In Munich, on September 14, 1949, nearly two hundred German historians from east and west met for the first time since World War II to discuss officially the state of German historical scholarship. All participants were delighted to hear the keynote speaker at the meeting. He was Hans Rothfels, a converted Jew and one of the leading historians of Weimar Germany, who had not left Germany until 1939. He had returned for the first time in 1949 and enjoyed a very successful semester at the university in Göttingen, and now he was delivering a lecture entitled "Bismarck and the Nineteenth Century." His prominence on the program seemed to represent some compensation, in the eyes of his fellow historians and in his own, for the man who had last addressed the profession on the topic "Bismarck and the East" in 1932, when German historians had met in Göttingen for the last time before the Nazi seizure of power. Both times, Rothfels gave a very sympathetic evaluation of Bismarck’s policy. Most importantly, in 1949 he denied all connection between Bismarck and the Third Reich; in his view, Bismarck’s Second Empire stood in sharp contrast and opposition to all that the Third Reich had propagated and done. It was no wonder that the audience felt strong relief when the formerly persecuted emigrant who had returned finished his speech. He brought down the house. For many participants, the lasting applause for Rothfels was the strongest impression of the Munich meeting, and they have treasured its memory up to the present. Rothfels himself was deeply impressed. He felt at home again.1

Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author.


Nevertheless, if one considered only this moving scene in Munich in 1949 and Rothfels’ own feelings about his success, it would convey the wrong picture of the complicated relations between German historians and their émigré colleagues after the end of World War II. When Ernst Schulin asked me to write a paper for his conference on German historiography between 1945 and 1965, I had only very scanty ideas about these relations. Naturally I knew about Hans Rothfels, Hans-Joachim Schoeps, and Golo Mann, about Dietrich Gerhard and Hans Rosenberg, but I could not venture to give a serious and well-documented judgment about the difficult problems of “re-migration” of historians after 1945. Had a genuine effort really been made in those times to attract the emigrants back to Germany, or had history faculties tried to keep them out? During the last two years, I have tried to find out something about this question, and I am very glad to present here some of the results, which are treated at greater length in my book The German Historical Profession after 1945, published at the beginning of 1989.2

This essay will concentrate on three subjects:

I. The situation at German universities immediately after the Second World War and the question of what was done to bring the emigrants home;

II. The personal fate of Hans Rosenberg and the negotiations at Cologne University to call him back, as one example of the personal choices facing emigrants when confronted with the chance to go back; and

III. A rough assessment of the effects of both remigration and permanent emigration on German historiography in the 1950s and 1960s.

The plight of the history faculties at the universities in postwar Germany was indeed chaotic. In Cologne, Peter Rassow was the only historian, after two of his colleagues were suspended from office. In Göttingen, the dean of the philosophical faculty reported that only octogenarian historian Karl Brandi could teach, because all other faculty members were ill, had been dismissed, or remained prisoners

of war (for example, medievalist Percy Ernst Schramm was working at Versailles for the U.S. Army Historical Division, reconstructing Germany’s last western campaign). History faculties at other universities did not fare much better, especially when some professors suffered temporary dismissal.

These obvious difficulties caused by postwar staff deficiencies in German universities provoked public discussion about the return of émigré scholars to Germany. Much of the German public strongly demanded such a return. Various state ministries of cultural affairs found it necessary – especially after press campaigns attacked them on the issue – to publish the records of their efforts to entice back some of the émigré professors permanently, or at least to invite them to give guest lectures. The Göttingen university newspaper published a detailed account of the fate of those professors who had left their positions in Göttingen for political reasons after 1933.3

As early as February 1946, the presidents of the universities of the British zone decided at a meeting in Goslar to demand special funding to support the reintegration of émigré professors. This decision amplified an earlier agreement of September 1945, which had been a very general recommendation that all emigrants should be called back but advanced no concrete plan to offer them jobs. Interestingly, the background to this maneuver was a press campaign in Great Britain, where influential newspapers, reporting about the reopening of German universities, criticized the fact that only a few German emigrants had so far left Britain. The Society for the Protection of Science and Learning (SPSL) had already contacted the relevant branches of the British military government to facilitate a quick return of those emigrants who wanted to go back: “It is hoped,” wrote the SPSL, “that the universities will invite many of these scholars to turn back, but not yet arrived.” Nevertheless Levison remained in close and friendly contact with his old university. For instance, he reestablished contact with the writer Thomas Mann, in order to arrange for the university to confer Mann’s honorary degree, which had been revoked in 1936. Levison even bequeathed his personal library to the Historical Institute and the university library, as a sign of his goodwill and his long-standing connection with his “old alma mater Bonnensis.”4

