

---

# Did the United States Create Democracy in Germany?

— ◆ —  
JAMES L. PAYNE

**D**o we know how to promote democracy in a troubled land? Do we have a set of policies and practices that administrators can take off the shelf, as it were, and apply in a reasonably straightforward fashion to produce a lasting democracy?

Before the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, many commentators and policymakers seemed to believe that such an established methodology exists. The difficult experience in that country has somewhat dimmed this confidence, but it has by no means destroyed it. Many writers continue to speak of nation building as if it involved a settled technology, like that of building interstate highways. They seem to believe that nation-building experts can go to any country and, regardless of its culture and traditions, successfully impose a democracy. What accounts for this confidence in the efficacy of nation-building expertise?

One important source appears to be the U.S. experience after World War II. Those who today advocate assertive policies of nation building repeatedly cite this era as a golden age of nation building. The United States should invade dictatorships and failed states, they say, and turn them into democracies. How do we know this task is feasible? They answer, “Look at what we did in Germany and Japan.”

Writing in the *New York Times Magazine* in June 2005, Michael Ignatieff, a professor of human rights at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, urged an “American crusade to spread democracy” around the world. His main evidence

---

**James L. Payne** taught political science at Yale, Wesleyan, Johns Hopkins, and Texas A&M, and he now writes independently from Sandpoint, Idaho.

*The Independent Review*, v. XI, n. 2, Fall 2006, ISSN 1086-1653, Copyright © 2006, pp. 209-221.

for the soundness of this undertaking is the presumed success in Germany. “Freedom in Germany was an American imperial imposition, from the cashiering of ex-Nazi officials and the expunging of anti-Semitic nonsense from school textbooks to the drafting of a new federal constitution” (Ignatieff 2005, 45).

A political analyst for the Rand Corporation, James Dobbins, makes the same claim: “The post–World War II occupations of Germany and Japan were America’s first experiences with the use of military force in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin rapid and fundamental societal transformation. Both were comprehensive efforts that aimed to engineer major social, political, and economic reconstruction. The success of these endeavors demonstrated that democracy was transferable” (2003, xiii).

Three leading scholars of democratic development, Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, echo the point. After the victory of the Allied powers in World War II, they say, “Democracy was imposed on Germany, Italy, and Japan, and surprisingly took hold and endured” (1989, xi).

Political scientist Mark Peceny advances the same idea: “In by far the most successful application of this policy [of encouraging democracy] in the history of U.S. foreign policy, U.S. occupation governments transformed Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan into liberal democratic allies in the wake of World War II” (1999, 81).

Even those who oppose nation building agree that the United States did succeed in Germany and Japan. Gary Dempsey, a foreign-policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute, criticizes observers who assume that “with enough money, experienced bureaucrats, and military firepower, retrograde states anywhere can be turned into open, self-sustaining, peaceful democracies, as Germany and Japan were after World War II” (2002, 3). Thus, even though Dempsey is critical of the idea that we can easily create democracies, he apparently accepts the premise that Germany and Japan were “turned into” democracies by U.S. action.

The current Bush administration absorbed this view. Two weeks before invading Iraq, the president defended the impending attack by pointing to the post–World War II interventions: “America has made and kept this kind of commitment before—in the peace that followed a world war. After defeating enemies, we did not leave behind occupying armies, we left constitutions and parliaments. We established an atmosphere of safety, in which responsible, reform-minded local leaders could build lasting institutions of freedom. In societies that once bred fascism and militarism, liberty found a permanent home.”<sup>1</sup>

These many references to the case of Germany make one curious. What exactly did U.S. administrators do to succeed so well in promoting democracy there? Surely, one supposes, this experience should yield a wealth of valuable lessons for modern-day nation builders to apply elsewhere.

---

1. Speech at the American Enterprise Institute, February 26, 2003.

On opening the contemporaneous books and articles about the postwar occupation of Germany, however, we find this assumption of success rudely contradicted. At the time, reporters and scholars did not have a glowing, confident view of U.S. policy. As they saw it, muddled policies and incompetent administration were botching the task of encouraging democracy. Illustrative of the tenor of these writings was an article entitled “Why Democracy Is Losing in Germany” that appeared in *Commentary* in September 1949. “We must face the fact,” the author wrote, “that the contradictions, vacillations, and reactionary manifestations of Western occupation policy have appallingly discredited democracy in Germany, both as a political system and an intellectual outlook” (Gurland 1949, 235). A close look reveals that, from the standpoint of democratic nation building, the U.S. occupation of Germany is actually a lesson on what not to do!

