

INTRODUCTION

The men who create power make an indispensable contribution to the nation's greatness, but the men who question power make a contribution just as indispensable, especially when that questioning is disinterested, for they determine whether we use power or power uses us.

—*John F. Kennedy at Amherst College,
October 26, 1963*

We are not hopeless idiots of history who are unable to take their destiny into their own hands. . . . We can create a world that the world has never seen before; a world that distinguishes itself by not knowing wars anymore, by not being hungry anymore, all across the globe. This is our historical opportunity.

—*Rudi Dutschke, TV Interview, December 3, 1967*

You could strike sparks anywhere. There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was *right*, that we were winning. And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. . . . We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave.

—*Hunter S. Thompson, Fear and Loathing
in Las Vegas, 1971*

THE ERUPTION OF STUDENT PROTEST in the 1960s was a global phenomenon, the magnitude of which was acknowledged by contemporary observers, enthusiastic supporters, and fierce critics alike. A CIA report on “Restless Youth” from September 1968 stated, “Youthful dissidence, involving students and nonstudents alike, is a world-wide phenomenon. . . . Because of the revolution in communications, the ease of travel, and the evolution of society everywhere, student behavior never again will resemble what it was when education was reserved for the elite. . . . Thanks to the riots in West Berlin, Paris, and New York and sit-ins in more than twenty other countries in recent months, student activism has caught the attention of the world.”¹

The extraordinary nature of the 1960s and the *annus mirabilis* 1968 are hardly disputable today. The long “sixties” are commonly remembered as an era of global change, producing a historical caesura, culturally as well as politically. In numerous countries, images of protest, generational revolt, countercultural indulgence, sexual liberation, and government repression circulate in the public memory of those years. Young people rebelled against what they saw as outdated traditional values and politics, expressing a widening gap between the generations. The outstanding historical characteristic of the sixties is that they transgressed the ideological fronts of the cold war. Not only the “First World” of Western capitalism but also the “Second World” of the Communist bloc and the “Third World” in Latin America, Africa, and Asia were shattered by largely unexpected internal ruptures.² As historian Eric Hobsbawm argues, the miraculous year “1968” was already an indication that the “golden age” was coming to an end. It was the climax of various developments that had been set in motion due to the immense speed of the social and economic transformations after the Second World War: a dramatic increase in university enrollment, a globalized media landscape that allowed an almost instantaneous spread of news and images, as well as an economic prosperity that fed the rising purchasing power of youth.³

Whether we describe sixties’ protest as a revolution in the world-system, a global revolutionary movement, or a conglomerate of national movements with local variants but common characteristics, its transnational dimension was one of its crucial motors. As the French student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit conceded, “Paris, Berlin, Frankfurt, New York, Berkeley, Rome, Prague, Rio, Mexico City, Warsaw—those were the places of a revolt that stretched all around the globe and captured the hearts and dreams of a whole generation. The year 1968 was, in the true sense of the word, international.”⁴ His British counterpart, Tariq Ali, even likened the impact of this year to a storm, which swept across the world and hit numerous countries in Asia, Europe, and the Americas.⁵

In recent years, many historians have begun to transform the sixties from an era mostly characterized by individual recollection and popular memory to one of professional, academic inquiry. In their judgment, the protest movements of the 1960s/70s were also a global phenomenon, representing social and cultural responses to emerging patterns of economic, technological, and political globalization.⁶ Yet the exact processes through which activists from numerous countries established contact, shared ideas, and adopted each other’s social and cultural practices are still largely unexplored.⁷ Most works fail to analyze how activists from different geographical, economic, political, and cultural frameworks imagined themselves as part of a global revolutionary movement. This book traces the perceptions, shared traditions, and exchanges between

student protesters during the 1960s, using the protest movements in two countries of the “First World,” the United States and West Germany, as a case study. It illustrates how activists from different political and cultural frameworks tried to construct a collective identity that could lead to solidarity and cooperation, as well as a more global consciousness. In addition, it details for the very first time how the U.S. government monitored and reacted to the global student protest during the 1960s.

Perhaps the most significant condition for the emergence of the protest movements of the 1960s was the powerful economic upswing of the 1950s. In the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, and other countries, the 1950s heralded an economic boom that opened the door to a broad-based consumer society from which the middle class benefited the most. This sudden prosperity resulted in new social freedoms that expressed themselves in a growing recreational culture. It also went hand-in-hand with the discovery and increasing influence of young people as an economic factor. This young postwar generation, the so-called baby boomers, not only flooded the universities in the early 1960s and severely strained their capacities, but also possessed a formidable purchasing power that made them a lucrative target group for the fashion and music industries. Commercialization and the exploitation of youth culture by the culture industry were therefore already discernable at the beginning of the decade and continued all through the 1960s.

