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The Democratic Gap
Transcultural Confrontations of German Immigrants and the Promise of American Democracy

European Views of the United States Volume 5

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Introduction

The history of German-American encounters represents a complex system of cultural exchange and confrontations over a period of more than three centuries. The significance of immigrant response patterns to pressures of acculturation, xenophobia, and cultural misunderstandings have received comparatively little attention among scholars. Instead, a harmonized history of cultural achievements created the impression that German-American traditions played a leading role in American culture. Despite its undeniable influence, the significance and function of the German cultural impact in the US is often closer to myth than to reality, this is demonstrated for example in the persisting Muhlenberg legend concerning how German almost became the official language of the United States. Although immigrants such as the Prussian officer Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben or the scientist Albert Einstein could become American heroes, some American leaders including such as Benjamin Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt had a strong aversion to Germans. We should not continue to perceive the German-American experience as a success story *par excellence* in which roughly seven million immigrants acculturated to the American mainstream. This book follows a revisionist trajectory. I am interested in German-American encounters resulting from a clash of competing, ultimately conflicting, visions of democracy.

Many German-American immigrants organized themselves in groups. They considered themselves “Uncle Sam’s healthiest adopted children” and the best representatives of American ideals. In my analysis, I will shift the focus to intellectual immigrants who became disenchanted with German-Americana and fashioned themselves into model American democrats. By calling attention to their Americanness they unintentionally complicated the process of socio-cultural integration. From this perspective, German-

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3  See fig. 1 Frederick Graetz, “A Family Party—The 200th Birthday of the Healthiest of Uncle Sam’s Adopted Children,” *Puck* 3 Oct. 1883. The artist celebrates the history of German-American immigration. The ethnic group identity of the German-Americans on display must be acknowledged, as Kathleen Neils Conzen argues, as an “invention” (131).

4  There has never been a coherent image of “America” in Germany. German immigrants responded in a multifaceted manner to the actual challenges of acculturation they
American encounters might reveal a history not so much marked by harmony but rather by discontinuity.

Critical reflections regarding disconcerting encounters with what I call “the democratic gap,” namely the discrepancy between democratic ideals and reality, recur like a leitmotif in German-American history. What happens when an immigrant becomes a proud naturalized American yet is denied recognition as an American citizen or when his Americanness comes under question due to allegedly un-American activities? Such a question demands a focus that is both national and transnational. I am particularly interested in the encounters in their new homeland. Just like the concept of “America” needs to be contextualized in each chapter, so does the term “German.” It needs further clarification since this analysis will cover more than two hundred years of immigration history during which the borders of Germany have changed dramatically. In his memoirs *Five Germanys I have Known* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2006), the German-born historian Fritz Stern emphasizes these changes in politics, cultural aspirations, racial discourses, and borders. I will introduce the term “German” as a reference point in a linguistic, cultural, and ethnic sense. Before 1806, my analysis will include the German-speaking immigrants and their descendants of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Afterwards, I will use the term to refer to the German Confederation with its follow-up organization the North German Confederation (1815–1871), and the German Empire (1871–1918). In the twentieth century, “Germany” is represented, respectively, by the Weimar Republic (1919–1933), Nazi Germany (1933–1945), the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) (1949–1990), and by the re-united Germany after 1990. As a matter of course, these “Germanies” also exemplify shifting notions of what constitutes a German national identity.

