–32. Cf. Mary Nolan, "Antifascism under Fascism: German Vision and Voices," *New German Critique* 67 (Legacies of Antifascism) (Winter 1996): 33–55. See also Josie McLellan, *Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades 1945–1989* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Christiane Wienand, "Remembered Change and Changes of Remembrance: East German Narratives of Anti-fascist Conversion," in Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port, eds., *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler* (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 99–118.

[11] Anthony Glees, Untitled review of *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* by Jeffrey Herf, *The Journal of Modern History* 72, 1 (March 2000): 274–6.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-08543-5 — Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany
Andreas Agocs
Excerpt
More Information

with and intervened in debates on German culture that were part of the country's experience of twentieth-century modernity. As a host of historiographical works have shown, the desire for culture to give unity to a diverse nation – paired with anxieties triggered by the rising influences of popular and commercialized mass culture – led to intense discussions of the proper definition and role of German culture in the Wilhelmine Empire.[12] By the end of the First World War, German culture was arguably split into three distinct manifestations: the "high culture" that served as the fundament of the nationalist-liberal or conservative educated upper-middle class; the popular mass entertainment industry, increasingly borrowing from American mass culture; and the extremely politicized cultural public sphere of Weimar democracy, with its class- and party-based versions of "agitation and propaganda" (agitprop). As Jost Hermand has shown, National Socialism, at least for some of its early adherents, was itself an expression of and attempt at overcoming these cultural divisions.[13]

However, as this book argues, by the 1930s and with the rise of fascism to power, concepts of "restoring cultural unity" or "renewing German culture" after a period of perceived degeneration were no longer exclusive projects of the reactionary political right. Rather, under the circumstances of European – and indeed global – politics in the first half of the twentieth century, a version of antifascism emerged among German exile intellectuals that rested less on the establishment of a utopian new social or economic order and more on the restoration and renewal of cultural ideals of a more tolerant and cosmopolitan, "humanist" German past. In other words, the antifascism that emerges in these pages was less revolutionary than restorative, which explains the sometimes strangely sounding evocations of both Karl Marx and Martin Luther, which characterized antifascist rhetoric before the war as well as in the postwar GDR. The concept of the "other Germany" implied the "resurrection" of a vague notion of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century humanist Germany, as well as of a more concrete pre-Nazi state of cultural and intellectual unity – a unity that had probably always been more wishful projection than tangible fact.

German intellectuals in exile – usually amidst great economic hardship and under constant threat of Goebbels's agents – organized writers'

[12] See Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

[13] See Jost Hermand, *Culture in Dark Times: Nazi Fascism, Inner Emigration, and Exile*, trans. Victoria W. Hill (New York: Berghahn, 2013), xi–xv, 122–40. See also Lutz Koepnick, "Culture in the Shadow of Trauma?" in Helmut Walser Smith, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 711–13.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

congresses in Paris, discussed Heine and Lessing in Great Britain, and staged Schiller plays in Mexico. For these intellectuals – communists, liberals, and conservatives – Hitler's defeat would lead to a "rebirth" of German culture based on an always vaguely defined "antifascist humanism": an awkward mixture of classical Weimar culture, Marxism, and a Protestant rhetoric of martyrdom and national reformation. This centrality of culture in the rhetoric of German antifascism seems to confirm a long-held and only recently refuted image. In a tradition going back to the early twentieth century, German intellectuals, especially from nationalist or conservative backgrounds, have described themselves as "unpolitical," in a supposed marked contrast to their counterparts in Britain and France.[14] Taken up and reinforced by the Allies during World War II, the image of the German intellectual – more interested in *Kultur* than in politics, and more influenced by the antidemocratic cultural criticism of Friedrich Nietzsche than by the liberal thought of John Stewart Mill or the public engagement of Emile Zola – became a staple in the historiography after 1945 and the cultural component of what became to be known as the German "special path."[15] Though many of the assumptions of the *Sonderweg* have been refuted, assumptions of a special German emphasis on aesthetics and *Innerlichkeit* (inner life) persist.[16]

German antifascism's turn toward "cultural renewal" took up older debates and discussions, but this was not a manifestation of an allegedly deep-seated German obsession with culture going back to the Romantic

[14] The classical and still influential works on this subject are Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*; Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964).

[15] For the classical *Sonderweg* interpretation, see the first four volumes of Hans-Ulrich Wehler's seminal *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Band 1: Vom Feudalismus des alten Reiches bis zur defensiven Modernisierung der Reformära, 1700–1815* (München: C. H. Beck, 1987); *Band 2: Von der Reformära bis zur industriellen und politischen "Deutschen Doppelrevolution," 1815–1845/49* (München: C. H. Beck, 1987); *Band 3: Von der "Deutschen Doppelrevolution" bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges, 1849–1914* (München: C. H. Beck, 1995); *Band 4: Vom Beginn des Ersten Welkriegs bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten, 1914–1949* (München: C. H. Beck, 1995). For the most influential critique of the *Sonderweg*, see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). For a summary of the *Sonderweg* debate, see William W. Hagen, "Master Narratives beyond Postmodernity: Germany's 'Separate Path' in Historiographical-Philosophical Light," *German Studies Review* XXX, 1 (February 2007): 1–32. Cf. Helmut Walser Smith, "When the Sonderweg Debate Left Us," *German Studies Review* XXXI, 2 (May 2008): 225–40.