At the beginning of 1947, the nonconformist magazine of the “younger generation,” Der Ruf, addressed the problem of the remigration of scholars. The specific occasion for the first article in Der Ruf was the removal of thirty-three professors from the University of Munich because of denazification and the openly expressed suspicion of German scholars that the military government wanted to lower the quality of German universities. The article listed the names of forty-two German professors who had emigrated (including such luminaries as Theodor E. Mommsen, Hans Rothfels, and Veit Valentin) and demanded that the military government and the responsible ministries arrange for the “homecoming of this huge and true Ger-

3 Göttinger Universitäts-Zeitung, vol. 2, no. 16, p. 16.

5 My report follows the documents found in Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf (hereafter HSTAD), NW 25, no. 84 (“Protokoll der Rektorenkonferenz vom 25./27.2. 1946 at Goslar”). The Northwest German Conference of Rectors, which met in September 1946 in Göttingen, again described the restoration of the rights of the émigré university teachers and their recall to teaching positions (or, rather, adequate provision for them) as a “joint duty of honor for all universities.” Compare Rolf Neuhaus, ed., Dokumente zur Hochschulreform, 1945–1959 (Wiesbaden, 1961), 16.
6 The report in HSTAD, NW 25, no. 227, January 4, 1946.
man academy” from abroad. Moreover, the author of the article made it quite clear that he considered it the moral duty of the emigrants to return to Germany now.8

The reaction which Der Ruf evoked from the United States military government makes this controversy interesting for our purposes. Neue Zeitung, which was published by U.S. military authorities, found the appeal important enough to reprint and to respond to extensively. Even OMGUS (Office of the Military Government of the United States) reacted. Its response made it clear that the U.S. military government would not assume the right to force particular scholars upon German universities. The selection of professors was the responsibility of the universities and the relevant ministries. The OMGUS article also referred sympathetically to those emigrants who were unwilling to return to Germany. If they had top positions at institutions in the United States, if they had employment contracts for longer periods, or if they were too old, one could not expect them to return to bombed-out German cities. Moreover, this article emphasized the tendency of the Germans to criticize the emigrants, as had Bavarian Minister-President Hoegner. The author, Dolf Sternberger, speculated how “unimaginably efficacious” it would have been if university students had demanded, unanimously and publicly, the return of the émigré scholars. He encapsulated the situation of these years when he called it a shame for the German universities to have been called back. The responsible ministry official stressed, in reply, that it was a matter of course to consider for appointments those persons who had been persecuted for political and racial reasons. However, in many cases the efforts had been in vain, because the emigrants now had outstanding positions and did not want to return to Germany. She highlighted a crucial point of such efforts when she reminded the ministry that not every emigrant would meet the requirements for a professional position.9 Nevertheless, in 1950 the West-German Conference of University Presidents confronted by steady attacks in the press – felt obliged to collect data from the different universities to prove that they had made all possible efforts to recall emigrant professors. Unfortunately the answers from the universities arrived so late that the staff could not compile the results in time for the conference session of 1950.10 Later on, the question apparently was forgotten. I have been unable to locate the file in the Westdeutsche Rektorenkonferenz Archive at Bad Godesberg.11

The University of Frankfurt even felt obliged to take a spectacular step into the realm of public relations after the Hessian minister for cultural affairs, Dr. Stein, in a speech to the Landtag, harshly criticized the university’s policy with regard to bringing back emigrants. Dr. Stein accused the university of resenting the pressure to call back the emigrants and of making only token efforts to attract them. The university thereupon published a report to prove that immediately after its reopening it had contacted jurists like Erich Kaufmann, Rudolf Smend, and Otto Kirchheimer, that it had reinstated Kurt Riezler to his position of honorary professor,12 and that it had granted Habilitation to ancient historian Hermann Strasburger, which had previously been denied for political reasons. The university had already negotiated with Max Horkheimer and Paul Tillich to join the faculty. It had also welcomed economic historian Ernst D. Fraenkel and political scientist Arnold Bergsträsser as guest professors. Nev-