### **Don’t Shake Hands!**

In Germany, the Allied effort had two aspects. One was the impact of the *war*. In World War II, Germany’s enemies defeated Hitler and in the process revealed to the German people that his pretensions were absurd and colossally destructive. As a result, the national mood in Germany that had enabled Hitler to come to power vanished. In this specific sense, one can say that U.S. action contributed to democracy in Germany: the Allied victory created a tabula rasa that permitted it to emerge.

The Allied effort’s second aspect was the military occupation, which extended from victory in 1945 to (for most practical purposes) 1952. As the previous quotations indicate, modern writers assume that skilled and purposeful U.S. officials applied sophisticated nation-building techniques during this period and thereby “imposed” democracy where it otherwise would not have come into existence. This hypothesis is extremely doubtful. The occupation’s actual policies and activities from 1945 to 1952 did little to further democracy, and many of them caused positive harm.

Modern writers’ first mistake is to assume that the goal of the American occupation in Germany was to make the country a democracy—that it constituted, as Dobbins puts it, a “comprehensive effort that aimed to engineer major social, political, and economic reconstruction” This view is wildly at variance with the facts. Building democracy was *not* the aim of occupation policy. Instead, policymakers aimed to punish Germany and to deny it any war-making potential. Some American leaders advocated a “back to the Stone Age” policy for Germany. One such plan, drawn up by Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau and his assistant Harry Dexter White, called for Germany to be dismembered and turned into an agrarian society in which the inhabitants would live by subsistence farming. Other leaders did not go so far, but they all agreed on severe punishment. “If I had my way,” President Franklin D. Roosevelt commented, “I would keep Germany on a breadline for the next 25

years” (qtd. in Davidson 1959, 7). From this angry mood came JCS 1067, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directive on U.S. objectives and basic policies that formed the orders of the military government from May 1945 to July 1947. It emphasized not reconstruction or democracy, but harsh treatment of the Germans.

One directive of JCS 1067 that the U.S. military authority attempted to implement was a policy of “nonfraternization.” Americans were not to engage in any kind of friendly, normal intercourse with Germans. They were not supposed to shake hands with them, to visit them in their homes, to play games with them, or to converse or argue with them. If they went to a German church, they had to sit in separate, Americans-only pews. The army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* ran many antifraternization slogans and statements such as “Don’t fraternize. If in a German town you bow to a pretty girl or pat a blond child . . . you bow to Hitler and his reign of blood” (qtd. in Davidson 1959, 54). Military police arrested more than a thousand Americans in an effort to sustain the policy of nonfraternization (Davidson 1959, 55). In practice, many Americans ignored the policy and braved punishment to do the sensible, human thing in interacting with the Germans. The nonfraternization policy was gradually relaxed and eventually abandoned. Nevertheless, the policy started the occupation out on the wrong foot if its presumed aim was to win hearts and minds and to teach the German people about democracy.

Other policies exacerbated this wrong-footedness. For example, the United States sought to keep its military and civilian personnel isolated from the Germans in compounds and colonies (often surrounded by barbed wire) known as “Little Americas.” At a time when great numbers of Germans were living in rubble, tents, and railway stations, the Americans had a comfortable lifestyle—and it was created at the Germans’ expense. U.S. troops seized the best homes and hotels as their living quarters and pushed the German occupants onto the street. For each American family housed in a requisitioned dwelling, eight Germans were made homeless; in Frankfurt alone, Americans requisitioned 10,800 apartments and single-family dwellings (Davidson 1959, 156, 276).

