

This thesis examines the rhetoric of East German domestic and foreign politics and how the issue of race and racism was handled. It covers the time period from the early 1950s through the 1960s, while contextualizing East German politics with German politics of the Weimar and Nazi eras. Accounts of racism towards Jews, Slavs and groups from Africa, Latin America and South East Asia are examined. The thesis attempts to show that in the self-proclaimed anti-racist state of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), racism marked both domestic and foreign politics and greatly influenced the Cold War politics of East Germany. The racism that was tolerated and promoted in the early period of the GDR still influences Germany today.

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Cold War Dictatorship:
Racism in the German Democratic Republic

By

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Abbreviations and Definitions

Dvdl: East German Administration of the Interior

FRG: Federal Republic of Germany

GDR: German Democratic Republic

SED: Socialist Unity Party

Stasi: East German Secret Police

Einheit- Unity

Entjudung- De-jewification

Freundschaft- Friendship

Freundschaftsideologie- The ideology of friendship

Gleichberechtigung- Equality of rights

Mischling- Mixed-breed

Klassenbrüdern- Class brothers

Kristallnacht- Night of Broken Glass

Negerschlampe- Negro slut

Rowdytum- Hooliganism

Volk- A people

Volkschauen- Exhibition of peoples

Volksarmee- The people's army

Volksdemokratie- A people's democracy

Volkskammer- Parliament

Volkspolizei- The people's police

Wehrmacht- Armed forces

Introduction

Racism and East German Domestic and Foreign Policy

Anetta Kahane was a young Jewish woman born in 1954 who experienced many of the injustices of the totalitarian dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). She was discriminated against as a Jew and was forced to discriminate against foreigners. In her memoir *Ich sehe was, was du nicht siehst* (I see what you don't see), Kahane recounts the fear and misunderstanding of GDR citizens towards foreigners on account of the East German policy that kept Germans and foreigners strictly controlled and separate. The result was racism in a country that claimed to be anti-racist. She also witnessed the extensiveness of the ruling party's, the Socialist Unity Party's (SED), ideology and law and its application outside the GDR. After college she worked for the East German government as a translator on the island of Sao Tome in Africa in the late 1970s and recounts in her memoir,

The GDR foreign service had implemented a strict ban against contact with foreigners. At the first instructional session with the Attaché I asked who he considered to be foreigners. He was astonished at my question. Naturally all non-GDR citizens were meant. The Sao Tomoners as well? Yes, of course, he said, and the Soviets, Cubans and all others as well.¹

Why were GDR citizens authoritatively segregated from foreigners? As Kahane reveals in her account, this segregation was one result of communist ideology, the national and international political situation during the Cold War and the SED's fear of losing power. Racism, fostered by this segregation, developed as a result

¹ Anetta Kahane, *Ich sehe was, was du nicht siehst* (Berlin: Rowohlt Verlag, 2004), 90. Note: All quotations originally in German have been translated by the author.

of both domestic and foreign policies, which were formulated from the same ideology.

This intertwined relationship between national and foreign politics was evident in both camps during the Cold War. Mary Dudziak and Thomas Borstelmann have explored this relationship in the United States and have revealed the important effects that American domestic policy had on foreign policy during the Cold War. Their studies show that the communist camp was able to use American race relations as evidence for the hypocrisy of U.S. foreign policy. The promotion of freedom and democracy abroad contradicted the United State's domestic politics of segregation and discrimination. Yet, similar contradictions accompanied communist dictatorships.

After World War II, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) tried to create a new image for itself, completely separate from its Nazi past. It promoted a strong rhetoric of anti-racism both at home and abroad in an attempt to show that no traces of fascism from the Third Reich existed in the GDR, which could endanger the democratic and peaceful development of the country. Anti-racism was a tactic through which the SED attempted to legitimize the GDR and establish power on both the national and international levels. However, a study of GDR ideology and rhetoric for both its national and foreign politics reveals that racism was tolerated and in some instances promoted by the government. The SED's anti-racist ideology was never applied. Problems stemming from racism or xenophobia had to be ignored by the East German dictatorship because it claimed

that these problems did not exist and as a result, the SED simply enforced the separation of Germans from foreigners.

In exploring the relationship between national and foreign policy in the GDR, this study focuses on the period between 1950 and the early 1970s. It is the period directly following the establishment of the GDR in 1949 to the beginning of Cold War detente² in the early 1970s. During this period, the GDR was strongly controlled by its big brother, the Soviet Union, and its legitimacy was threatened by its German neighbor, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). For the first twenty years of their existence there was no mutual recognition between the two German states. The GDR used strong rhetoric to substantiate and justify its claim to being the true German state and to being separate and superior to both the Germany of the Third Reich and that of the FRG. It had to counteract the West German constitution, which denied the existence of a separate East German government by recognizing both East and West Germans as citizens of the FRG.