9 Neue Zeitung, no. 12, February 9, 1947. The same article also quotes Alfred Weber, who had described the recall of the emigrants as the “moral and political duty of all faculties.”
10 The account here is taken from Jerome Vaillant, Der Ruf. Unabhängige Blätter der jungen Generation (Munich, 1978), 109-13. The article which began the debate was reprinted with commentary in Neue Zeitung on January 4, and the response of the military government in Neue Zeitung on January 6.
11 Referentin Dr. Auburtin to Sozialminister, March 2, 1948, HSTAD, NW 25, no. 227.
12 Universitätsarchiv Köln (Cologne University archives, hereafter UA Köln) 47/144 of May 10, 1950, with reference to the decision of the Nineteenth West German Rectors’ Conference in Hannover in March of that year.
13 Protokoll of the Twentieth WRK (38) of August 1950 in Bonn, in WRK Archiv. Unfortunately, the responses which were received from the universities cannot be found in the archive of the WRK. I wish to thank Dr. Horst Kalischer for his friendly assistance.
14 Diplomat Kurt Riezler (1882-1955), who had been a close aide to imperial chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg between 1915-17 and had been honorary professor of philosophy at the University of Frankfurt since 1928, emigrated to the United States in 1938 and taught until 1952 at the New School for Social Research in New York.
Nevertheless, Dr. Stein singled out the University of Frankfurt because of its bad reputation. At Heidelberg the balance sheet was also unfavorable, because out of thirty-four emigrants only four had come back. 

Despite these indisputable efforts, one cannot exclude the possibility that negotiations with emigrants were sometimes conducted only to impress the military government. For example, when Otto Vossler recommended to Peter Rassow, dean of the Cologne philosophical faculty, that Golo Mann be invited back to Germany, Vossler concluded, "If he rejects the invitation, you will be in the good books of the men of power and you will have shown good will."17

In an important step, the president of the German Research Council (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, or DFG) in December 1951 asked the chairmen of various professional organizations whether they knew of any émigré colleagues who lacked pensions. He referred to plans under consideration in the Federal Home Office to appoint these men to German "foreign" professorships, in order to provide them pensions. Gerhard Ritter, at that time chairman of the Verband der Historiker Deutschlands, named eleven historians, who, he thought, met the conditions of this plan: Viktor Ehrenberg (formerly of Prague, now of London); Fritz Epstein (Privatdozent Hamburg/Stanford); Gerhard Masur (Privatdozent Berlin/Virginia); Dietrich Gerhard (Privatdozent Berlin/St. Louis); Hans Baron (Newberry Library, Chicago); Hans Rosenberg (Privatdozent Cologne/Brooklyn College, New York); Richard Koebner (Professor, Breslau/Jerusalem); Hajo Holborn (Privatdozent Heidelberg/Yale); Ernst Kantorowicz (Princeton); Martin Weinbaum (Privatdozent Freiburg/Queens College, N.Y.); and Frances L. Carsten (Privatdozent Danzig/London). 18 In fact this initiative from the Bonn Home Office led to a number of professional appointments for these men. 19 Expert opinions determined theoretical dates when they would have been appointed to tenured positions in Germany, thus providing a basis for the amount of the pensions to be paid under this law. It is interesting to note that this law, which provided restitution for National Socialist injustice to emigrants, was adopted and published on the same day as the law regulating the reintegration of Nazi officials into the civil service of the Federal Republic, the so-called 131 Law, was adopted.

The law of restitution was a most ambivalent measure. On the one hand, it provided at least some sort of financial justice for the men whom the Nazis had driven from their country; it tried to offer compensation for lost chances in life. On the other hand, it had an effect, surely unintentional, on the question of re-migration. The finances of the recipients of these pensions now were improved, because the émigrés now had a double income: the salary they earned abroad and the pension. Under these conditions, it would have been against all financial common sense to return to Germany and to give up this favorable treatment. I mention this problem with some trepidation, but after discussions with some older German colleagues who had personal contacts with emigrants, I think it is worthy of consideration.

We know only too well that there was no significant return of emigrants which might have effected a new orientation of historical writing in the Federal Republic of Germany. The very few returnees of the first postwar years20 were Hans-Joachim Schoeps (to Erlangen), Ernst D. Fraenkel (to Frankfurt), Walter Mohr (to Saarbrücken), and Hans Rothfels (to Tübingen). Rothfels had already received several offers of university chairs before his impressive performance at the first postwar meeting of German historians. 21 He considered his return to Germany to be a "return to a position given

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15 I have selected here only several examples from the extensive "Response of the Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-University in Frankfurt am Main to the Speech to the Landtag by Minister of Cultural Affairs Dr. Erwin Stein on July 28, 1948," which selected proceedings to call faculty members predominately from the legal faculty (NL Mommsen). BAK. Stein's declaration also caused further reactions. The public debate illustrated the conflicting arguments of those who entrusted a fundamental reform to the autonomy of the universities and those politicians who regarded the universities as unsuited to pursue such a policy.