## Deliberately Wrecking the German Economy

Further setting the stage for resentment were the U.S. economic policies. Although little is known about the requirements for democracy, one important factor suggested by research and common sense is prosperity: destitute people are ready to listen to demagogues who promise bread at the expense of freedom. Therefore, anyone seeking to establish a democracy in a defeated country should make a maximum effort to ensure the local inhabitants’ prosperity and well-being. Many Americans today suppose that “we put Germany on its feet after the war,” but the truth is more nearly the opposite. U.S. policy was intended to inflict economic privation. As part of the JCS 1067 punishment philosophy, U.S. forces were not supposed to provide ordinary

relief. Troops were specifically ordered not to let American food supplies go to hungry Germans. American households were instructed not to let their German maids have leftovers; excess food was to be destroyed or rendered inedible (Davidson 1959, 85). A German university professor pointed out that U.S. soldiers “create unnecessary ill will to pour twenty litres of left-over cocoa in the gutter when it is badly needed in our clinics. It makes it hard for me to defend American democracy among my countrymen” (qtd. in Davidson 1959, 86).

JCS 1067 forbade the occupation authority from taking any “steps looking toward the economic rehabilitation of Germany” (JCS 1067 qtd. in Zink 1957, 253). The Allies placed limits on German industries, freezing the production of steel, machine tools, and chemicals at less than half the prewar rate. Even the production of textiles and shoes was limited to depressed levels. The Allies also pursued a policy of dismantling factories, deliberately destroying hundreds of plants and throwing several hundred thousand employees out of work in the western zone (Davidson 1959, 255). German workers threatened strikes against this practice; even the archbishop of Cologne and his parishioners prayed against this senseless economic destruction (Davidson 1959, 255). Nevertheless, it continued out of sheer bureaucratic inertia until 1950.

The German economy was further burdened by having to pay for the occupation itself, both through arbitrary requisitions of properties, finished goods, and raw materials and through direct payments from German governmental units. One calculation estimated that occupation costs consumed 46 percent of local tax receipts in 1948 (Davidson 1959, 261). German newspapers began to release details of what troops were buying with German taxpayers’ money: one ton of water bugs to feed a U.S. general’s pet fish, a bedspread of Korean goatskin, thirty thousand bras (the Americans banned the newspaper for publishing this last item—a nice “democratic” touch on the part of the would-be “teachers of democracy”).

Another economic factor that kept the country in poverty was the failure to issue currency. This lapse had many reasons, including complications with the Russians and U.S. officials’ economic ignorance, but the fact was that for three years, from 1945 to 1948, the Germans had no sound currency, only Hitler’s debased old currency and an untrustworthy occupation script. In desperation, locals turned to cigarettes—which consequently became much too valuable as a medium of exchange to smoke. Imagine trying to carry out a high-value sale or to make a future-oriented contact in cigarettes! When a new currency was finally issued in June 1948, economic life began to revive immediately.

Not all American actions were economically injurious to Germany. Some Americans were personally generous, some relief aid was distributed, and the Allies did work to restore basic services. But these positive efforts were not enough to counteract the damage that occupation policies had done to economic life. The Germans were desperately poor in 1945–48 not because of war damage. Studies showed that German industries and facilities were largely intact and that production could have been restored quickly had the Allies been willing to allow it (Zink 1957, 253). But

U.S. policy, some of it deliberate, some simply the usual muddle in a government-directed economy, promoted destitution and despair—and thereby earned the resentment of much of the local population.

At this point, some readers may want to ask, What about the Marshall Plan? In June 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall announced a sweeping foreign-aid proposal for Europe. As a public gesture of magnanimity, the Marshall Plan was certainly a public-relations success of the first order. It convinced many, in both the United States and Europe, that the United States wanted to aid Europe's economic recovery. Unfortunately, the focus on the Marshall Plan's good intentions has tended to obscure a crucial scientific question: Was the aid decisive in Europe's economic recovery, or was Europe going to recover anyway?

This question, it seems, remains an open one, especially as we are beginning to notice that aid to underdeveloped countries has in many cases brought little positive economic result (see World Bank 1998; Easterly 2006). Foreign aid may well be one of those policies that seems as if it ought to work, yet does not. The money follows bureaucratic and political channels and winds up being wasted or used to prop up uneconomic arrangements. In the case of the Marshall Plan, one notices, for example, that there is no correlation between the amount of aid per capita given to the various European countries and their respective increases in production from 1948 to 1951.<sup>2</sup> This finding suggests no cause-and-effect relationship between aid and increased production. As scholars have looked more closely at this program, doubt has grown about whether the aid was needed or effective (Wexler 1983; Milward 1989; Esposito 1994).