While concentrating on securing its legitimacy, the GDR became a static point amidst the changing and developing scene of the Cold War. The 1950s and 1960s saw rapid political change: the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, Prague Spring of 1968 and the development of atomic weapons. However, the SED's politics stayed consistent and revolved around a set ideology. This ideology claimed that the FRG and United States were enemies and that the GDR was a perfect communist and anti-racist state. International solidarity with other communist

² Cold War Detente refers to the general reduction of political tension between the United States and the Soviet Union during the early 1970s through the start of the 1980s.

countries and newly independent socialist states was critical as well. Until Willy Brandt, the Chancellor of West Germany from 1969 to 1974, started his Ostpolitik, which resulted in mutual recognition between the two German states, domestic and foreign political ideology stayed consistent. This program was dedicated to developing recognition and friendship with East Germany and marked the easing of tension between the East and the West. It also marked a change in the nature of SED policies to include reform and more flexibility regarding foreigners.

The study of the GDR and the relationship between its domestic and foreign policies during this era has been given very little attention in the past. The study of racism in relation to these policies has received even less attention. With the reunification of Germany in 1990, there was a surge of studies regarding racism in both East and West Germany and the development of neo-Nazi groups, which were greatly affecting the social and political atmosphere of German society. However, material concerning racism in East Germany before the 1980s is very limited; more attention has been given to the reunification period, rather than the early dictatorship of the GDR. As a result, the resources that are used in this study hold particular significance to the conclusions that I reach.³

The information that was released by the dictatorship in the GDR was completely censored and therefore unreliable. Publications of statistics and even memoirs were censored and often do not reveal the underlying problems that were present in GDR society. Therefore, in my analysis of materials, especially

³ See: Jonathan R. Zatlín, *Race and Economy in Soviet-Style Regime; Schwarz-Weisse Zeiten*; Anetta Kahane, *Ich sehe was, was du nicht siehst.*; Hans-Joachim Doering, „Es geht um unsere Existenz“...; Eva-Mario Elsner, *Ausländerpolitik und Ausländerfeindschaft*.

newspaper and radio reports, I look both at the information that was released and what was left unsaid. I try to question the obvious and understand the not so obvious, thereby uncovering useful evidence in unreliable sources. Analyzing trends and main themes in published material reveals the nature of the totalitarian regime and the relationship between its national and foreign policy. In addition to newspaper and radio reports, I also use interviews and memoirs published in the 1990s, which recount people's personal experiences with foreigners and racism in the GDR. This case study of racism in an officially anti-racist state uncovers the similar ideologies of SED national and foreign politics and how they were interdependent. Many of the interviews used cover experiences from the 1980s, because much more has been recorded about the 1980s than the earlier years. The experiences from the 1980s, however, testify to similarities in accounts of racism with earlier reports and are thus important in order to supplement the previous material and provide a fuller picture. It is important here to note that many of the texts used are originally in German, but I translated the quotations for the convenience of the reader.

What is meant by race and racism in this study is key to understanding its role in the GDR. Racism is a "system of advantage based on race."⁴ It is a social construct based on prejudice against a certain group of people, defined as a race, and provides specific privileges. These privileges can be anything from political power to individual social status. Racism is also a belief that people are fundamentally different and unequal. The concept of race is at the root of racism

⁴ Beverly Daniel Tatum, *"Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" and other Conversations about Race* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 7.

and gives racism a certain structure. Historically, race has been seen as a biological categorization of people based on certain physical characteristics. People today, like their predecessors, “have conflated several distinct physical features- skin color, hair type, various facial features- to create a system of absolute racial identities: white, black, yellow, red and sometimes brown.”⁵ Racial categories have often changed based on the political situation of the times. Today’s modern understanding is that race and racism are socially defined constructs ridden with prejudice and the belief in the inequality of peoples.

The constructs of race and racism have been used on a state and personal level in order to ensure certain privileges. In German politics and literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people of Slavic origin, especially Poles, were often considered an inferior race. They had similar physical characteristics to Germans, yet the greater poverty of Eastern Europe and the different work ethic of Eastern Europeans were explained as biological defects of the inferior Slavic race. The Nazis took this racism much further and tried to eliminate all races that it believed endangered the progress of the German race. In a sense, once a people is threatened by characteristics of another people, racism is used as an excuse to discriminate against potentially dangerous people from which a person or group of people wants to protect itself. This tactic was consciously and subconsciously used by the East German government during the Cold War for its own security in both national and foreign politics. These examples have been of state prejudice, but racism plays an important role in the private sphere as well. There is a

⁵ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 7.

difference between state racism, which can be officially controlled, and private prejudice, over which the government has little influence. Unlike the Nazi regime, the East German government was not officially racist, yet it tolerated certain situations and implemented laws that promoted racism at the private level.

The following three chapters attempt to uncover the relationship between national and foreign politics under the GDR dictatorship, by shedding light on the nature of the dictatorship and the role that racism played in its domestic and foreign policies. The first chapter explains the development of politics and racism in Germany from the Enlightenment to the establishment of the GDR. It shows how issues of racism have been present in modern German history, especially concerning certain groups such as the Poles. Different governments, from Bismarck to Hitler to the SED, took differing stances regarding racism and nationalism in order to accomplish their political goals. Bismarck used race to define German nationalism, which was an important factor in the unification of German kingdoms in the nineteenth century. Hitler used racism and nationalism as the basis of his politics in order to justify genocide and slavery. The GDR used a strict policy of anti-racism to differentiate itself from the Nazis and Western democracies, while still tolerating and even encouraging racism and discrimination when it was politically beneficial, or when it did not endanger the legitimacy of SED politics. This role of racism bound SED national and foreign politics in an interdependent and static relationship.