17 UA Köln, 197/39.

18 About the last of these Ritter clearly made a mistake. F. L. Carsten, who left Germany for political reasons, received his Ph.D. in London only after the war. Ritter also indicated that Martin Weinbaum was at Manchester University in England; actually he taught at Queens College in New York City.

19 The basis for this was the Law to Regulate the Reparation for National Socialist Injustice to Members of the Public Service, of May 11, 1951 (Bundesgesetzblatt, pt. 1 (1951):291-6). The 131-Law dates from the same day.

20 Of 134 historian-emigrants, only 21 returned to the two German states during the first two decades after the end of the war. This data comes from Biographischer Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933, edited by the Institut für Zeitgeschichte and by the Research Foundation for Jewish Immigration (Munich, 1983-3). I heartily thank Lothar Mertens, M. A. (Bochum) for preparing these data. The presentation by Horst Möller, Exodus der Kultur. Schriftsteller, Wissenschaftler und Künstler in der Emigration nach 1933 (München, 1984), esp. 102-18, is also based upon this material.

21 In the summer of 1947, he received offers from Erlangen and Heidelberg. In 1951, he accepted the offer from Tübingen. For a biography of Rothfels and Heidelberg. In 1951, he accepted the offer from Tübingen. For a biography of Rothfels, see the obituary by Werner Conze in Historische Zeitschrift 237 (1983):311-60, 347.
by nature." Golo Mann did not come back until 1958. In 1947, he was not yet interested in returning, and later it took several attempts for him to obtain a professorship in the Federal Republic, over the opposition of conservative faculties. Dietrich Gerhard also came back in the 1950s. In 1954, he took a chair in American history at Cologne University, but he retained his American post in St. Louis even after he moved to the Max-Planck-Institute for history in Göttingen in 1961. Several attempts by Fritz Epstein, a specialist in Eastern European history who worked in the United States as a librarian, to return to a German university or research institution failed. In 1955, when he theoretically had a chance to receive an offer from Cologne University (after the first man on the list had declined), the ministry in Düsseldorf passed him over, for reasons which were very difficult to explain to Epstein. German colleagues blamed financial considerations, but Epstein was nevertheless deeply hurt. Three years later, when he sought appointment as director of the Munich Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Hans Rothfels had to tell him that this appointment would tarnish the institute by giving it the reputation of a "Morgenthau-Institute." Other emigrants who belonged to the liberal school of Friedrich Meinecke— in spite of Meinecke’s personal intervention with Hajo Holborn and Hans Rosenberg—remained in the United States and came back to Germany only as guest professors. By returning to serve as part-time teachers at German universities, they highlighted for the German academic world the changes that could have occurred in Germany had more emigrants gone back permanently, for they tried to demonstrate in their books and articles the fatal influence of certain continuities in German history, based upon serious research. More important was the fact that they returned to Germany only temporarily, too late, or not at all. Because the emigrant historians remained abroad, the German historical profession failed to undertake the much-promised and much-debated revision of historical thinking that was needed after 1948–9. Even Friedrich Meinecke, who had sharply attacked Prussian militarism in 1946, retreated in 1949. He spoke not of "guilt" but of "tragedy," for Germany, he stated, had acted in legitimate self-defense. Hajo Holborn never hesitated to criticize his teacher for this change of mind.

II

All these observations attempt to sketch the total picture, and of necessity they neglect the personal situations of emigrants who were confronted with the question of an eventual return. Before I risk some general remarks about the personal plight of emigrant historians, I would like to examine the special fate of Hans Rosenberg. It seems to be a good example to illustrate both the difficulties posed for German faculties that sought to entice an emigrant back and the problems of the emigrants themselves.

There is no need to give a biography of Hans Rosenberg, from his Cologne Habilitation in 1932 up to his teaching career at Brooklyn College in New York, which began in 1938. In 1944 he became a citizen of the United States. As early as March 1946, Peter Rassow addressed an appeal to him, as well as to all other émigré faculty members, in response to a formal order of the British Military Government. Rassow wrote:

After Nazi domination has been abolished, all regulations by which members of the faculty have been excluded for racial or political reasons have become obsolete. The philosophical faculty begs you to return to our community and to take again the place you once had. Certainly it is a very difficult undertaking to come back to Cologne, a city for the most part destroyed, and to root here again. Just as intensively as we shall work

23 Rothfels to Epstein, December 30, 1958, NL Epstein, no. 82, Schieder–Epstein Correspondence, BAK.
24 Meinecke, Ausgewählte Briefwechsel, 247, where Meinecke spoke of the lack of good forces. In a letter to Rassow on February 19, 1947, Meinecke spoke of the rising generation in modern history as a "ruin" (UA Köln 197/39). Hajo Holborn was in Germany in the fall of 1947 merely in the service of the American government, in order to prepare a report on the progress of democratization.
25 Compare B. Faulebich, "Der 'deutsche Weg' aus der Sicht des Exils. Zum Urteil emi-
Rosenberg rejected this general offer, which was not connected with any definite job and which all university faculties were required to send to their émigré members in 1946. But he declined it politely, even deeply moved, pointing out his possession of a secure job in New York, saying nothing definite about a possible return to Germany.