It is especially doubtful that Marshall Plan aid helped Germany decisively because the contribution to that country was relatively low. England and France received \$2.7 and \$2.2 billion respectively, about \$54 per capita, whereas West Germany received only \$1.2 billion, or \$24 per capita. It seems unlikely that the latter amount, even if used effectively, counterbalanced the negative effect of the U.S. policies of confiscation, economic obstruction, and deliberate destruction.

### **First Punishing, Then Helping Nazis**

Democracy was eclipsed in Germany in 1933, when Hitler and the Nazi Party took power. With their defeat in war, however, the mood and motivation that buoyed their followers collapsed. Hitlerism, whatever it was, had been demonstrated to be catastrophically foolish, and the vast majority of Nazi supporters turned away from it. They did not make a reasoned analysis of what was wrong with Nazism; it simply became passé, unattractive, and unhelpful for personal advancement. Therefore, after the war, no positive measures were needed to keep Nazism from coming back.

---

2. I have computed this correlation from data given in Wexler 1983, 63, 67, 94.

At the time, policymakers were not sufficiently open-minded to perceive this reality. U.S. officials imagined that those who had acted in the Nazi Party remained deeply committed believers. This view led them to expect “werewolves,” or cells of fanatical, violent Nazis who would harass the occupation army in suicide attacks and sabotage (Montgomery 1957, 69). Nothing of the sort happened, but its absence did not cause policymakers to change their views about the Nazis’ nature.

Furthermore, heinous deeds had been done in the name of Nazism, and the world wanted to see punishment. Imprisoning the obvious leaders and malefactors would not be enough; all who had put their shoulders to the Nazi wheel must be made to suffer. Many occupation officials on the scene perceived the basic, normal “humanness” of former Nazis, but they could not tell distant audiences that persecution of former Nazis was unwise and unworkable. When General George Patton commented that there wasn’t much more difference between German parties than there was between Republicans and Democrats, a storm of protest back home led to his recall.

In the American zone, the process of purging and punishing Nazis started with the requirement that the entire adult population, 13 million people, fill out a detailed autobiographical questionnaire consisting of 150 searching personal questions. In effect, every adult was assumed to be guilty until cleared by a tribunal that decided his or her degree of complicity. Although these tribunals did not follow judicial rules of evidence, they were still slow and cumbersome and could not deal with the caseload in reasonable time. Because no German could hold any job except day laborer without clearance by the tribunal, “millions of capable and politically indifferent Germans had to remain idle or engage in ‘ordinary labor’ for an indefinite period” (Montgomery 1957, 23). This obstacle to staffing firms and agencies formed, of course, another impediment to economic development.

The denazification process ascribed guilt by association. Germans were punished—fired from their jobs, fined, or sent to jail—not for what they actually did. To convict a person, the tribunals did not have to prove that a defendant killed someone or that he ordered an arrest or caused some other kind of injury. It was enough that the accused was or was alleged to be an active sympathizer. This shadowy protocol encouraged informers to come forward to denounce neighbors- or personal enemies. The public came to feel that thousands of perfectly innocent people were being punished. German politicians, especially Christian Democratic Party leaders, opposed the denazification process, arguing that it resembled Hitler’s persecutions in its reliance on the doctrine of “collective guilt.” Even the Americans eventually agreed that the effort was a counterproductive failure, and they abandoned the program. Then, in 1951, they made a complete reversal and embraced the idea that Nazis had rights! Amazing as it seems, it was *required by law* that civil servants and teachers who had been removed because of their alleged Nazi attachments be rehired, so scores of thousands were (Montgomery 1957, 66, 81; Davidson 1959, 276). Former Nazis even demanded—and sometimes

received—compensation for the wrongs done to them in the denazification process (Montgomery 1957, 69).

The most unfortunate consequence of the U.S. policy of trying to persecute Nazis was that it provoked sympathy for Nazis that they otherwise would not have received. Harvard professor of public administration John D. Montgomery, who made a comprehensive study of the episode, concluded that the denazification policy actually strengthened the neo-Nazis in the postwar years. The process, he concluded, generated “bitterness and resentment [that] gave the sanction of martyrdom to otherwise unsaintly lives or dignified an otherwise degraded ideology by appearing to persecute it” (1957, 150; see also pp. 31, 57, 67, 69).

The U.S. denazification policy was not a brilliant pro-democratic stroke, as modern nation builders imagine. Instead, it was a counterproductive witch hunt, widely recognized at the time as a “fiasco,” and it was *abandoned entirely and even reversed by the same occupation authority that had imposed it* (Herz 1948).