The second chapter explains the prominence of racism in GDR society and how racism was encouraged by anti-racist SED rhetoric. It concentrates on the

specific groups of people that experienced racism in the GDR: Slavs (especially Poles), Jews and *others* of non-European origin, such as Chileans, Africans and Vietnamese. Slavs and non-Europeans were brought into Germany for two reasons, which were justified under the blanket ideology of international solidarity- as workers or students. Their experiences, however, were not consistent with SED ideology and reveal the complexity of problems that were never dealt with in the GDR. Anti-Semitism in the GDR reveals the same problem and shows how racist sentiment was expressed not only against foreigners, but also against fellow Germans.

The last chapter makes a comparison with America during the civil rights era and how the GDR used contradictions in American politics as evidence for the legitimacy of its ideology. The SED accused the U.S. of racism and used the hypocrisy of American politics as proof of the superiority of communism. This analysis shows the static nature of SED rhetoric, which reflects the nature of its politics. SED rhetoric regarding its enemy the United States, like its ideology and policies, did not change as the situation in the United States changed. This chapter also reveals the important role that racism played in defining the Cold War politics of both camps.

Borstelmann and Dudziak's field of study, which focuses on U.S. national and foreign politics, adds depth to the understanding of Cold War politics and how the two camps interacted to secure their national interests. My study comes from another angle- from the communist perspective. It shows how communist foreign policies were driven by social circumstances at home and how

international conditions shaped domestic policies. My study also sheds light on specific problems in the GDR that are the root of contemporary problems in Germany. The increasing strength of neo-Nazi groups among young East Germans can be linked to the history of racism in the region. My thesis also adds a new perspective to the study of Cold War relations and reveals similarities between the two camps. The bond between national and foreign policies affected not only the legitimacy of democratic countries, but also the politics of dictatorships.

Chapter I

The Political and Ideological Development of the GDR

The German Democratic Republic claimed to be a new German state, free from problems of racism and capitalism. The SED was strongly committed to anti-racism in both its national and foreign political rhetoric, in order to separate itself from the Nazis and the West and to maintain an honorable ideology that could be used to defend its policies. However, the SED's political and ideological development became hypocritical. The development of the SED led to a dictatorial rule that supported discrimination, intolerance and ultimately, racism. Discrimination against Jews, Slavs and what were termed 'others', or non-Germans, was present in the GDR, even if the government officially claimed that racism did not exist. The presence of racism marks continuities, yet also great differences, between the GDR and previous German governments. Each German government, from Bismarck to Hitler to the SED, created different national and foreign policies surrounding the issues of race and nationalism, yet racism was present under all three regimes and bound German domestic and foreign politics together. This chapter traces the development of racism in Germany from Bismarck to the SED. It also attempts to show differences and continuities in the regimes and how racism connected national and foreign politics under these three governments.

1.1 From Bismarck to Hitler

The project of political modernization in Germany was linked to the development of German nationalism and the German nation-state. The modern

construct of the German nation was greatly influenced by enlightenment theories on race. Modern Germany, therefore, was marked not only by political developments towards unification, but also by nationalist theories that asserted the superiority of the German race. Before the unification efforts of Otto von Bismarck, the first Chancellor of the German Empire in 1871⁶, the Germanic kingdoms were individually governed states, with separate dialects and cultures. In the 18th century, German enlightenment thinkers called for the development of a common culture and nation, which initiated the struggle for a national identity. Aspirations for a national revival sprang from the hope of regaining a mythical political unity that German folklore recounted. One of the most popular medieval myths was that of the 'Emperor Barbarossa,' who had conquered and unified German lands. The development of a German cultural nation also sprang from German literary traditions, with writers such as Georg Gottfried Gervinus and Friedrich Schiller as spokesmen for a German nation. Attempts at political unity, such as the failed revolution of 1848 which doomed Prussian and Austrian efforts to create a common nation-state, drove a focused movement for the creation of cultural unity. The founding of the German Empire in 1871 under Bismarck

⁶ Bismarck became the prime minister of Prussia, one of the largest German kingdoms, in 1863. He was successful in creating the North German Alliance, an alliance between Prussia and 17 northern German states in 1866. Bismarck's victory in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 enabled the union of the Kingdoms of Bavaria, Württemberg, Baden and Hessen with the North German Alliance, a union that created the German Empire in 1870. King William I of Prussia was proclaimed German Emperor, with Bismarck as his Chancellor.

marked the unity of German culture and national identity, with the exclusion of Austria.⁷

The formation of a national identity was one of the most influential characteristics of the new German Empire. This national identity was rooted in the development of patriotism with the rewriting of a patriotic version of history, the creation of national holidays, displays of military parades and patriotic speeches.⁸ This new German nationalism maintained that the German nation was a racial construct instead of a cultural one. Nationalism was based on the idea that Germans belonged to one race, which contained certain linguistic and cultural traditions. Feelings of national pride developed along with the concept that Germans should maintain the purity and strength of their nation. This combination of race and patriotism reflected popular intellectual thought of the day that combined nationalism, racism and science.