Negotiations began in Cologne to fill the chair vacated by liberal historian Johannes Zieckursch, whose pupil Rosenberg had once been. Rosenberg was a serious candidate from the beginning; Meinecke himself had recommended him in a letter to Rassow. Discussions very soon narrowed the list to Theodor Schieder, Hans Rosenberg, Hans Herzfeld, and Carl Hinrichs, in that order, the last two names placed ex aequo in third place. The reasons for this order became much clearer when the dean sent a “supplement” to the list to the board of curators. This supplement was occasioned by a letter from Rosenberg detailing his latest publications and — above all — his interesting plans for teaching in the next five years. Thereafter the philosophical faculty emphasized its desire to persuade Rosenberg to accept the chair: “If the information had arrived earlier in Cologne, the faculty undoubtedly would have put Hans Rosenberg at the top of the list,” wrote the dean to the chairman of the board of curators.

“The faculty refrains from changing the list only because this could be seen as a discourtesy toward Professor Schieder, who was kind enough to agree to substitute for the chairholder in the next semester, if he has been denazified by that time.” The dean proposed this resolution in a session of the board at which the mayor of Cologne, Robert Görlinger, who had been an emigrant too, showed his personal interest about a possible return to Germany.

Since Rosenberg’s readiness to come to Cologne was uncertain, the board left the list formally unchanged but directed Dean Fritz Schalk to inquire immediately about Rosenberg’s plans. “If Rosenberg shows an interest, we are going to demand the appointment of Rosenberg from the ministry.” That meant that the continuation of the proceedings now depended upon Rosenberg’s answer.

Rosenberg found himself in a difficult situation after he received Dean Schalk’s letter, compounded by the fact that the British university officer indicated his personal interest, in a postscript to the same letter. At that moment, Rosenberg recognized that he had raised expectations too high in Cologne by sending his letters, his list of books and articles, and his teaching plans. As early as the middle of September 1947, he had been puzzled that Cologne expected an answer to the question “ ‘When,’ although the question of ‘If’ is not yet clear to me,” he wrote. In letters to Cologne, he stressed that good friends had warned him against returning to bombed-out Cologne, posed questions about the status of Cologne libraries, and once more underlined his obligations to Brooklyn College and to his wife. Also he wanted greater clarity about the psychic and political climate in Cologne, especially about the problem of anti-Semiticism.

Rosenberg’s answer illustrates the difficult decision facing emigrants when they were confronted, in that very early postwar period, with the question of suddenly leaving the secure and rich United States. “There are too many uncertainties, complexities, and imponderables in the picture,” Rosenberg wrote back to Cologne on November 27. “I cannot accept a permanent professorship at Cologne University.” From my impression of the records and my conversations with Rosenberg in the last year of his life, it was respect for his wife, who had seen her destroyed hometown in the summer of 1947, which made Rosenberg reject the offer from Cologne. Had he been alone, I am sure he would have been ready to go back to Germany.

Subsequently the board of Cologne University did not have to proceed as it would have had Rosenberg answered positively. Theodor Schieder, who already was serving as substitute professor in Cologne, could now be appointed to a permanent position, and he began his remarkable and important teaching career there. In the case of Hans Rosenberg, the faculty had taken all possible steps — insofar as I can judge the case from the records of the faculty, the

28 UA Köln, 197/39.
29 Rosenberg’s plans are of special interest precisely because of the relatively unchanged course offerings of the historical seminars. He described to the Cologne faculty ten main thematic points which he wished to treat in lectures and seminars (“What is to be expected and not to be expected of me?”): history of dictatorship from the Renaissance to the present; world history since 1914; general history of early capitalism (1200–1750); general history of high capitalism and the planned economy; comparative constitutional and administration history of Europe and North America in the modern era; German history from the Reformation to the French Revolution; German history since 1815; Russian history; history of political theory and social philosophy from the Middle Ages to the present.
board, and the personal papers of Rosenberg himself – to attract back an émigré colleague. I did not find any hint of personal resentment against Rosenberg or other emigrants.30