### Educating for Fuzziness

For centuries, education has been considered important, even essential, to democracy. Unfortunately, this presumed link has never been defined concretely. Is it necessary for citizens to learn arithmetic, spelling, or religious catechism? Should schools teach history, and, if so, which history? There is perhaps no woolier and more contentious subject than “education for democracy.”

Occupation policy after World War II reflected the confusion on this topic. Take the matter of textbooks, which Ignatieff (quoted at the beginning of this article) believes to have been so decisive. The German experience clearly proves that textbooks do not matter. Under the Hitler regime, German schoolchildren had used the Nazi-oriented textbooks for more than a decade, yet all this propaganda and indoctrination failed to produce a cohort of dedicated Nazis: after the war, no significant manifestation of Nazi loyalties appeared in Germany (Montgomery 1957, 69; Davidson 1959, 231–32). Yes, the Allies did away with the offensive Nazi-slanted school textbooks (by using reprinted German textbooks of the pre-Hitler era), and they no doubt felt much better having made the change. It is doubtful, however, that the change had any effect on relevant political attitudes. After all, the postwar German democracy was set up by middle-aged and elderly German adults who were not reading these schoolbooks anyway.

Beginning in 1947, the Americans moved beyond merely restarting the existing German education system and took up the idea of redirecting and reforming it. A good authority on the quality of this reform effort is political scientist Harold Zink, who was a high official in the U.S. occupation, becoming chief historian of the Office of the U.S. High Commissioner in 1950. As a former member of the U.S. occupation establishment, Zink is cautious and forgiving in his treatment of Allied miscues, but even with this bias he gives a damning account of the American education program.

The program, he says, was an “incohesive” mélange of “divergent points of view” (1957, 193–94).

The first head of the education section was H. B. Wells, the president of Indiana University, picked because he was a “big name,” an administrator skilled at wheedling money from the Indiana legislature, not an authority on elementary or secondary education (Zink 1957, 200). Wells quickly developed a huge staff, composed for the most part of “empire builders,” Zink says, “who knew very little about German problems and cared less, but saw in the Education Division an opportunity to gain recognition, build up personal power, and the like” (1957, 202). This staff was directed to draw up plans for “a complete reorganization of German education on American lines.” Wells left within a year, and most of these plans, “fortunately for both Germans and Americans,” says Zink, “remained on paper and were never executed” (1957, 203).

The next “big name” to head the education branch was Alonzo Grace, a former commissioner of education in Connecticut. Grace began by damning the first three years of the U.S. occupation as “more or less devoid of an educational and cultural relations effort” (Zink 1957, 204). Having spurned the work of his predecessors, he proceeded to enunciate a rambling collection of, according to Zink, “inconsistent” principles and “platitudes” that left most observers bemused. Fortunately this period of “fuzziness” and “too much rather pompous talk” ended in less than a year, and the education program was essentially closed out in 1949 (Zink 1957, 206, 207).

Zink’s summary of the occupation effort in education is telling: “Because of the time factor and the lack of detailed knowledge of German institutions, many ill-conceived programs were set up which had no chance of succeeding and squandered large amounts of public funds. There was duplication of effort, conflict, and an immense amount of sheer waste of effort” (1957, 202).

## Political Engineering

Democracy is a political arrangement, so it is of interest to see how the institutions of democratic German government came into being. Were they created and imposed by the Allies on an apathetic or resisting people, or did the Germans themselves take the lead? The evidence strongly supports the latter interpretation. The Christian Democratic Party—soon to become the ruling party in West Germany—was founded by a group of thirty-five German political leaders in Berlin two weeks *before* U.S. military forces even reached the city. On their own, they drew up a declaration of principles, rejecting Nazi ideas such as the primacy of the state and asserting the importance of individuals and families (Davidson 1959, 93). The Americans did not officially authorize the formation of parties in Berlin until August 1945, more than a month *after* the four main ones had been formed.