The combination of race and science came out of the Enlightenment's radical attempt to define man's place in nature. Scientific endeavors focused on this goal and in combination with religious concerns, developed the theory that the 'inner man' could be read through outward appearance. Therefore, the way different people looked was understood to be characteristic of their personal qualities.⁹ Good people looked a certain way and therefore, good races had particular physical features. Characterizing nations became related to categorizing

⁷ Konrad H. Jarausch and others, „The Presence of the Past: Culture, Opinion, and Identity in Germany,“ in *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997), 28-33.

⁸ Konrad H. Jarausch and others, „The Presence of the Past, 36.

⁹ George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, Inc., 1978), 3-5.

physical traits. Charles Darwin's¹⁰ scientific discoveries of evolution greatly influenced racial theorists, who developed the theory of Social Darwinism. This theory was based on an analysis of the social and political behavior of various peoples and of their respective ecological conditions. It claimed that certain races evolved in a superior manner to others, based on characteristics of natural fitness.¹¹ Characteristics were associated with various groups of people and through a combination of peoples' histories, cultures and physical appearances, intellectuals generated the concept of racial biology. Social theorists attempt to prove Germanic racial superiority using the theory of Social Darwinism. The work of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach¹² and later that of Houston Steward Chamberlain (1855-1927) and Alfred Ploetz (1860-1940) was used to construct evidence for the superiority of the German race, which later formed the basis of Nazi ideology.¹³

Elements other than physical characteristics were also used to identify race in order to distinguish and rank groups of people. During the nineteenth century, language became one of the principle identifying factors for race. The German writer and philosopher Herder was instrumental in awakening a national consciousness in Germany when he identified the German language as the most

¹⁰ Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was a British naturalist whose theory on the occurrence of evolution through natural selection has become the central explanation for biology today. One of his most famous works is *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1857).

¹¹ Hans-Joachim Bieber „Anti-Semitism as a Reflection of Social, Economic and Political Tension in Germany: 1880-1933,“ in: *Jews and Germans from 1860-1933- The Problematic Symbiosis*, (ed) David Bronsen (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1979), 42.

¹² Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's (1754-1840) craniometrical research led to his theory that the human species was divided into five races, to which he also assigned psychological characteristics. This theory was later used to assert the superiority of the Germanic race, which possessed superior physical and psychological traits.

¹³ George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 80.

direct descendent of the perfect Greek language. Therefore, the German language was superior to others. In the 1850's Heinrich Riehl proposed that customs, rather than language, were the integrative force of a race and coined the term *Heimatkunde* (local homeland history).¹⁴ This history bound a race together and proved its worth. With Riehl and Herder's claims as evidence, certain intellectuals of the time deemed the German race the purest. Tacitus' *Germania*, written in A.D. 98, was used as proof that from the beginning, ancient Germans had kept themselves pure and had not mixed with other tribes. Jews were considered another race, and therefore, pure Germans were not Jewish. Some theories also viewed the pure German race as being free of Slavic blood. Out of these racial theories came the unification of such terms as race, nation and *Volk* (a people). Racial purity became a new ideal and the theory of racial hierarchy was popularized.

The concept of ensuring the purity of a race from degeneration by impure peoples became important in the late nineteenth century and was popularized by Max Nordau.¹⁵ Eugenics was seen by some people as an essential practice on behalf of a superior race to eliminate the unfit and keep the race pure. During the nineteenth century Jews were considered one of the impure factors of society because they were thought to be habitual criminals. Africans were another impure race. It is important to note here that the development of racism and eugenics was by no means confined to Germans. The French were just as concerned with the purity of their race as the Germans were. Not all Germans or French were bigoted,

¹⁴ George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 36-47.

¹⁵ Max Nordau (1849-1923) was a Hungarian and a Zionist leader. He was a social critic who wrote many controversial books, including *Degeneration* (1892).

but the radical nature of racist theories and practices made them prominent features of political and societal public rhetoric of the time.

The rise of racial constructs and their implementation in explaining the structure of society, combined with the political and economic situations of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, resulted in politically supported racism. With the revolution of 1848 and the emancipation of Jews in Germany in 1869, the presence and visibility of Jews in politics and public life increased. A new group of Jews, which had weak links to the traditional Jewish community, focused on modernization and supported the new Reich. They became leaders of the industrial revolution in Germany and of the Social Democratic Party. Eduard Lasker and Ludwig Bamberger, who were parliamentary leaders of the National Liberals, Max Hirsch, who was the co-founder of the Liberal Trade Union, and Leopold Sonnemann, who was the editor of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, are examples of prominent Jews in nineteenth century Germany who were part of this modern Jewish community. Ultimately, this new presence further hurt the position of Jews in Germany.