But Cologne was not the only faculty which would have liked to make Rosenberg a colleague. Even though the Free University of Berlin was not as ambitious in this regard as was Cologne, there can be no doubt that Meinecke urged Rosenberg strongly to return to Germany, for he appointed him guest lecturer in Berlin in December 1948. Meinecke reported to Siegfried A. Kaehler at the end of May 1949 that after “the failure to keep the extremely successful Rosenberg in Berlin,” the faculty planned to think seriously of Hans Herzfeld.31

III

Even after this presentation of a well-documented single case, it seems very difficult to make a final judgment about the intensity and seriousness of the efforts to call back émigré historians. If one considers the inner resistance developed by emigrants against Germany during the years of National Socialism, the extremely insecure conditions of life in occupied postwar Germany, and the relatively low number of men who had a high enough scholarly profile to be appointed to a professorship, one must finally conclude that, under the given circumstances, one could not have tried very much harder. One must emphasize Meinecke’s tone of regret when he pointed out in a letter to Hajo Holborn the general difficulty of finding capable candidates for modern history chairs in postwar Germany.32

Even Hans Rothfels, who usually is described as immediately ready to return after the war, found himself in a dilemma in October 1950, when he had to decide between a history chair at Tübingen and a guest professorship in Berlin. The main question, he wrote to Fritz Epstein, was whether to return to Germany at all, and he asked Epstein for his opinion on this central issue. Epstein’s answer not only shows the personal difficulties of the emigrants in general, but it may also explain the impossibility of coming to a final judgment on this question. The problem, Epstein replied, was that on a decision of such consequence, no one was able to speak for another: “You know very well about the advantages of an eventual return, and I feel like you. In my opinion it is decisive whether you have true friends, whether you have found professional and personal response or will find it sometime.” The ages of his children certainly played a role for him, and maybe – so he reasoned, to encourage himself – one could do something from the United States for scholarly cooperation with Germany. Concerning the last question in Rothfels’ letter, Epstein could only report good news. After his visit to Berlin, he felt convinced that the present generation of students was not going to forget in the future the harm that the persecution of Jews had done to the German name.33

Naturally one cannot generalize this exchange between Rothfels and Epstein to all émigré historians, but it highlighted the most important aspects of the discussion on the subject. We may take it for granted, however, that the decision of an emigrant family to return depended more decisively upon their specific personal and professional perspective on life in the United States than upon a political evaluation of German conditions before and after the war. A scholar whose children were still attending college saw no immediate reason to return, and did colleagues who for good reasons felt deeply obligated to their American friends, who had helped them out in the most difficult situation of their lives.

The balance sheet cannot be drawn solely from the mere number of historians who went back to Germany to live and work. We must also consider historians who periodically returned to Germany as guest professors, such as Rosenberg, Dietrich Gerhard, Fritz Epstein, and Gerhard Masur.34 Theodor Mommsen, Ernst Kantorowicz, Hajo Holborn, and Felix Gilbert, all of whom had decided to remain in the United States, discussed these guest professorships many times. They regarded it as their special duty to intensify scholarly exchange between the United States and the western part of Germany, and

30 The circumstances of the appointment, which without a doubt indicated the direction of the postwar German historical profession, is recounted here on the basis of Cologne appointment records, the protocol of the Kuratorium (UA Köln 197 / 39 and 471 / 44), and supplementary documents in the private possession of Hans Rosenberg.


32 Meinecke to Holborn, March 19, 1946, in Meinecke, Ausgewählter Briefwechsel, 247.

33 NL Epstein, no. 102, Briefwechsel Epstein–Rothfels, BAK.

34 Horst Möller, Exodus der Kultur, 105-6, has correctly called attention to this point.
they sought to establish a new attitude of cooperation toward Germany at their American universities.\(^{35}\)

Viewed from the perspective of the 1990s, we must emphasize that there was – as Friedrich Meinecke observed in 1949 – no form of *emigrantisches ressentiment* among the emigrants.\(^{36}\) It was surprising how quickly the émigrés reestablished contact with Germany, through the exchange of letters and regards and – more importantly – parcels, and through requests for books which had been published in Germany during the war. I was somewhat astonished, even shocked, to find that the return to normalcy in this regard came about as quickly as the return to business as usual within the German historical profession. Hans Rosenberg demonstrated that he knew very well how to differentiate between qualified, personally honest, and politically harmless former party members and several “denazified Nazis” who had to be watched, when he remarked upon the development of the Free University of Berlin, with its different categories of politically charged professors.\(^{37}\)