My approach follows along efforts to internationalize American studies in the sense of Djelal Kadir, Carolyn Porter, Amy Kaplan, and other pioneers in the internationalization of American studies, to go beyond the American nation state, and to include international relations and public policy in order to better understand developments in American culture. See in this context Djelal Kadir, “To World, To Globalize: Comparative Literature’s Crossroads,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 41.1 (2004): 1–9; Amy Kaplan, “The Tenacious Grasp of American Exceptionalism,” *Comparative American Studies* 2 (2004): 153–59; Carolyn Porter, “What We Know That We Don’t Know: Remapping Literary Studies,” *American Literary History* 6.3 (1994): 467–526. However, I do not propose an oppositional counter-perspective from national outsiders or focus on non-American national agendas. By paying special attention to naturalized foreigners from Germany, I hope to bring into perspective the dissent of the national outsider who has become an insider with an international background. Winfried Fluck rightfully reminds us that a theorist or artist from another country does not automatically offer a transnational point of view. We need to be careful to identify what kind of perspectives really hold the potential to be transnational and what approaches become complicit in an agenda established by U.S.-American institutions. The analytical trajectory of American society and culture would be “still guided by American ideals, albeit now more inclusively defined” (Fluck, “Inside” 27). My
in those people in Germany who dream of becoming Americans and then fashion themselves into what they consider to be an “exemplary American.” The degree of enthusiasm invested in the promise of American democracy determines the intensity of the immigrant’s commitment to demonstrate his or her Americanness. From this assumption, a number of questions arise: Why has the promise of American democracy been so persuasive since the founding year of the United States despite the prejudice regarding cultural inferiority, a history of slavery and genocide, violations of human rights, imperial self-righteousness, and media manipulations? What kinds of response patterns evolve after the shock of arrival in the United States and the realization of its democratic shortcomings? What happens when the declaration of one’s personal independence and freedom results in an experience that is disconcerting rather than a fulfillment of expectations? In order to answer these questions I will focus on special cases of transcultural confrontations and comparisons.

As far as the history of immigration is concerned, a comparative perspective has much to offer. Monographs and studies on individual immigrant groups in specific time periods and places abound. However, much of the scholarly material on immigration and cross-national comparative history has a rather narrow focus. For example, scholars compared present-day immigrants with their predecessors, or analyzed time-bound, culture-bound, or city-bound assumptions. My study tries to avoid the pitfalls of what George Frederickson has identified as the “illusion of total regularity” or the “illusion of absolute uniqueness,” which often serves as a basis of ethnic approach aims to focus on intercultural spaces and diasporic conditions without losing sight of the persuasive powers of the conception of the nation state.

In addition, it is important to ask to what extent German intellectual constructions of their own American identity resemble claims African Americans have brought forth during different stages of their struggle for freedom and equality. While acknowledging the difference between ethnicity and race in the American cultural context, one could argue that German intellectual émigrés developed a sense of what W.E.B. Du Bois called a “double consciousness” (9) in their struggle to become model Americans. While this specific African American pattern of finding one’s identity through one’s cultural “otherness” has been productively applied to the “black Atlantic” and the formation of modernity by Paul Gilroy, certain elements of identity constructions in the African American experience can be transferred to the experience of German émigrés. This aspect represents a particularly fruitful topic for the discussion of German-American confrontations since the socio-cultural situation of African Americans has often achieved the status of a test case regarding the principles of American democracy. Gilroy explained that the “problem of weighing the claims of national identity against other contrasting varieties of subjectivity and identification has a special place in the intellectual history of blacks in the west” (30).
immigrant scholarship (65). The analysis regarding constructions of an imaginary America and the actual experience of becoming an American citizen will be contextualized with the struggles of another group whose fate many immigrants perceived to be a test case of American democracy: the socio-political, economic, and cultural struggle for equality of African Americans. I will describe different forms of confrontations including confrontations of the idealized notions of “America” and the actual experience of living in the United States, confrontations of naturalized foreigners and nativists, confrontations of inside and outside perspectives, and finally confrontations of reform strategies by German immigrants and by African American intellectuals.

In a first step, I will address the history of German-American encounters and discuss alternative approaches beyond the emphasis on cultural contributions. Rather than arguing in favor of a familiar narrative of successful acculturation, I will investigate questions about acculturation, which bring elements of discontinuity and confrontation to the forefront. The first chapter will include a close analysis of the function of patriotism among German immigrants, response patterns to the democratic gap, and the notion of a thrill created, staged, and perpetuated in the ritual of the naturalization process. I will introduce a theoretical framework to identify competing conceptions of national identity, and the promise of American democracy in both Germany and the United States respectively.

The focus on German intellectual immigrants results from the fact that they repeatedly addressed the failures of American culture to recognize the social, economic, and political rights of African Americans and, what is equally important, reflected on their dissent in one way or another.