All of these processes and discourses were disseminated internationally thanks to the rapid advances in communication technology—in particular television and satellite communication. In July 1962, a year after the German broadcasting company ZDF was established, NASA’s Telstar 1 broadcasted the first television pictures from the United States to Europe via satellite. In addition, international airlines expanded their services during the decade with a growing number of destinations and cheaper ticket prices. The cold war and the increasing cultural-diplomacy efforts of both superpowers to influence global opinion also helped promote transnational exchange well into the first half of the 1960s. In short, technological innovation and an internationalized media landscape created a qualitatively new level of sociocultural networking across national borders well before 1968.

This system of international exchange provided a favorable climate for the emergence of transnational subcultures and protest movements that were to shape the ideas and actions of sixties’ activists. Raging against consumerism and the spiritual decay of society in the 1950s, the Beat movement or the “Halbstarke” phenomenon provided an important source of inspiration for the young generation. Similarly, artistic avant-gardes like the Situationist International (SI), which drew on the existentialism of Sartre and Camus, Dadaism, Surrealism, and the Lettrists, of-

ferred an action repertoire which the Dutch Provos, the German Kommune 1, and American countercultural icons such as Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and the Diggers readily copied from.

An equally rich source of inspiration was the African American civil rights movement. Its iconography, protest methods, and ethics made an impact far beyond the United States' borders. Figures such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., strategies such as Freedom Rides, direct action, and civil disobedience, as well as the denunciation of a system of apartheid in the heart of the Western "free world," played a crucial role in the politicization process of Western activists. The Black Power movement then motivated student protesters to take a firmer and even militant stance against an establishment that appeared unwilling to compromise. Furthermore, it directed the students' attention to the Third World liberation movements and the legacies of European colonialist policies. This was especially apparent in the case of Vietnam. The U.S.-led war in South-east Asia therefore soon became a symbol of the imperialist oppression of the Third World by the "free West."

Starting in 1965, the growing antiwar movement in the United States not only influenced the style of protests on an international level through the institution of teach-ins. In the footsteps of an international pacifist network that had protested nuclear armament since the 1950s, the antiwar movement was also able to gather a worldwide following of protesters by the late 1960s, all of whom had one thing in common—their opposition to the Vietnam War. As the conflict escalated, the Viet Cong, Che Guevara, and even Mao Zedong became international icons that represented the uncompromising struggle against the all-powerful, globally operating forces of imperialism.

Even the movement that provided much of the intellectual undercurrent for the protest of the 1960s, the New Left, was of transnational origins. Initially a European product that emerged in Great Britain under the influence of E. P. Thompson, Stuart Hall, and Ralph Miliband, it was carried over to the United States by, among others, the sociologist C. Wright Mills. The American SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and its programmatic "Port Huron Statement" of 1962 helped shape the New Left's agenda even further and ultimately established it in a transatlantic context. Activists on both sides of the Atlantic had much in common—the rejection of traditional Marxism and its focus on the working class, a fundamental dissatisfaction with the cold war (its policy of nuclear deterrence and anticommunist ideology) and the condemnation of society's social and political apathy, materialism, and capitalistic competitive mindset. In addition, activists were inspired by each other's protest, visited each other's conferences, and imported new protest techniques and strategies to their local contexts.

The shared opposition against the war in Vietnam remained, however, the issue that most deeply connected activists to each other. For members of the West German SDS (Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, or German Socialist Student League), for example, Vietnam epitomized the global reach of imperialism and the necessity for a “global revolutionary alliance” between activists in the First World and the liberation movements of the Third World. Along this dictum, many student protesters sought to overcome the bloc confrontation of the cold war between East and West in favor of a greater focus on the North-South divide, and reached out to their peers in other countries for this endeavor.

This is not to suggest that national and regional idiosyncrasies were not still pervasive. Even though anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, and international solidarity were diffuse-but-shared elements of the cognitive orientation of these movements, specific national issues generally determined the characteristics of protesters. In Belgium, the dominance of the French language at the Flemish university in Leuven triggered major protests among Flemish students, which had a strong nationalist current. In Italy, and even more in Germany, activists turned their anger on their parents’ fascist past. In Greece and Spain, the dictatorships of the colonels and of General Franco were the main targets of criticism. International encounters therefore did not always lead to tight and permanent networks across national borders but sometimes also showcased the differences among activists. Such differences became visible, for example, during the World Youth Festival in Sofia in 1968, when the Bulgarian hosts clashed with the West German guests over an antiwar demonstration at the U.S. embassy.

Perhaps the most apt expression of this ambivalence was a panel discussion hosted by the BBC shortly after “the French May.” The discussion featured such prominent student leaders as Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Alan Geismar from France, Tariq Ali from Great Britain, Karl-Dietrich Wolff from West Germany, Jan Kavan from Czechoslovakia, as well as Dragana Stavijel from Yugoslavia, among others. The interesting aspect is that all these participants agreed that youthful unrest, in its attempt to transform society, had transcended national borders. In a remarkable display of mutual solidarity, all of them rose up and sang the “Communist Internationale” together at the end of the program, each of them in their native tongue.⁸

Fraternizations like these were made possible by the rise of alternative lifestyles and countercultures, often of Anglo-American origin, as additional forms of dissent. New aesthetics emerging in art, music, film, and fashion joined with hippie ideologies and lifestyles and merged into a new set of symbolic forms, attractive to the young generation in both the East and West. Long hair, beards, colorful and exotic clothes, casual behavior,

and a hedonistic search for pleasure and ostentatious informality became distinctive marks of a rebelling youth across the world. This is illustrated by the international success of artists such as Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and Jimi Hendrix.⁹ In addition, a global media landscape allowed iconic images to travel around the globe almost instantaneously, whether it was the killing of a Viet Cong by the police chief of Saigon, the frightened Vietnamese girl Kim Phúc running down the streets away from her village, or when National Guard units open fired on students at Kent State University.¹⁰

The transnational interaction among activists in the 1960s thus drew its strength from a collective protest identity that consisted of shared cultural and political reference points and was strengthened by a global medial discourse. The significance of these networks increased as their participants addressed problems encompassing an international dimension that people could also relate to on a local level (imperialism, bloc divisions of the cold war, and so forth). With universities as the breeding grounds of protest—a protest that drew support from prominent intellectuals such as Herbert Marcuse—the late 1960s saw the emergence of an international language of dissent.

In the case of the protest movements in West Germany and the United States, the exceptionally close political, economic, and cultural associations between the two countries during the cold war were particularly important for this transnational exchange.¹¹ Due to the specific conditions of occupation and reeducation and the Federal Republic's role in U.S. foreign policy after 1945, the transatlantic partnership between the two countries was extremely strong. In the first decade after the Second World War, American "cultural diplomacy" was aimed at a democratization of German political culture, in other words an "Americanization from above."¹² The years that followed, from 1955 to 1965, in contrast, can be viewed as a starting point for a "grassroots Americanization," whereby official political goals were complemented and even replaced by an immense cultural influence on West German society and the political landscape.¹³

With the increasing actions of the civil rights and free speech movement in the first half of the 1960s, the U.S. government's prestige began to change among the perceptions of the young generation both in the United States and Europe. What added to this dissatisfaction among the younger generation in West Germany was the legacy of the German past and the after-effects it still had on the young republic, which, in their view, had not successfully mastered its legacy under U.S. political influence.¹⁴ Furthermore, the notion that the United States, once seen as a democratic model, guiding spirit, and leader of the supposed "free world," was wag-

ing an ever-escalating and questionable war in Southeast Asia led many to revolt against what they believed to be a cynical version of democracy.¹⁵

Similar feelings of disillusionment had already developed within the United States and found their way to Europe, where they fundamentally challenged the prevailing impression of the United States among segments of the young generation. Hence, the split perception of the United States was one of the dominating concepts for the New Left in West Germany, because it vehemently clashed with previous images.¹⁶ As Richard Pells wrote with respect to the European perception of America in the 1960s,

America might be racist and repressive, but it also supplied the leaders and the troubadours of the revolution: Malcolm X and Bob Dylan, Angela Davis and Joan Baez, the Students for a Democratic Society and Jefferson Airplane. A young person living in Austria, Holland, or Italy could denounce the imperialist in the White House and the Pentagon while at the same time learning from the media how to emulate the adversarial style of the American counterculture and the tactics of the civil rights and antiwar movements in the United States.¹⁷

These countercultural items and their import can hardly be labeled as anti-American, given their origins and strong roots in the United States.¹⁸ They instead formed a critique of the official U.S. government, thus defining this dissent as predominantly anti-imperialist and, as such, a further expression of intense mutual relations between American activists and their European counterparts. Moreover, these shared sentiments reflected an additional degree of American (counter-)cultural influence. In other words, the dissent was (if at all) an anti-Americanism of “With America against America.”¹⁹ These ambiguous images were part of the intercultural, transatlantic network and discourse between the two movements. West German and European students selectively adopted, modified, and used American countercultural imports, thereby turning them into their own.²⁰ That this intercultural exchange created a common, though constructed, reality explains why the protesting students of the 1960s felt connected to each other, as if they were on an “international crusade.” It turned the sixties into a shared experience across national boundaries.²¹

The aim of this study is to illustrate the ways in which this “other” cold-war alliance composed of students enabled them to connect to each other and form a counterpoint to their countries’ official transatlantic partnership. By examining the interconnectedness of the American and German student movements and the government reactions their relationship provoked, the study seeks to contribute to an explanation of the internationality of the sixties and this decade’s role in the postwar political order.

Chapter 1 retraces the origins of the New Left in both the United States and West Germany, starting with the cooperation between the American and German SDSs as initiated by German SDS member Michael Vester. The influence that Vester exercised on the formulation of the Port Huron Statement of the American SDS in 1962 forms the chronological beginning of my analysis, which illustrates the transnational nature of the New Left as early as the beginning of the 1960s, as well as the degree to which American protest ideas continued to be imported to the German SDS until the mid-sixties.

Chapter 2 examines the development of the transatlantic networks of protest between the two student organizations with respect to their common opposition to the war in Vietnam. After reviewing the attempts by the American SDS to internationalize the antiwar movement, the chapter explores the significance of American protest techniques of “direct action” for the ideological development of the German SDS from 1964 through 1966/67. American protest examples helped the anti-authoritarian faction in the German SDS led by Rudi Dutschke in its effort to win over the organization to its own political program. By integrating strategies of “direct action,” such as sit-ins or teach-ins, from the American New Left into their own protest repertoire, German activists created a unique amalgam of revolutionary theories that merged with previous ideological influences from sources as diverse as Che Guevara, Herbert Marcuse, and George Lukács.

Chapter 3 describes the global revolutionary theory that emerged out of this synthesis and the various attempts of German and American student activists to realize it in the form of an anti-imperialist, second front in the urban centers of the First World. The challenges posed by the implementation of this projected global protest network are illustrated through a detailed examination of the international conferences and meetings of the New Left, as well as of alternating visits between German and American activists and other modes of transatlantic cooperation. Rudi Dutschke’s plans to study with Herbert Marcuse in California, Bernardine Dohrn’s visit to the German SDS 1968 national convention in Frankfurt, and German SDS president Karl-Dietrich Wolff’s lecture tour through the United States in the spring of 1969 are just some of the many transatlantic connections exemplifying this global revolutionary program.

Chapter 4 then explores a previously unknown dimension of transatlantic intertwinement in the 1960s/70s, namely the reception of the civil rights movement and Black Power ideology in a West German context. By investigating the contacts between German SDS members and representatives of the Black Panther Party, I can show for the first time how solidarity and identification with Black Power fostered an increasing radicalization and greater militancy in the West German student movement.

For West German activists, Black Power epitomized the liberation from imperialism and capitalism from within the First World by fulfilling both Che Guevara's foco theory (sparking a revolution through both revolutionary action and the creation of conditions that make it possible) and Herbert Marcuse's minority theory (revolutionary change does not come from the working class but from society's outsiders and minorities). When combined with Frantz Fanon's theories of liberation from colonial oppression through the use of violence and the unresolved National Socialist past, Black Power formed an ideological symbiosis that not only reinforced the determination of West German activists but also played a significant part in the emergence of the Rote Armee Fraktion (Red Army Faction; RAF) and the terrorism of the 1970s.

The last two chapters of this study point out the various ways in which the "other" alliance contested the transatlantic partnership and official relations between West Germany and the United States. Using previously classified government sources, chapter 5 discusses how American officials evaluated the challenge posed by the transnational cooperation of protesting students in the Federal Republic and the United States and how the government initiated a comprehensive monitoring and cultural diplomacy effort to counter it. Focusing particularly on the interplay between the State Department and local mission officials, the chapter explores how American foreign policymakers viewed the rebelling West German youth, especially in light of the country's geopolitical significance in cold-war Europe and its long-standing relationship with the United States.

Taking West Germany as a case in point, chapter 6 demonstrates the overall institutional and strategic impact that the global dimension of student protest had on U.S. foreign policy in the 1960s/70s by introducing the work of the State Department's Inter-Agency Youth Committee founded under the Kennedy administration in 1962, which continued to advise American foreign policymakers until 1972 on how to confront youthful unrest.²² The study concludes with a discussion of the significance of the "other" alliance and the transnational dimension of 1960s/70s' protest for the history of the cold war and the twentieth century.