Hans Rothfels also emphasized, in his report about a journey he made to Germany in 1949 under the auspices of the so-called reorientation program, the astonishing ease of relations with colleagues who all “had been affiliated with the Nazi setup in one way or another.”\(^{38}\) I could not discover any examples of a breakdown in personal relations. The intensity of exchange programs everywhere demonstrates the quickly restored willingness to cooperate. This seems to be a remarkable phenomenon which may have some significance for the strength of the historical guild and its professional values, its “team spirit,” and the close ties of the emigrants to the cultural system of Germany and Europe. When I read the letters exchanged between some refugee scholars and their German colleagues just after the war, I was very astonished to find that they attributed only minor significance to the Holocaust and to the problem of “guilt,” a fact that cannot be explained solely by a low level of awareness of the terrible dimensions of the “final solution.”\(^{39}\)

\(^{35}\) I base this point upon a letter from Felix Gilbert, for which I am most grateful to him.


\(^{37}\) Thus in a letter to Howard Johnson of September 24, 1949 (private possession of Hans Rosenberg).

\(^{38}\) NL Rothfels, no. 59, BAK. It is interesting to note in this connection that in 1933 Eckart Kehr had described Hans Rothfels as “the first Fascist among German historians” (quoted from Joachim F. Radkau, *Die deutsche Emigration in den USA. Ihr Einfluss auf die amerikanische Europapolitik 1933–1945* [Düsseldorf, 1971], 308, n. 254).


The close ties between refugee historians and their colleagues in Germany seem to form a remarkable contrast to the fact that only a few scholars found their way back to Germany. Veit Valentin, who evidently was willing to return, died not long after his first visit to Frankfurt in January 1947.\(^{40}\) A man like Hajo Holborn, who had gone into emigration in 1933 under the guise of beginning a “journey for studies” and had hoped that the journey would end one day at home, refused to respond to the earnest entreaties of his old teacher Friedrich Meinecke.\(^{41}\)

I wish to add one more observation to this puzzle of impressions about the postwar period in the German historical profession. There not only was an emigration to the United States and other secure countries; there was also a kind of inner emigration in Germany. I do not include here those German historians who had been consciously silent during the Third Reich or had even been in contact with the resistance movement (like Fritz Kern, Gerhard Ritter, Friedrich Baethgen, or Peter Rassow). Instead I want to mention a man who had lived in obscurity as a *Vierteljude*, as he described himself in his curriculum vitae for the U.S. Military Government in 1946, Ludwig Dehio (the son of the famous art historian Georg Dehio), who had survived the Nazi regime as an archivist at the Prussian archive at Berlin-Charlottenburg.

In 1946, Friedrich Meinecke, who had come into closer contact with Dehio during the war, recommended him for the position of editor-in-chief of *Historische Zeitschrift*. After some hesitation, Dehio accepted this job, which gave him a key position in the German historical guild. His work for this first-rank scholarly journal offered him the chance to press for a revision of German history, which seemed indispensable to him. He did not want to return to business as usual, but he instead looked searchingly for new insights into his troubled times by means of historical investigation. It was his firm intention to include in each issue of the journal some great article by a leading historian, discussing the changes in German political life since the catastrophe. However, his policy could not triumph over the “terrible urge for normalcy.” When he could not quickly find
the path-breaking articles he sought, his publisher could delay publication no longer. Dehio wanted to bring out the first postwar number of Historische Zeitschrift with at least a new foreword – more critical, more committed – but the publisher did not want to open the new series with Dehio’s bitter prose, which deplored the “improvement of our science as a consequence of forbidding free discussion, of separation from foreign countries, of emigration, ... and of the sheer misery after the catastrophe.” According to the publisher, these clear words did not suit the situation of 1949.42

During my research I found only relatively few historians who were clearly willing to return to Germany without first arranging for a position. Helmut Hirsch, who taught at Roosevelt College in Chicago, wrote to Gerhard Ritter in 1952 to express the wish “not only to visit my old Heimat but to try to find a job in Germany, in spite of the enormous difficulties.” Six years later, he wrote to Hans Rothfels that he wanted to go back to Germany because he saw no professional future for himself in the United States. He was able to return only in 1961, when he found a position at the Verwaltungs- und Wirtschaftsakademie in Düsseldorf, where he taught until 1969.43 As far as I know, Gerhard Masur, Fritz Epstein, and George Wolfgang Hallgarten were willing to go back to Germany but could not find a satisfactory tenured position.44 They had to content themselves with guest lectures and other forms of scholarly cooperation. It is too difficult to make a judgment about the relative professional reputations of these very different scholars, but I learned from discussions among the emigrants themselves that there were important differences which were known both in the United States and in Germany.