While The Federal Republic of Germany experienced phases in which young people in particular voiced dissent against American politics, for example during the escalation of the Vietnam War or the change of the U.S. Arms Control Policy in the 1980s, the responses after 9/11 had a different quality. The more American culture has become a staple in a globalized world, the more intensified have frictions become. The accusations range from unrestricted self-righteousness in international affairs to the charge of imperialistic strategies in Afghanistan and Iraq, violations of human rights in Guantánamo, and political isolationism. Demonstrations of dissent spread across a broad spectrum of the German population and included in addition to public intellectual figures, liberals and conservatives, teenagers and older people and the average people from the streets as well as intellectuals. The many causes of this dissident among many Germans includes the disparity between the idealized image of “America” as a democratic beacon for the world and its evident inconsistencies in maintaining this fantasy.

With Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations regarding the effect of a democratic environment to distinguish oneself from others in the cultural sphere, this book takes a fresh look at immigrant acts of patriotism. Frictions between natives and naturalized...
Americanness function as a means to distinguish oneself from other Americans who appear to lack enthusiasm for the moral responsibility of American citizenship or who take it for granted. The claim of being an American can be described in aesthetic terms as a “thrill” since many immigrants describe their naturalization as an “intense emotion or excitement,” which is the standard definition for the term. This excitement results from the creation of a fantasy space and a fictitious self-fashioning into an American prior to their actual arrival on American soil. Not being Americans by birthright, immigrants repeatedly emphasize the special experience of having had to earn their citizenship and democratic rights. In this context, patriotism seems to acquire a dimension of self-fashioning. By concentrating on the function of patriotism, I will reveal hidden motives behind German immigrants’ declarations of Americanness.

The trajectory of mapping the confrontation of inside and outside perspectives on the promise of American Democracy calls for a specific focus and a fresh structural approach. Instead of creating a chronological narrative of the German immigrant experience, I will focus on six fields of conflict, which emerged during different phases of transatlantic encounters. At the center will be the conflict between the fantasy construct of “America” and the experience of arriving in the socio-cultural reality of the United States. In order to frame these conflicting moments of the imaginary with actual spaces, I adopt the term “force field” which was first developed by the German-American social scientist Kurt Lewin. Lewin’s concept is the

foreigners over questions of racial equality, liberty, and freedom are thereby transferred from the political to the cultural sphere. Patriotic performances can be observed in moments of conflict and discussions about issues ranging from abolitionism, emancipation, human rights, civil rights, or how to confront national traumas. The comparisons I offer in my analysis produce transcultural confrontations that will, among other things, show how immigrants and African Americans combine patriotism and dissent to turn the promise of American democracy into reality.


Lewin was responsible for establishing the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1945. As Lewin pointed out, the center was “devoted to the development of scientific concepts, methods, and theories of group life which should lead to a deeper understanding and permit a more intelligent management of social problems in small and large settings” (“Research” 135). Though less known today than his contemporaries Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung, some scholars such as Christopher Kuipers go so far as to argue that the key founder of social and organizational psychology had an even greater impact on contemporary psy-
result of his biographical experience as an immigrant and evolved under the impression of a looming World War after his emigration to the United States in 1933. Conflicts are central to his force field theory and tied to the experience of frustration. A “field” is dynamic and defined by a person’s (or a group’s) motives, values, needs, moods, goals, anxieties, and ideals. He argues that an individual’s or a collective group mind can be described in a topological constellation of constructs. Lewin’s force field analysis offers a series of steps including a description of the current situation, a notion of the desired situation, an analysis regarding in which direction the situation will develop if action is not being taken, a list of the forces needed to bring about change, and a list of the forces resisting change (“Defining” 201). The analysis of cause relations and the nature of conditions of change described by Lewin are helpful to approach the transcultural confrontations of intellectual German émigrés in the American socio-cultural and political context.

For my project, I define a force field as an interplay of motivating factors to emigrate to the United States, cultural aspirations, expectations and the encounter with forces which seem to render the fantasy of “America” and “becoming an American” a disenchanting experience. However, in order to apply this approach to the sphere of German-American confrontations I need to move beyond the organizational level which Lewin had in mind towards the sphere of culture. From an émigré perspective, “America” functions both as a physical and an imaginary space. Therefore, Lewin’s approach needs to be modified. One of the most prominent theoreticians of properties of fields psychology than the two iconographic thinkers. See Christopher M. Kuipers, “The Anthology/Corpus Dynamic: A Field Theory of the Canon,” *College Literature* 30.2 (Spring 2003): 51–71; 52.

12 One of Lewin’s interests lay in the challenge to turn Nazi-Germany into a modern democracy. In essays such as “Some Social-Psychological Differences between the United States and Germany” (1936) or “The Special Case of Germany” (1943) he argued for changing the constellation of forces in order to bring about change. He used the term force field to find operational terms to describe what it means to be a democratic leader and to create a democratic group structure. Lewin describes a force field as a “distribution of forces in space” in order to achieve a certain goal (197).

13 Lewin’s concept is useful for my analysis of transcultural confrontations because it offers means to investigate the balance of power involved in an issue, to identify the key players and target groups, the opponents and allies, and to define the ways how to influence the target groups.

is Pierre Bourdieu who defines fields as synchronically structured spaces in which agents and social positions are positioned. In order to understand the competition between a newcomer to a field and the dominant agents, the agent’s capital and habitus are crucial. Bourdieu rightly emphasizes the complicity between the antagonists in a force field since they “share a certain number of fundamental interests, namely everything that is linked to the very existence of the field” (73). For my analysis of force fields from an immigrant perspective, however, Bourdieu’s emphasis on hierarchies based on the agent’s capital does not represent the key element in the struggle over democratic shortcomings in which I am interested. I need to take into account the function of the agent’s national background and his/her construction of Americanness before and after the moment of immigration. In the immigrant experience, the image of “America” had been based on literary or pictorial representations prior to emigration. These representations are, as Winfried Fluck emphasizes, always in some way or another distorting since they “redefine (and thereby recreate) it in the act of representation” (“Imaginary” 25).

The experience of disillusion and certain response patterns of reformist impulses can only be accounted for if the immigrants had already assumed a certain attitude towards “America.” This attitude can be defined in aesthetic terms. For German immigrants, “America” represented a complex “text” consisting of the mediated construct of spatial representations, cultural products, and the implications of political democratic promises. In this context it is crucial to ask about the kind of uses the imaginary space of “America” offers to the reader or spectator. What are the reasons for Germans to engage at some point in their lives with the cultural construct of “America”? How do expectations of American culture shape the wish to apply for American citizenship? What are the consequences of socio-

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15 Bourdieu emphasized the structure of a field as being defined as a “state of power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle” (Sociology 73). He brought into focus the distribution of the specific capital of the agents in a power struggle. This led him to the thesis that subversive actions are most likely to be initiated by those players who are “least endowed with capital” (73). For my approach to analyze German-American encounters, I am less interested in questions of capital but rather in the cultural confrontations and imaginary constructions of what it means to position oneself as a representative naturalized American after the experience of immigration.

16 I follow Winfried Fluck’s re-definition of “aesthetic” from a philosophy of art to an aesthetic experience which he outlined in his essay “Why We Need Fiction: Reception Aesthetics, Literary Anthropology, Funktionsgeschichte” published in the collection of his essays: Romance with America? Essays on Culture, Literature, and American Studies, ed. Laura Bieger, Johannes Voelz (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 2009) 365–84.
political activism for immigrants? These questions will lead me to sketch out certain socio-cultural and political force fields which are crucial to understand what kind of cultural background the recipient brings to the aesthetic transfer which Fluck defines as a necessity to constitute an aesthetic experience.17

The force fields of confrontation, which are crucial in German-American encounters, concern responses to abolitionism, female emancipation, debates over cultural pluralism, patriotism in times of war, and the evolution of a Holocaust consciousness. In addition, during the last decade, the issue of growing up black in Germany and the American experience of Afro-Germans has emerged as a new field of research, which I will address within the context of transcultural confrontations. The different force fields I selected define the kind of material I will use for my evaluation. The richness of sources, resources, and the overwhelming number of involved in such an undertaking require limitations. I decided to present case studies of those artists who best represent the confrontations involved in the force fields at stake. In some cases, the protagonists are well known cultural mediators such as Ottlie Assing, Kurt Weill, or Hannah Arendt. However, they have not been thoroughly analyzed from the perspective of transcultural confrontations in the corresponding force fields. Other examples draw on intellectuals or artists including Charles Follen, Winold Reiss, and Hans Jürgen Massaquoi who, over time, have either fallen underneath the radar of German-American scholarship or who have only recently emerged as crucial figures in transcultural confrontations.

My approach of analyzing force fields from the perspective of immigrant fantasies about what it means to become an American demands a specific structure.18 Each chapter consists of a three-part structure in order to trace

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17 In order to come to terms with transcultural confrontations in various force fields, it is helpful to reconceptualize space as aesthetic object in the sense of Winfried Fluck. Starting from the assumption that all perceptions of space are constructs, he argues in “Imaginary Space; or, Space as Object” that “physical space has to become mental space, or, more precisely, imaginary space” in order to attain cultural meaning (25). This insight is particularly important in order to understand the moment of disillusion or even shock that many immigrants reported when they arrived in the United States.

18 Another important force field concerns issues of linguistic contact zones and multilingualism. For example, dialects can be used as starting points to compare the function of vernacular traditions in the United States with German-American identity constructions. Thereby, the nexus of language, patriotism, and xenophobia in American culture will become apparent. German immigrants brought with them not only a vision of a free democratic society beyond the Atlantic but also their traditions and dialects. English as the official language of the United States created particular challenges.
back German images of American democracy, the moment of intercultural encounters, and the confrontation between German intellectual immigrants and African American artists. The chapter titles refer to a force field and the transatlantic confrontation of a German immigrant. The emphasis lies on the German-American experience in the first two parts. In the third section, the cultural imaginary and the encounter with the democratic gap of German intellectual immigrants will be confronted and contextualized with the African American experience.

The first section of each chapter deals with the political and cultural situation in Germany and the function of the American Dream. The Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution have played a crucial role for Germans to contrast their own cultural situation with the struggle for a national identity. In order to bring the clash between the vision of Amerika and the experience of “America” into focus, the particular concepts of German patriotism in the European context need to be assessed. The late eighteenth century is significant for the development of a patriotic code in Germany. Compared to France and Great Britain, Germany could not define national identity on the basis of political unity. Only by referring to special categories found in German culture could patriotism create a bond among people. These patriotic codes differ in the era of Enlightenment, romanticism, the revolutionary Vormärz of 1848, and the decades preceding the foundation of the German Empire in 1871. Afterwards, codes of patriotism moved from the cultural realm into practical politics. Germany appears as a latecomer in the development of patriotism within the European nation building process. This delay marks the cornerstone of a German Sonderweg in the history of democracy compared to other major European countries such as Great Britain and France. When the Weimar Republic was founded

German immigrants produced a remarkably rich body of literature celebrating linguistic diversity in the United States through a creative use of languages and representations of ethnic speech. Among those who wanted to incorporate authentic dialect speech patterns in their poetry were the Pennsylvania Germans. They competed with popular poetry labeled “Dutch” dialect, which used an artificial lingua franca to mock certain characteristics of German immigrant culture. Aspects of inferiority, crudeness, or primitivity were not only detected in sentimental efforts of preserving German traditions but also in the alleged lack of command of the dominant English language. Poetry written in the “Pennsylfanisch” dialect demonstrates how contact zones of languages can become ambivalent means to perform American patriotism. See in this context my essay “Deutsch, Dutch, Double Dutch: Authentic and Artificial German-American Dialects,” Amerikastudien/American Studies, eds. Heike Paul and Werner Sollors 51.1 (2006): 93–114.

Historians have used the term “Sonderweg” applying different connotations to it in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After its use as a source of pride within nineteenth
in 1919 or the Federal Republic of Germany came into existence in 1949, democratic political structures were more or less imposed by foreign powers. Only in 1989 did Germany experience a (peaceful) revolution and chose, by its own free will, to become a unified democratic nation. The slogan of East German dissenters “Wir sind das Volk” (we are the people) refers not only to the basic right stated in the Basic Law, that all state power is derived from the people: “Alle Staatsgewalt geht vom Volke aus” (German Constitution, article 20, part 2). There are also transatlantic echoes of the opening sentence of the American Constitution “We the People…”