If anything, the U.S. occupation harassed and delayed the formation and functioning of political parties. The Americans required parties to go through a cumbersome licensing process in order to operate in each local region; they banned

the use of party symbols, armbands, and parades; in Bavaria, they banned a democratic monarchist party (Zink 1957, 336–37; Davidson 1959, 95–96). The U.S. authority on political parties and elections, Richard M. Scammon, summed up the impact on political party activity: “Interference by occupation authorities was not infrequent in the earliest days of German political activity, and many of these interferences seem on later examination to have been improper and arbitrary” (qtd. in Zink 1957, 337). Scammon attributed the mischief more to ineptitude (“lack of understanding”) than to a deliberate intention to impair the formation of democratic parties.

Constitution writing is another area in which the U.S. occupation is often given credit (again, see Ignatieff’s statements, cited earlier), but here, too, the record indicates a doubtful effect. In the writing of constitutions for German state-level governments, U.S. officials “kept close touch with the work,” but, official historian Zink says, “it cannot be fairly stated that the constitutions were their brain children” (1957, 180).<sup>3</sup> He says the same about the national constitution, drafted in 1949: “Definitely a German product” (1957, 186). Historian Eugene Davidson echoes this opinion: “it was mainly a German document” (1959, 237).

If setting up a democracy were an intricate, specialized undertaking, then it would be unrealistic to expect an army of occupation to do it very well, or perhaps to do it at all. We must bear in mind that most post–World War II occupation officials were military officers with no particular expertise in social science, diplomacy, or constitutional theory. For example, the head of the occupation, General Lucius Clay, had come up through the army engineers, working on rivers and harbors projects. He had “almost no background in political matters” (Zink 1957, 68). According to Zink, the staff officers who ended up in the occupation administration tended to be of an inferior quality because the best officers were kept in the active military combat units, not released to serve in the occupation branch. Many had “little self-control, indifferent moral standards, and a record of failure in their domestic relations and social groups at home” (1957, 8–9). Very few spoke German. The occupation officials were, at best, run-of-the-mill army personnel; in many cases, says Zink, they were “deadwood” (1957, 208, 210). Therefore, it is drroll to behold today’s nation-building theorists attribute to them superior powers to engineer a major social and political transformation.

Did the U.S. occupation impose democracy on Germany? On this point, we need go no further than the conclusion of political scientist and occupation chief historian Harold Zink. He reports, as noted earlier, that the objective of preparing Germany for democracy was not a serious goal of the occupation and was never given serious attention by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This “vague or perhaps meaningless” objective was included in the Potsdam Declaration (signed with the Soviet Union)

---

3. General Lucius D. Clay makes the same point in his book *Decision in Germany* (1950, 89).

merely “because it sounded well” (1957, 326). Zink scorns the idea that the United States might have had a coherent program for building democracy: “The transplanting of democratic political institutions to Germany would be most uncertain at best, but when such a goal was coupled with a vengeful program emphasizing denazification, the imposition of a low living standard on the German people, nonfraternization, the destruction of German industry, and the like, it would seem to have little or no concrete significance” (1957, 327).

## **Democracy by Design or by Evolution?**

The record shows, then, that from the standpoint of promoting democracy, the U.S. occupation of Germany was extraordinarily inept. Yet, despite the miscues, democracy emerged in Germany. How do we explain this result? A full answer is beyond the compass of this article, but I can sketch out the beginnings of an explanation.

There are, it seems, two broad theories about how democracy comes into being. One is that it is the product of social engineering. In this view, democracy is an elaborate machine with many parts—constitutions, electoral systems, civic organizations, and so forth—and experts are needed to craft and assemble these parts. Nation builders tend to favor this model because it validates their role. They are like the highway engineers who believe that highways can be built anywhere and that they have the skills to build them.

Belief in this “design” model of democracy accounts for the misperception about what happened in postwar Germany. The commentators have reasoned backward, supposing that because democracy can come about only by design, then skilled, purposeful nation builders must have been at work on the scene.

An opposing model of political development views democracy as an organic, natural outgrowth in a society that has reached a certain stage of cultural evolution. It cannot be imposed from the outside if the society is not “ready” for it. When conditions are propitious, it will happen more or less naturally, without any experts or social engineers to create it.

What cultural condition makes a nation “ready” for democracy? The factor I would propose is a variable that has been strangely neglected in the study of democracy: moderation of the amount of leadership political violence. Where political leaders are inclined to use violence against each other—violence in the form of political murders, gang attacks, and armed revolts—democracy cannot survive. It will tend to collapse into civil war or a repressive dictatorship.