The late 1870s saw a deep economic depression, for which many Germans blamed the Jews. Jews who were more successful than fellow non-Jewish German professionals became the targets of jealousy and hatred. By the 1880s, new rightwing conservative groups that supported anti-Semitism, such as the Conservative Party, the League of German Farmers and the National Liberal and Center Party, were decidedly anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitism was also used by nationalistic associations, like the Pan-German League, the army, the navy and

colonial clubs, to incite political agitation. Between 1886 to 1889, there were no unbaptized Jewish members of the Prussian Assembly and from 1893 to 1912 there were no Jews in the *Reichstag* (Parliament) other than a few Social Democrats. The state grew more reluctant to prosecute libels of anti-Semitic agitators. A rise in discussion among the Jewish community as to their position in politics and society led many non-Jewish Germans to connect Jews with revolution and radicalism. The combination of biological and social theories, along with the political and economic situation, led to intense anti-Semitism and the increasing belief that Jews were not a part of the German race and therefore should be kept on the rim of society.¹⁶

This racist ideology attacked not only Jews, but all non-Germans. The German bourgeoisie, who had grown in power as a result of the industrial revolution and who had great influence in defining the concept of a ‘German,’ used this theory of superiority against their trading partners in the East- the Slavs. The work of Marx and Engels¹⁷ exemplifies this anti-Slav chauvinism. They identified the Slavs as another group of people over whom the German nation was superior. The Ostmarkverein was founded in 1894 to Germanize the provinces added to Prussia through the Polish partition. Max Weber¹⁸ claimed, “It was we

¹⁶ Peter Pulzer, „Jewish Participation in Wilhelmine Politics,“ in: *Jews and Germans from 1860-1933- The Problematic Symbiosis*. (ed) David Bronsen (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1979), 80-85.

¹⁷ Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engles (1820-1895) were political philosophers who co-authored *The Communist Manifest* (1848), which became the basis for the communist political movement.

¹⁸ Max Weber (1864-1920) was a German political economist and sociologist. His works deal with the rationalization of religion and government, but he also wrote about economics.

who humanized the Poles.”¹⁹ In his essay *The National State and Economic Policy* (1895), Weber attempted to explain exactly why Germans were superior in every way to the Slavs in the East by looking at the economic situation of the two groups.

One is immediately tempted to believe that there is a difference in the two nationalities, stemming from racial qualities of a physical and psychic nature, in the ability to adapt to different economic and social conditions. This is, in fact, the basis of the difference.[...] Both processes, however- emigration here, population growth there- are in the final analysis to be traced to one and the same cause: the lower standard of living [...] which the Slavic race demands by its very nature.²⁰

At the turn of the century, there were over a million foreigners in Germany, 60 percent of whom were from Eastern Europe. This large number of foreigners, coupled with the economic and political tensions of the time, incited racism from Germans who blamed foreigners for their problems. These tensions instigated the adoption of the German citizenship law of 1913. The law distinguished citizenship from residence, defining citizenry on the basis of descent, or *ius sanguini*.²¹ This construction of German identity, which excluded ‘others’, or non-Germans such as Slavs and Jews, had significant influence on the politics of the Third Reich and future developments in German identity.

Imperialism was another result of the social and political theories of the time. Social Darwinism was used to justify imperialism as a necessity in proving

¹⁹ J.H Brinks, *Children of a New Fatherland: Germany's Post-War Right-Wing Politics* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000), 85.

²⁰ Max Weber, „The National State and Economic Policy,“ in: *Nineteenth-Century Europe: Liberalism and its Critics*, (ed.) Jan Goldstein and John W. Boyer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 442, 444.

²¹ Jeffery Peck and others, “Natives, Strangers and Foreigners: Constituting Germans by Constructing Others,” in *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997), 67.

the 'fitness' of the nation and gave the Reich a mission to become a global rather than merely a continental power. The German flag flew in the Pacific over the Marshall Islands and the Bismarck Archipelago and over Kiaochow off the coast of China. In Africa the Cameroons, Togoland, German Southwest Africa (now Namibia) and German East Africa (now Tanzania) were controlled by the Reich. These lands, however, were of little strategic and economic value and illustrate Germany's desire for symbols of national strength.²² The theory of Germanic racial superiority also supported the imperialist mission, as conquered peoples were used as scientific evidence for a racial hierarchy. *Völkerschauen* (exhibitions of peoples) were set up in Germany to exemplify this theory of Social Darwinism. A prime example was the German Colonial Exposition of 1896, which exhibited Africans and Pacific Islanders. Viewers were encouraged to regard their colonial counterparts as idealized 'primitive' versions of their former selves.²³ This idea of racial purity and superiority was an important element of the first German state and impacted the formation of both national and foreign policy.

1910 to the 1920s was an era of revolution throughout Europe, especially in Eastern Europe, during which anti-Semitism increased. During World War I a large number of Jews joined the military, with the hope of proving their loyalty to Germany and their worth in German society. Their efforts went unrecognized by many Germans. Many middle class Germans blamed the Jews for the defeat in World War II and the verdict of Versailles. They also blamed the Jews for the

²² Dietrich Orlow, *A History of Modern Germany 1987 to Present* (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2002), 72-76.

²³ Jeffery Peck, "Natives, Strangers and Foreigners," 68-69.

egalitarian tendencies of the new Weimar democratic system,²⁴ which they were particularly unhappy about because many Jews had been the authors and proponents of the Republic. In addition, a rise of inflation after World War I led to further attacks on Jews, who were accused of causing economic problems.²⁵ The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which was based on the socialist ideology of Marxism, increased the visibility of Jews in Eastern Europe; many Jews participated in the revolution because it promised them equality. Racist groups used the increased activity of Jews in German society to justify their racism, which supported the birth of a radicalized right wing. The German Workers Party, as well as other political organizations such as the People's Defense and Offensive League, were founded upon racist ideology and worked against new revolutionary politics. After 1920, the Socialist Party of Germany, which was largely supported by German Jews, was excluded from the Weimar government.²⁶ Counter movements of the Bolshevik Revolution, troubles caused by the global economic depression and national frustration were some of the primary causes for the development of the National Socialist (Nazi) party and its ideology of protecting and promoting a pure German race.