The second section of each chapter addresses moments of friction and various response patterns. The difference between utopian expectations and the disconcerting experience of living in the United States, between principle and practice regarding the promise of American democracy activates certain
century imperialism, historians like Fritz Fischer and Hans-Ulrich Wehler have turned to the term in a negative sense to explain the rise of Nazism. They argued that there was a fateful connection between a reciprocal development in the modernization process in the economic and political sphere. See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914–1949 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2003) 601–02. The “meta-narrative” of the exceptional development in Germany also functioned as an excuse to accept the separation of the country and the political success story of people in West Germany. See Die historische Meistererzählung: Deutungslinien der deutschen Nationalgeschichte nach 1945, eds. Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002) 11–12. While I agree with Geoff Eley’s and David Blackbourn’s objection that the term “Sonderweg” inherently proposes the notion of a “normal” historical development, I find it useful as a reference to the multifaceted history of democracy in Germany compared to different developments in Great Britain and France.

20 It is crucial to recognize the agents of the ideology labeled German Kultur nations before Bismarck forged the German Empire. Therefore, this book will refer to constructions of national identity and patriotism in the writings and works of intellectuals as a basis to understand the nature of different transcultural confrontations. I will distinguish between the aesthetic notion of German folk culture during the romantic period, the democratic notion of a German nation in the Vormärz era, the Realpolitik before the foundation of the German Empire, the politicized discourse of patriotism before World War I, the democracy of the Weimar Republic, the concept of imperialism under the Nazi regime, and the search for normalcy as the United States ally after 1945. For a discussion of the importance of intellectual groups within the Bildungsbürgertum between 1770 and 1870 see Bernhard Giesen, Die Intellektuellen und die Nation: Eine deutsche Achsenzeit (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993) 233–35.
response patterns to the democratic gap. I am particularly interested in responses based on dissent in the name of American patriotism and reformist activities. As a social and cultural construction, the category of “race” undermines the promise of equality by offering privileges to certain groups. It creates hierarchies, which challenge the basic principles of the “Declaration of Independence.” In American culture, the concept of “race” has infiltrated the law, institutions, everyday practices, and behavior. German immigrants have struggled with the ideological friction points caused by the construct of “race.” The encounter of what Nancy Foner and George Frederickson describe as “‘racism’ in the full and unambiguous sense of the term” became an unbearable stigma for those naturalized foreigners who set out to fashion themselves into representatives of American democratic culture.

In section three of each chapter, I will compare the line of argumentation and patriotic performances of German immigrants with those of prominent African Americans. I follow Jeffrey Stewart’s claim that African Americans present “the most important exception to American citizenship” (13). German intellectual immigrants responded to this exceptional situation by drawing on their own cultural and political position. By confronting imaginary constructions of American democracy with the reality of American cultural life, racial differences emerge as a continuing cause of friction. The comparison of German immigrants and African American voices of dissent create confrontations, which are transcultural by nature. They will shed light on transatlantic concepts and (mis)conceptions regarding the promise of American democracy.

21 When I speak of concepts of “America,” I follow the conviction of new historicists that these concepts are not static but characterized by dynamic, openness, and instability. Thus, it is important to assess the function of “America” in the corresponding contexts of the individual authors I selected.

22 Thomas Mann’s assessment after World War II that Germany never had a revolution and thus “has never learned to combine the concept of the nation with the concept of liberty” (Addresses 56) has far-reaching consequences for the German perspective on the United States and the democratic visions of German immigrants. To Thomas Mann’s son, the historian Golo Mann, West Germany appeared to be an “artificial homunculus,” a product created by foreign powers rather than active democratic commitment of its people (45).
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Why has the promise of American democracy been so persuasive to immigrants despite prejudice regarding cultural inferiority, a history of slavery and genocide, violations of human rights, media manipulations, and imperial self-righteousness? How can we analyze, understand, and evaluate the response patterns of immigrants, which evolved after the shock of arrival in the United States and the encounter with severe democratic shortcomings?

This book investigates patriotic dissent of naturalized German immigrants to overcome what I call "the democratic gap," namely the discrepancy between democratic ideals and practices. By turning to six force fields (abolitionism, female emancipation, cultural pluralism, patriotic performance culture, the civil rights movement, and Holocaust consciousness), a comparison of democratic criticism between German immigrants and African American writers reveals the underlying premises of transcultural confrontations and hidden motives behind declarations of Americanness. The response patterns discussed are also relevant for other immigrant groups such as Asian Americans, Arab Americans, or Hispanic and Latino Americans.

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