From this perspective, democracy is not at all complicated. It may take many complex forms, but the core concept is elementary: leaders have decided not to employ force against each other. As a result, they necessarily turn to nonviolent methods, such as counting heads (elections), to settle their disputes. In this “cultural” model, democracy is simply the default mode of government where leaders

are peaceful, and any group of friends and neighbors can start it up spontaneously.<sup>4</sup>

This sort of development, I suggest, is what happened in Germany. Long before World War II, Germany had evolved a basically nonviolent politics. Even before 1850, democratic forms of government were emerging, with elections and legislative bodies, and participants had long transcended the custom of political murder. By 1871, the country was a democracy, with universal manhood suffrage and a national parliament. The Hitler regime of 1933 thus represented a bizarre departure from a long democratic tradition. It was a regime in which thugs and murderers intimidated and displaced the normal political class.

After the war, the country reverted to its peaceful political tradition. Hitler's ideas were thoroughly discredited, his thugs disappeared, and the nonviolent democratic leaders of the prewar era came forward. They simply did what came naturally: started political parties, organized campaigns, drew up constitutions, and staffed the government. I believe the same interpretation applies to Japan, Austria, and Italy. Allied policies did not create democracy in these countries. Instead, the deviant, violent leaders of the prior regime departed the scene, leaving a cadre of leaders who were not inclined to use force against each other. Given this precondition, democracy came into being naturally.

It will be some time before we can fully assess this interpretation of how democracy comes about. Nevertheless, it seems clear, as a number of scholars are now observing, that we need to broaden our theories to include the cultural dimension of the process (see, e.g., Carothers 2002). After all, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of military interventions that have sought to promote democracy have failed.<sup>5</sup> These many failures suggest that democracy involves cultural factors not amenable to direct manipulation by policymakers.

## References

- Carothers, Thomas. 2002. The End of the Transitional Paradigm. *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (January): 5–21.
- Clay, General Lucius D. 1950. *Decision in Germany*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.
- Davidson, Eugene. 1959. *The Death and Life of Germany*. New York: Knopf.
- Dempsey, Gary T. 2002. *Old Folly in a New Disguise: Nation Building to Combat Terrorism*. Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 429, March 21. Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute.
- Diamond, Larry, Juan J. Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset. 1989. *Democracy in Developing Countries*. Vol. 4, *Latin America*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989.

---

4. For a fuller exposition of this approach to democracy as an outgrowth of a “low-violence” society, see Mueller 1995, 156–59; Payne 2004, 81–99, and 2005.

5. For a review of the nation-building record, see Payne 2006.

- Dobbins, James. 2003. *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand.
- Easterly, William. 2006. *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. New York: Penguin.
- Esposito, Chiarella. 1994. *America's Feeble Weapon: Funding the Marshall Plan in France and Italy, 1948–1950*. Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Gurland, R. L. 1949. Why Democracy Is Losing in Germany. *Commentary* 8 (September): 227–37.
- Herz, John H. 1948. The Fiasco of Denazification in Germany. *Political Science Quarterly* (December): 569–94.
- Ignatieff, Michael. 2005. Who Are Americans to Think That Freedom Is Theirs to Spread? *New York Times Magazine*, June 26, 42–47.
- Milward, Alan S. 1989. Was the Marshall Plan Necessary? *Diplomatic History* 13 (spring): 231–53.
- Montgomery, John D. 1957. *Forced to Be Free: The Artificial Revolution in Germany and Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mueller, John. 1995. *Quiet Cataclysm: Reflections on the Recent Transformation of World Politics*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Payne, James L. 2004. *A History of Force*. Sandpoint, Idaho: Lytton.
- . 2005. The Prospects for Democracy in High-Violence Societies. *The Independent Review* 9, no. 4 (spring 2005): 563–72.
- . 2006. Does Nation Building Work? The Prospects for Democracy in High-Violence Societies. *The Independent Review* 10, no. 4 (spring): 597–608.
- Peceny, Mark. 1999. *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Wexler, Imanuel. 1983. *The Marshall Plan Revisited: The European Recovery Program in Economic Perspective*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- World Bank. 1998. *Assessing Aid: What Works, What Doesn't, and Why*. Policy Research Report. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Zink, Harold. 1957. *The United States in Germany 1944–1955*. Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand.