



These German students were among those who attended U.S. colleges in 1953-'54. It was from the 1953-'54 contingent

Since World War II more than 10,000
Germans have studied in U.S. universities.

What do they think of our way of
life? What impressions did they form?

Here's a unique report on America

...AS GERMANS SEE US

By **JOHN F. MEAD**

Executive Secretary, U.S. Education Commission in Germany

THIS year more than 34,000 students from foreign lands were enrolled in American colleges and universities under various U.S. government and private student-exchange programs. They came from 130 countries and attended 1,450 American seats of learning. Never before in history has a nation been gracious host to so many student-visitors—and never before has a nation voluntarily subjected itself to such searching scrutiny by foreign guests.

The student-exchange programs were stepped up after World War II. In the first year—1945-'46—some 9,500 foreign students took part. The number has grown steadily ever since; for the 1955-'56 school year, about 35,000 are expected.

The young men and women who come to these shores are given unparalleled opportunities to get to know America intimately. Scattered over the length and breadth of the country, they live and visit in big cities and small towns, in industrial centers and on farms. They study, hold bull sessions and go out on dates with American young people. They wander where they please, ask thoughtful questions and receive sincere answers, see the American way of life with their own eyes.

The conclusions they reach, the impressions they carry back to their homelands, are important to the future of the United States. These young people are among the elite of their countries, the future leaders of their communities and their nations. What they think and say about us will help mold world opinion toward the United States for many years to come.

Collier's for August 5, 1955



German exchange students that a group was chosen to take part in the symposium on which this article is based

COURTESY SCANDINAVIAN AIRLINES

For this reason, the U.S. State Department has placed special emphasis on the exchange of students with our enemy of World Wars I and II—Germany. Since 1945, more than 10,000 German nationals have come to the United States under various programs sponsored by the State Department's International Educational Exchange Service. In addition, hundreds of American consultants, specialists, educators and students have visited Germany on American government grants. Those of us associated with the exchange programs are convinced that West Germany's decision to throw in its lot with the West is due, at least in part, to the mutual respect and understanding arising from these person-to-person contacts between Americans and Germans.

But what do the returning German young people really think about the American way of life? How do they think American education compares with German education? What about Americans impressed them most?

To get the answers to these and other pertinent questions, the U.S. Educational Commission in Germany—also known as the Fulbright Commission—recently sponsored a symposium of German professors, teachers and university students who had spent the 1953-'54 academic year in the United States.

The meeting lasted two days. At its end, the group summed up its conclusions in a report to our commission. Since the report was written in German without suggestion or supervision by American sources, the opinions advanced may be

presumed to express the honest reactions of those taking part in the symposium.

In submitting the report, the German group acknowledged that its interpretation of life in the United States may be open to question, but declared there was substantial agreement on practically all the points. Certainly, not all the conclusions set forth will seem valid or palatable to Americans. But whether the conclusions are right or wrong is not at issue. The report's importance lies in the fact that these are the impressions brought back to their homeland by a select group of Germans. In the years ahead, these visitors will continue to interpret America and Americans to their compatriots in the light of these conclusions.

Here is a summary of the German group's analysis of American life, paraphrased into question-and-answer form:

What specifically impressed the German visitors about Americans?

"Chiefly, their outward friendship and inward uncertainty. Americans are freer in their social contacts than Germans, but their conviviality is often superficial—a "front" to hide feelings of isolation and insecurity. (That's why increasing numbers seek psychiatric help every year.) Hospitality is taken for granted. The stranger is everywhere received with open arms, and a foreigner is passed from family to family. Casual friendships are formed quickly, and Americans are more apt to discuss personal problems with passing acquaint-

ances than with old friends. Disarming frankness and honesty are American characteristics, but people are reluctant to admit need or illness, and they don't like to talk about death. They believe in conforming to social conventions, mode of dress and manner of speech. It is important to them to be popular; they spare no effort to avoid social frictions and, in general, are more tolerant of mistakes than Germans. They enjoy publicity and do not hesitate to capitalize on membership in the right clubs and churches, or to display material success in order to stand in the spotlight. Active participation in sports and membership in 'respectable' political parties are important to them. It is considered desirable to support popularly accepted opinions, even when such support is little more than lip service. Money is more readily accepted as a measure of a man's worth than in Germany, and people discuss their personal finances freely. Despite the stress and strain of business life, however, Americans know how to relax in their leisure time."

How do the Germans define the American philosophy of life?