The Nazi party succeeded by claiming to be a culmination of all prior nationalistic dreams- a claim that promised German revival following the failed democratic Weimar Republic and the protection of the German race from

²⁴ The Weimar Republic, which existed from 1919-1933, was a constitutional democracy created after the abolition of the German monarchy following WWI. Despite its political form, the republic still called itself the German Empire.

²⁵ Hans-Joachim Bieber, „Anti-Semitism as a reflection of Social,” 51-55.

²⁶ Ibid., 56.

degeneration. “The Nazis were the inheritors and beneficiaries of deep and ill-hidden strains of anti-Semitism, anti-modernism and anti-parliamentarism in German society.”²⁷ The regime was marked by radicalism and brutality and justified extreme racism. Severe human rights violations and genocide took place as a result of this racism, which changed the world’s attitude towards racism after the Holocaust. After the Holocaust racism meant not only a movement that believed in the inherent racial differences of people, but it became a taboo accompanied by the stigma of genocide that had been committed in its name.

The Nazis claimed that the eradication of all ‘others’ in Germany was necessary for keeping the German race pure. The Nazi Party paramilitary groups, notably the Storm troopers or the SA, put up racist posters, terrorized regime opponents and innocent bystanders and effectively implemented the brutal racist policies of the Party. The Nazi message was always the same: Germany’s political and economic problems were caused by Jews and Marxists and the only solution was the elimination from power of these culprits. In order to fulfill this goal, Hitler created a totalitarian regime that established an increasingly efficient system of state-sponsored terror and infused all political and non-political activities with Nazi values and ideas.

Hitler’s plan to establish racial dominance included the elimination of the Jews and any others who could taint the superiority of the German race. The Nazi support of eugenics and euthanasia was based upon the proposition that degeneration, as exemplified by habitual criminality or insanity, was structural

²⁷ Dietrich Orlow, *A History of Modern Germany*, 171.

and final. Criminals included Jews, along with ‘others,’ or the non-German groups of the Wilhelminan era. Disabled people and political dissidents were also categorized as un-German and therefore fit for removal.²⁸ Steps towards implementing eugenics came early. In 1933 the Nazi party instated a compulsory sterilization law for the prevention of hereditary diseases. Courts were ordered to decide the hereditary health of people and in certain instances to decree sterilization.²⁹ This law was one of the means for ensuring racial purity. In 1935 the Nuremberg Laws were passed, which stripped Jews of German citizenship and denied them government employment, thereby making them official outsiders. On November 9, 1938 a pogrom was incited against Jewish businesses which became known as *Kristalnacht* (Night of Broken Glass). A euthanasia act was passed in 1939 along with further acts passed, which increased the separation of and brutality towards Jews and other non-Germans. By 1941, Jews were transferred to special ghettos and forced to wear a yellow star in order to distinguish them from Germans. Any person who had any amount of Jewish blood from the past three generations was considered a Jew, or a *Mischlung* (mixed-breed), and a threat. Finally, in 1942 at the Wannsee Conference outside Berlin, the plan for the final solution of the Jewish and degenerate question was exposed. From then on, more than 6 million Jews, homosexuals, Slavs and others were systematically murdered and more than 10 million were forced into labor camps.³⁰

²⁸ George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 84.

²⁹ George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 81.

³⁰ Dietrich Orlow, *A History of Modern Germany*, 175-188.

Imperialism was an extremely important tactic for Hitler. Hitler believed that the German nation needed room to expand and to increase its “living space.” He identified eastward expansion as essential for the growth of the German nation and linked this expansion with the elimination of Jews, many of whom lived in Eastern Europe.³¹ Overtaking and Germanizing other countries meant the eradication of non-German influences and inferior races. In support of this German expansion, slave labor was used to build up Germany’s industrial and military capacity. ‘Others,’ mainly Jews and foreigners, were used for this slave labor and by 1944 millions of foreign workers, mainly Poles, were brought into Germany to build infrastructure for the Reich.³² This reinforced the racial hierarchy that was an important aspect of Nazi German nationalism. Western Europeans were at the top of humanity, Poles and Russians were near the bottom and Jews were at the very bottom.

This is a very simplified version of a complicated dictatorship, but what is important here is the link between national and foreign politics and how racism and nationalism were used to justify German policies. The concept of German racial superiority was translated into nationalism, which excluded certain groups from the German nation by defining them as a threat to German society. This concept emerged from the Enlightenment through the Wilhelminian period and was further modified to support Hitler’s acts of genocide. Racism in domestic politics, which allowed for anti-Semitism, citizenship laws, eugenics and finally the Holocaust, was inherently connected with German foreign politics. Imperialist

³¹ George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution*, 204.

³² Jeffrey Peck, “Natives, Strangers and Foreigners,” 72.

exploitation of foreign peoples were direct results of the ideological link between German domestic and foreign politics and racism. Racist ideology carried through all the layers of German politics and was also present in the German Democratic Republic.

1.2 The Formation of the GDR

The post-World War II struggle to create a national and political identity in Germany included wrestling not only with the recent Nazi past, but also with the failure of Germany's first democracy and the legacy of Bismarck's German empire. The Allies- the United States, Great Britain, the USSR and France- were determined to restructure Germany in a way that would prevent Germany from becoming another dangerous military power. The Potsdam Agreement of August 2, 1945 transferred chief authority in Germany to the four occupation forces, the Allies, and divided Germany into sectors to be administered by the allies. Laws were made that outlawed National Socialism and Nazi rhetoric. The Agreement also stated the importance of developing democratic ideals and introducing an elected and representative government in Germany. The Soviet sector, which became the German Democratic Republic, became the exception to democracy in Germany.

During this post-war era political tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union developed into a cold war due to conflicting politics regarding military power, global influence and the development of certain states, in

particular Germany. Both super-powers wanted a united Germany on its own terms, which created a struggle between the models of a liberal, plural democratic state and a communist, one-party socialist state. This struggle marked a confrontation between Sovietization and Americanization as competing strands of German political identity. In the Soviet occupation zone, Sovietization meant the transfer and adoption of Soviet ideology in the form of Stalinism. Land reform, a planned economy, the transformation of the state apparatus to the totalitarian Soviet system, the abolition of a bourgeois form of justice and the installation of anti-fascist-democratic school systems were implemented quickly by the Soviets.³³ This Sovietization linked East German politics directly to the Soviet Union for the next 40 years.

In light of recent Nazi history, East German politics became defined by the need to distinguish East Germany from the Nazi regime. Official status was granted to the Communist Party (KPD), headed by Walter Ulbricht,³⁴ which was recognized as the antithetical party to National Socialism. On March 10, 1945 the head of the Soviet military administration in Germany, General Chuikov, transferred authority to the provisional government in the Soviet sector.³⁵ This was more a public gesture of trust on the part of the Soviet Union than an actual power transfer. Significant power was still held by the Soviets, but this did mark the onset of East German politics. The German Communist Party (KPD)

³³ Michael Lemke, "Foreign Influences on the dictatorial development of the GDR 1949-1955," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 94-95.

³⁴ Walter Ulbricht (1893-1973) was a founding member of the Communist Party of Germany in 1919 and was the First Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party from 1950-1971.

³⁵ J.H. Brinks, *Children of a new fatherland*, 4.

presented itself as a reformed, broadly based worker's party. The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was founded four days after the KPD, with a platform based on the rejection of dictatorship and the guarantee of democratic freedoms. These two parties were the most significant in shaping East Germany's political development. The SPD and KPD had been enemies during the Weimar period and post-war politics exacerbated this rivalry. The SPD's greater support among the people posed a direct threat to the KPD, which was the party favored by the Soviet government. As a result, the KPD started a campaign to combine parties and in 1946, the SPD was forced to unify with the KPD to form the Socialist Unity Party (SED).³⁶ The SED governed the GDR on a political platform of communism and anti-fascism until its fall.

As the Sovietization of East Germany and the Americanization of West Germany developed, political differences between the two sides grew and threatened the hope of German unification. On May 23, 1949 the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was proclaimed and in response, the German Democratic Republic was created on October 7, 1949. This marked the final division of Germany for the next 40 years and the start of a tense relationship between the two states. The politics of the two countries increasingly clashed as one grew into a capitalist democracy and the other into a communist dictatorship. Because both claimed to be the legitimate German state, their politics became a means with which to justify and legitimate this claim. Before the Stalin

³⁶ Gary Bruce. *Resistance with the people: Repression and Resistance in eastern Germany 1945-1955* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 23-39.

memorandum of 1952³⁷ both states remained dedicated to the goal of a united Germany, but perspectives looked progressively worse as the Cold War developed. West Germany's ties to the West and East Germany's subjugation to the Soviet Union meant that the two states were tied to the politics of the Cold War. The FRG's membership in NATO in 1955 and the GDR membership in the Warsaw Pact marked the unquestionable division of Germany until 1989.³⁸ In response to the division, the GDR blamed the FRG for the failure of unification and accused the FRG of being a fascist, capitalist state.

The GDR was supposedly set up as a 'People's Democracy' with a civil-democratic constitution, a parliament and an independent judiciary. The constitution, passed on October 7, 1949, claimed the GDR to be the legitimate and official German state and recognized only one German citizenship- that of GDR citizens. The constitution set out distinct rights for its citizens. „All citizens have equal rights under the law.”³⁹ Racism was also outlawed.

Agitation against democratic institutions and organizations, assassination attempts against democratic politicians, intolerance towards beliefs, racism and anti-nationalism, military propaganda, as well as violent agitation and all other such acts, which are directed against equality, are criminal acts. The exercise of democratic rights laid out in the constitution are not considered anti-state agitation.⁴⁰

In this article from the Constitution of the GDR, any acts that jeopardized *Gleichberechtigung* (equality of citizens) was punishable. Expressions of racism

³⁷ Stalin presented his 'Stalin Memorandum' in 1952, calling for the realization of German unity in exchange for a neutral and non-aligned Germany. The United States refused this offer because they felt it was a political ploy to strengthen Soviet power in Germany. The debate still continues to this day whether it was the fault of the Soviet Union or the United States that negotiations for German unity failed and ended with the Stalin memorandum.