It seems, then, that to be fair one must recognize that much was done to bring the émigré historians back to the German universities and that problem cases do not prove the existence of a general policy of keeping them out of Germany. The remarkable influence that guest professors like Hans Rosenberg exercised in Germany also tends to disprove any policy of exclusion. But the attitude of the professional organization of German historians was quite different. When German historians met for the first time after World War II at Munich, Gerhard Ritter assumed the role of natural spokesman of German historians, a position of eminence recognized much more in the United States, than in Germany itself. Ritter found no reason for a general reorientation of historical scholarship in Germany. He even felt obliged to criticize voices from the United States that warned about the traditional and even völkische character of some historical dissertations produced in Germany.45 This meeting of German historians, which on the one hand welcomed Hans Rothfels warmly, on the other hand said nothing about the émigré historians. Those who had expected some expression of regret, not to mention an admission of guilt, from Gerhard Ritter, who had helped to draft the Stuttgart “confession of guilt” of the Protestant churches, must have been disappointed after his opening speech. He complained about the loss of libraries and archives and about the difficulty of arranging scholarly exchanges between the occupation zones, but he neither found a word of regret for the loss of the émigré scholars nor voiced any sense of obligation to attempt to reestablish relations with his colleagues abroad. He found it necessary, however, to attack Felix Gilbert for his critiques of some postwar dissertations which seemed, by their choice of concepts, to prolong the Nazi era in the field of historical research.46

It would give a false picture to exaggerate the influence exercised by the émigré scholars after their return or during their visiting professorships, but their role was significant. Hans Rothfels was politically indistinguishable from his conservative German colleagues, but he nonetheless established the new branch of contemporary history in Germany, introduced systematic approaches from political science into history, and sharply attacked the traditional paradigm of objectivity. Hans Rosenberg influenced a generation of Berlin students like Otto Büsch, Friedrich Zunkel, Gerhard A. Ritter, and

42 This sentence was part of an introductory article by Dehio, intended for the first issue of Historische Zeitschrift but never published. The text may now be found in Schulze, Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft, 101–4.
44 Compare also Walther, “Emigrierte deutsche Historiker.”
later Hans-Ulrich Wehler. On the other hand we must recognize that the important development of “modern German social history” during the 1950s did not stem from the traditions of Karl Lamprecht or Otto Hintze but from a special sort of history that I would like to call a “denazified Volksgeschichte,” propagated by men like Otto Brunner, Hans Freyer, Gunter Ipsen, and Werner Conze and going back to the “discovery” of the Volk in the early Weimar republic. Of necessity, the writing of history had changed under the experience of National Socialism. Only after the war did the many ruptures in German society from the middle of the nineteenth century find their way into the conceptual system of German history, a process which had been completed much earlier in other European countries. Only after the experience of National Socialism did the “history of mankind,” as it was proposed vaguely by Friedrich Meinecke, become possible “as a great historical duty of the future.” Meinecke’s insights could not come to fruition all at once. The concept was first discussed by Werner Conze and Theodor Schieder, when Conze criticized the traditional historical method as inadequate to the modern world and when Schieder tried to define the role of “man in history.” Schieder, especially, tried to create a kind of history consciously oriented toward man, who was to be found in the “social constructs” built by human beings, thus reconciling the fruitless polarization of individualism and collectivism.

But this method of Volksgeschichte, which was rebaptized “social history” or “structural history” and organized, above all, in Conze’s “Working Group for Modern Social History” after 1957, was only one form of innovation within the German historical profession. A second and weaker influence came from the liberal wing of the Weimar historians, who, for example, explored the relation between the foreign policy and the domestic policy of states; the sociohistorical foundation of the military organizations of states; or the social conditions of the production and reception of ideas.

This partial recourse to the conceptual discussions of the Weimar periods unites – at least in my essay – these two methodological approaches. Hans Rosenberg profited from his first postwar contacts with Germany, obtaining the collected essays of Otto Hintze, which had been published during the war. Felix Gilbert and Fritz Epstein were already convinced in 1948 that “Otto Hintze will more and more be recognized as one of the greatest German historians in modern times.” When Theodor Schieder praised the new edition of Hintze’s collected essays in 1963, the two directions were brought together, and a broader basis for further development of German historical writing was established.

47 I discuss this point in Chapter 16 of my Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft.
48 Meinecke to S. A. Kaehler, January 29, 1945, in Meinecke, Ausgewählter Briefwechsel, 514.