[16] See, for example, Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); cf. Sean A. Forner, "Reconsidering the 'Unpolitical German': Democratic Renewal and the Politics of Culture in Occupied Germany," *German History* 32, 1 (March 2014): 53–78.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-08543-5 — Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany
Andreas Agocs
Excerpt
More Information

period. The emergence of culture at the forefront of German antifascism is tied to the rise and failure of the Europe-wide *Volksfront* (Popular Front) as political mass movement. As Jean-Michel Palmier has shown, after the successes of fascism in Europe in the mid-1930s, the struggle for and defense of culture became a project that drew participants among intellectuals from all European countries as well as the United States. Events like the International Congress for the Defence of Culture in Paris in 1935, for example, had their "roots in a cultural and political movement that developed steadily in France from the 1920s on."[17] The fascist threat to European culture was also a prime concern for the multinational pro-Republican participants in the Spanish Civil War a few years later.[18]

Yet, while part of larger transnational processes, German antifascism evolved in the context of more localized events. The first concrete test for the political effectiveness of the German Popular Front failed to win the Saar referendum in 1935 – the antifascist coalition's overwhelming political defeat meant that henceforth the struggle for German culture became the main front. In addition, for German opponents of the National Socialist regime, the identification with a vague concept of German humanism enabled communists, socialists, and liberals to define their positions while avoiding potentially conflicted discussions about a post-Nazi political and economic order. In an era when fascism claimed ownership of all aspects of society, cultural debates were immensely political, not only as a common ground that enabled coalitions between liberals and communists, but also as a tool that contested the claim of the Nazi regime to represent a racially and ideologically purified national culture.[19]

Initially, it was bourgeois liberal intellectuals such as Thomas Mann who called for the defense of the "other Germany" – the "humanist," i.e., tolerant and cosmopolitan culture embodied by the German Enlightenment (Kant, Lessing, Herder) as well as the "Weimar classics," Goethe, Schiller, and Hölderlin.[20] The emergence of the Popular Front expanded this list to include the mid-nineteenth-century democratic-revolutionary tradition

[17] Jean-Michel Palmier, *Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2006), 333.
[18] Ibid., 336–8.
[19] Whether fascism ever made good on its claim to "totalitarian" intrusion of the state into society is, of course, a matter of historiographical debate; see Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Vintage, 2004). For Nazi conceptions of culture, including the role of the "Weimar classics," see Hermand, *Culture in Dark Times*, 15–45.
[20] For a recent reevaluation of cosmopolitanism as a trait in German cultural history, see Franz Leander Fillafer and Jürgen Osterhammel, "Cosmopolitanism and the German Enlightenment," in Smith, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, 119–43.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-08543-5 — Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany
Andreas Agocs
Excerpt
More Information

of Heine and Marx. Given the vast range and diversity of this catalog, the exact contours of this antifascist humanism were never very concretely defined, except as a collage of everything German that was not explicitly National Socialist. Perhaps because of its vague definition and its broad range, the antifascist so-called humanist front survived even after the end of the Popular Front movement that set in with the Hitler–Stalin Pact of 1939; as these pages will show, it also continued in occupied Germany after 1945, where its dynamic shaped and was shaped by the emerging Cold War tensions in the occupation zones.

But the concept of culture espoused by the wartime "humanist front" was not only open-ended in its definition and vague in its content. It also made for an uneasy marriage of the "dual legacies of Weimar," which had seemingly contradicted each other before 1933: the bourgeois-liberal ideal of traditional "high culture" – with the "Weimar classics," Goethe and Schiller, as its foundation – and the leftist demand for a politically engaged art, which characterized much of the mass culture of the Weimar republic. As I argue in this book, the result was a peculiar and politically volatile mixture of nineteenth-century cultural nationalism and twentieth-century politics of mass mobilization.[21] The demand for the humanist restoration of classical Weimar culture blended with calls for the "total mobilization of art" – a term nationalist right-wing author Ernst Jünger used in the 1920s, as did left-wing dramatist Erwin Piscator at the antifascist congress in Barcelona in 1936.[22] It also finds echoes in the rhetoric and the programs of antifascists after 1945, from the Kulturbund inauguration to the First German Writers' Congress in October 1947.

Another line of argument in this work involves the period in Germany after 1945 and the consolidation of Communist rule in the Soviet Occupation Zone. Much of the recent scholarship on twentieth-century Germany has complicated the notion of 1945 as a "zero hour" (*Stunde Null*). Without denying the ruptures that occurred with the German capitulation in May 1945, this study emphasizes the transitional character of the years between the early 1940s and early 1950s.[23] This book

[21] See Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik: Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1987). See also James M. Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977). For the central role of mass mobilization in the first half of Europe's twentieth century, see also Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage, 1998). For the mobilization of the German middle classes, see Peter Fritzsche, *Rehearsals for Fascism: Populism and Political Mobilization in Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[22] See Palmier, *Weimar in Exile*, 54, 163.

[23] See Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Germany Is No More: Defeat, Occupation, and the Postwar Order," in Smith, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*, 593–614; Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat,*

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org