"Pragmatism is the dominant influence; anything patently useful is accepted without reservation. There is a strong emphasis on material values, and old theories and practices are rapidly discarded. There is, however, a firm belief in the stability of American economic and political institutions. Certain puritan attitudes of life can still be found in the United States, but they are meeting growing re-



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"Most remarkable," say the returned German students, "is th

sistance. However, the increasing influence of the Roman Catholic Church offers a possible counterbalance against this neopagan trend."

What of the social structure in the U.S.?

"The answer is complicated. The United States is going through a social revolution. Ruthless competition, coupled with a reckless readiness to assume financial risk, has been modified and tempered by a growing emphasis on social security. There has been a consolidation of the middle class, and social power has shifted to this group with the result that members of the upper social group today tend to deprecate any claims to social superiority. This trend toward a stable central group without marked social ambitions may be a result of the depression of the 1930s. The dominant American ideal is no longer the daring pioneer, but the financially solid and educationally qualified citizen."

How does the American way of life compare with the German?

"In the United States, there is more conscious emphasis on gracious living. Among the middle classes one normally finds carpeted floors, comfortable upholstered furniture, a television set, a radio, a phonograph (often a high-fidelity instrument), a collection of both classical and modern records, automatic refrigeration, oil heating, air conditioning and a family auto with a garage to house it. The American diet is varied. A substantial breakfast is the rule, but a light luncheon, often taken at a snack bar or in a cafeteria, normally suffices for the midday meal. Dinner is the chief

meal of the day and, despite the popular belief in Germany, canned foods are not used exclusively; family meals are carefully prepared. Alcohol is used in moderation; soft drinks are more popular. Styles are colorful and in good taste, but on vacation and at home very informal and practical. On formal occasions, more attention is paid to protocol than in Germany. The wardrobe changes with the seasons, but fashions are fairly constant. Women often wear tight-fitting slacks and sandals, and black is not considered an elegant color. Hobbies are very important, and many people find pleasure in do-it-yourself activities or in camping, amateur theatricals, fishing or hunting."

What part do women play in American life?

"A vastly more important role than in Europe. They exercise influence well beyond the family circle. Most remarkable is the fact that American women determine consumer demand, and thus are potent factors in the economic life of the nation. Mrs. America is swayed by popularized scientific conceptions, especially in psychology and pedagogy. As with the race problem, foreigners should reserve judgment and avoid comparisons when discussing the role of women in the United States."

How about relations between the sexes?

"There is marked freedom of association between men and women, but their relationships are subject to definite social patterns. Strict external controls are the rule—especially for girls, who begin associating with boys at an early age. Among the unmarried, social engagements with the opposite sex

rank first among leisure-time activities. Women plan for marriage more intensively than do men."

What about family life?

"American families are increasing in size, and early marriages are common. Sons and daughters of the family tend to become independent while still quite young. In fact, each member of the family usually tries to associate himself with groups of special interest to him or her rather than to the family as a whole. Married men create an impression of youthful comradeship and polite consideration in their family life."

What is the relationship between capital and labor in the U.S.?

"Closer than in any European country. A rapid increase in the number of workers who are small shareholders in corporations is leveling the distinction between capitalists and workers and reducing the basic causes of conflict between them. One result is that an *esprit de corps* develops among many workers toward their employer, and they come to regard the corporation as their 'home.' Without such ties, a worker finds himself at loose ends; unlike the situation in Europe, there is no ideologically united labor party, no class-conscious workers' group. However, the differences between conditions in small and large enterprises should not be overlooked. Small enterprises are still run somewhat patriarchally, and labor unions have little effect on them. Occasionally, one observes a tendency to exploit workers in them. Large enterprises are more considerate, and opposing interests



"Married men create an impression of youthful comradeship in family life"



"It is important to Americans to be popular. . . . They enjoy publicity"



"In the U.S., there is more conscious emphasis on gracious living . . . among the middle classes"



"A light luncheon, taken at a snack bar, suffices at midday"

fact that American women control consumer demand in the U.S."

are reconciled by capital and labor as equal social partners. However, the occasional strong contrasts of interests should not be lost sight of." [This was the one area in which substantial differences of opinion appeared among the visitors, though a majority supported the views presented here.]

How about "red tape" in the U.S.?

"The extent and rigidity of bureaucracy in the United States is surprising to a German visitor. There seems to be a tendency toward organization for its own sake. The desire to compile details and minutiae reflects the general American respect for any kind of statistics. The relative inflexibility of the system may be due to the lack of organizational and legal procedures which would allow American corporations to give their executives greater latitude of judgment. So as not to jeopardize their jobs, executives often sacrifice efficiency to comply literally with unnecessary or outmoded regulations."

Are the opportunities for success greater in the United States than in Germany?

"Yes, but the American rags-to-riches legend is dying."

Why do so many Americans go to college?

"Mainly, to prepare themselves for a profession, but social aspirations are also important, especially among girls. In fact, American girls often admit freely that their chief reason for attending a university is to improve their chances of marriage. Although many students profess an interest in the

cultural values of higher education, there is so much economic and social pressure for an academic degree that knowledge for itself is frequently considered secondary. This utilitarian approach to higher education is due to a growing concern in America with social security. The professionally trained man considers himself less vulnerable to dismissal, unemployment and other job hazards. Idealism has not vanished entirely, but its chief proponents today are teachers, scientists and artists."

How does college education in America differ from that in Germany?

"Mainly in the approach. American colleges emphasize inductive methodology (drawing general conclusions from a study of specific examples), primarily because high-school students in the United States are relatively so weakly prepared. This emphasis develops a scientific type of mind which can solve set problems quickly and surely but finds it difficult to do independent research. Furthermore, the American system of tests and examinations leads to methodological thinking and a lack of initiative. Checking off answers in a multiple-choice test prevents a student from stating his own opinion and gives him a chance to get a correct answer without knowing the background of his subject. On the other hand, German education is still based on the principle stated by Humboldt in the nineteenth century: 'The German student must work out his own methods, essential facts, and insight in his special field.' This approach—learning by experiment—forces the average German student to spend two semesters orienting himself in his chosen subject and challenges his best capabilities."

How can college education be improved?

"In the United States, students should be permitted more freedom in choosing their curriculums so that they may develop more independence and self-responsibility in their studies. In graduate schools, there should be less coddling by the professors and more active independent effort by the students. This would improve the capabilities of the candidates for graduate degrees and make them more self-sufficient in professional work later on. In Germany, on the other hand, the Humboldt principle is also outmoded. All sciences have developed to the point where mastery of any broad field is impossible. German universities, therefore, should introduce a tutorial system to help a student obtain the minimum essentials in his specialized field and assist him in adapting and applying this knowledge."

Do Americans have a sense of history?

"Yes, so far as their own national history is concerned, and this historical sense has produced a strikingly uniform national attitude. Patriotism is taught in schools, clubs and even in churches, where the singing of patriotic songs during religious services surprises visitors from abroad. Americans tend to idealize their national heroes and have a strong sense of pride in their success as a nation, but since the Korean war there is evidence that some have begun to question America's invincibility. The traditional American isolationist attitude toward world affairs has begun to change, and growing U.S. participation in international questions may be expected." ■■■



Top, left, Susan and William Holden on location, in an exuberant picnic-ground romp; middle, Susie shops on Main Street for a swimsuit for bathing sequence; bottom, with co-star Kim Novak, she watches picnic games being filmed. Says Manhattan-born Susan: "I've never had so much fresh air"



Hollywood is bringing the Pulitzer play, Picnic, to a wide, colorful screen. It has Kansas for a locale—and Susan Strasberg, a 17-year-old film fledgling, for the movie's most challenging role



KANSAS

LATE in May, a velvet-eyed teen-ager named Susan Strasberg checked into a Hutchinson, Kansas, hotel and headed straight for bed. For the previous two weeks, while other seventeen-year-olds had been hatching plans for senior proms, she had traveled from New York to Hollywood and halfway back, rehearsed, had make-up tests, squirmed in and out of costumes, and managed to cram in three hours a day of school-work besides. Susie had been getting set for a movie role most young actresses would have given a well-turned arm and leg for—that of a tomboy on the edge of maturity, in Columbia Pictures' version of the play called Picnic. On Broadway, the part won an award for actress Kim Stanley—while the play, a vignette of midsummer boredom disrupted by a handsome vagrant, was copping a batch of prizes for itself, author William Inge and producer-director Joshua Logan.

As Millie, Susan, a film fledgling with one movie behind her (M-G-M's *The Cobweb*), found herself in the company of giants: William Holden, as the distracting young vagrant; Kim Novak, as Susie's sister, the town beauty; Betty Field, as their mother; Rosalind Russell, as

Collier's for August 5, 1955