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**Transforming German Universities during the Cold War: The
Failure of
American and Soviet Cultural Imperialism**

Summary

My research is focused on reconstructing and comparing American and Soviet policies in the universities of West Germany and East Germany during the entire period of the Cold War, 1945-1990. The policies of the superpowers in German universities have been divided into two periods. The first period is from 1945 through the early 1960s, when the United States and the Soviet Union first initiated their unprecedented reforms in German universities. The second period runs from the mid-1960s until 1990, when the United States and the Soviet Union attempted to continue to impose their divergent cultural values on West and East Germany, all while the resistance of the German university community was undermining the influence of the superpowers in both West Germany and East Germany. The research makes use of newly available archival records and tests the primary assumption that both American and Soviet educational policy in German universities was a policy of cultural imperialism, and that thus the

concept of cultural imperialism is an appropriate framework for describing their activities.

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter I serves as an introduction to the research. It deals with a discussion of the theoretical framework, the previous literature, and the documentary sources. Chapter II explains the Cold War context and the political aims of the superpowers in Germany beyond their university policies. In addition, the chapter provides a description of the governmental agencies of both Washington and Moscow that were in charge of transforming German universities. Finally, this chapter discusses how the superpowers perceived the German university system and what strategies they proposed in order to modify it.

Chapter III investigates the transformations and revisions imposed by both powers on the universities of West Germany and East Germany, respectively, from 1945 until the early 1960s. First, the United States and the Soviet Union both replaced rectors and rewrote university statutes. Second, both powers attempted to change the curriculum of every department through introducing new disciplines, notably, political science or Marxism-Leninism, and American studies or Soviet studies. Third, new academic establishments were set up in the universities and, fourth, the holdings of the university libraries were thoroughly modified. Finally, both powers had a hand in the fall of the great and famous Berlin University in order to take full control over its resources, brains, scientific potential, and property, which were scattered all

over the three sectors of Occupied Berlin. The activities of the two superpowers, determined by their ideological goals, contributed to the break up of this university. The fact of the imposition of reforms from above was the main factor that stirred up indignation on the part of both the faculty and the student body when faced with these reforms. The resistance of the universities managed to have an impact in terms of slowing down the introduction of these reforms. And, in the end, both powers resigned themselves to the fact that German university life was not going to be fully reformed.

Chapters IV and V compare the policies of the United States and the Soviet Union towards the main bodies of the university community – the teaching staff and students – during the initial period of the Cold War, 1945 until the early 1960s.

Chapter IV shows how all the transformations proposed either by the Americans or by the Soviets seriously affected the personal lives and academic careers of those professors who worked in universities. The faculty was faced with the choice of reacting either positively or negatively to reforms which, in turn, would enormously influence the final outcome of the transformations. Although both powers aimed to create a new, pliable kind of professor (either a pro-American or a pro-Soviet one), the methods they used to do so differed. In particular, a demarcation can be drawn in such areas as approaches to purging, modes of communication with the faculty, and methods of promoting reforms by means of the university corporation of the professoriate.

In their attempt to create a new kind of professor, both powers encountered resistance from the *old* German professoriate. Albeit officially accepting the proposed reforms, these professors declared that the imposed reforms would undermine the traditional German university system, and they managed to block some of the transformations. They were mainly opposed to delivering lectures in the field of political science in West Germany and in the field of Marxism in East Germany.

Chapter V discusses the American and Soviet policies towards the German student body by means of the following components of their policies: the purging of students, the modification of the rules of admission to the universities, the instilling of German students with new ideological values, and the establishment of student organizations in the universities from 1945 through the early 1960s. Both governments intended to create a new loyal student body in order to cultivate a new elite which would go on to maintain the political regimes in both parts of a divided Germany. They ended up, however, facing strong and open student opposition. German students articulated their discontent relative to both the Soviet and American reforms. Communism caused more oppositional activities on the part of students because of the association of communist ideology with the introduction of communist organizations and the imposition of Marxism as a new basis for all studies in the universities.

Chapter VI sets about reconstructing the achievements and shortcomings of American and Soviet policies in German universities during the period of the mid-1960s up until 1990. First of all, this chapter discusses the American policy towards radical West German students. To eliminate student opposition, Washington compelled the government of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1969 to introduce a whole new package of reforms that had been proposed for the German universities by designated American experts. However, these reforms in the end soon became bogged down due to the strong resistance of the *conservative old professoriate*. This segment of the German faculty initiated a successful counteroffensive and succeeded in reinstating parts of the traditional German university system that had been eliminated by American reforms going back to the period of the Occupation and to 1969. Second, the chapter goes on to show how the Soviet government conducted a fresh ideological attack on East German universities through the expansion of Marxism in the disciplines, curriculum, and even in the behavior of students and professors in the 1970s and early 1980s. Though demonstrating outward obedience to the indoctrination and ideology of the ruling regime, the university faculty as a whole never became loyal and convinced followers of communism. Third, the American cultural offensive which was aimed at East German universities is subjected to analysis in this chapter. University faculty and a segment of the student body – in contrast to religious young people and most of

the intelligentsia who became members of the broad dissident movement supported by the West – demonstrated a marked lack of enthusiasm towards the new ideology and values coming from the West. It was those very university faculty who still admired the old traditions of the German universities, traditions such as academic freedom, isolation from politics, repudiation of imposed ideologies, and a powerful position for the senior faculty. They believed that both rival ideologies – whether American democracy or Soviet Marxism – undermined the traditions of German university life.

The research ends with the conclusions that can be drawn about the main accomplishments and failures of the policies conducted by the United States and the Soviet Union in German universities. It is proposed in the final analysis that the cultural interference by both powers in the German university system and the ensuing cultural pressure framed in terms of cultural imperialism was not only met with strong resistance on the part of German academic traditionalism or conservatism, but consequently failed as a result of this resistance. Both open and silent resistance by the German university system was able to undermine the cultural pressures from both sides and, according to our analysis, succeeded in reviving some of the traditional features peculiar to German universities. Consequently, both superpowers were forced to admit the failure of their educational policies in Germany as the Cold War drew to a close.