³⁸ J.H Brinks, *Children of a New Fatherland*, 4-5.

³⁹ „Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratische Republik, Die, B I Article 6.1,“ *DDR*, documentArchiv.de, <http://www.documentarchiv.de/ddr.html>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

were classified as criminal acts. The criminality of racism was a defining ideology of the SED, as it differentiated the GDR from the politics and acts of Nazi Germany. The concept that all citizens were equal before the law was also extremely important, especially for groups such as the Jews in the GDR. Under Hitler German Jews had not been equal under the law. But in the GDR there was no legal distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans. Freedom of assembly and freedom of speech were also ensured along with protection against censorship. The right to a job was another very important guarantee and upheld the Marxist idea of equal access to basic living necessities. “The workforce is protected by the state. The right to employment is guaranteed. The state secures all citizens employment and basic necessities through economic controls.”⁴¹ These rights were claimed by the SED to be the basis of GDR law and society.

The SED attempted to construct an image of tolerance and freedom, but as Walter Ulbricht, the first secretary of the SED from 1950-1971, said to his close associate Wolfgang Leonhard, “It must appear democratic, but we must have everything firmly in our hands.”⁴² The democracy guaranteed in the constitution was a front for the totalitarian dictatorship of the SED. One means of securing its control was by fixing elections. Free and fair elections were not a reality. Because the SED did not have overwhelming support in the population, it adjusted the voting count in 1946 in order to secure 50 percent of the votes.⁴³ This power was important not only for the SED, but also for the Soviet Union, which knew that it would only be able to retain its influence in the GDR if the SED was in office.

⁴¹ „Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratische Republik, Die, B I Article 6.1.“

⁴² J.H Brinks, *Children of a New Fatherland*, 45.

⁴³ Gary Bruce, *Es geht um unsere Existenz*, 50.

Undemocratic elections were one of the first signs of a party dictatorship in the GDR.

With the onset of dictatorship it became clear to many East Germans that the SED's promise of democracy was a hoax. In response, resistance activity, especially within the CDU, increased during the early 1950's. By the end of 1952, protests arose that were linked to the poor economic conditions in the GDR, but which turned into fundamental political resistance. As a Rathenow factory worker said, "In the press, everything is presented to the people so wonderfully, but in reality everything is a disgrace."⁴⁴ This dichotomy marked not only the GDR economy but also its social and political structure. The agricultural collectivization programs implemented by the Soviet Union and the SED after World War II were deemed a failure in 1953 and set aside. In June 1953 there was so much discontent with SED policy and government that worker uprisings broke out. On June 17th 100,000 protestors with slogans such as "Down with the police, the Volkarmee [People's Army] and the government," and "We are at the end of our torture- we demand free elections," marched in Berlin, setting off a wave of protests throughout the GDR. The *Volkspolizei* [People's Police] and Soviet tanks were sent in to stop the resistance. Over 200 people were killed and thousands of East Germans were issued reprisals. The "June 17th revolution was an act of popular anti-Communist resistance, which had been caused in large part by Soviet and SED repression."⁴⁵ The most important result of the uprisings was the expansion of SED instruments of control. The secret police (*Stasi*) was

⁴⁴ Gary Bruce, *Es geht um unsere Existenz*, 167.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

strengthened, censorship was increased and GDR domestic policy focused on eradicating public dissent. The GDR constitution called for a democratic state, but the GDR had turned into a repressive dictatorship. Its claim to being the antithesis of the Nazi regime was in theory only.

1.3 Similarities with the Past

Elements of racism, xenophobia and fascist ideology that marked Germany's past were also to be found to a certain degree in GDR society. Hatred towards Slavs and other foreigners, anti-Semitism and general feelings of German superiority were not eradicated in the GDR. One example is the increased anti-Slav sentiment, which resulted from the redrawing of border lines between Poland and Germany. At the Potsdam conference in 1945 the Allies declared that Poland would occupy territories east of the Oder and Neisse rivers, which had used to belong to Germany. This was one of Stalin's ploys to secure Polish dependence on the USSR and increase Russia's control over its satellite states. The new Oder-Neisse border, which was finalized in 1949 with the Oder-Neisse Treaty, was accompanied by a Polish decree forcing all Germans who lived east of the Oder-Neisse border to "return" to Germany. By 1950 approximately 11,600,000 Germans had left Poland, with 4,300,000 of them settling in the Soviet zone and the rest settling in West Germany.⁴⁶ It was not only the refugees who hated Poles for the loss of land. The East Germans who had to help support the refugees also resented the Poles for their unjust occupation of German territory. The historical

⁴⁶ Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish-East German Relations, 1945-1962* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 35.

animosity between the two groups was only strengthened by Soviet and SED politics.

Certain features of Sovietization were at variance with the GDR's self-proclaimed identity as the antithesis to the Nazi regime. Besides land, judicial and economic reforms that were implemented, the GDR became a police state. This was a development that the Soviet Union mandated in order to secure its own safety against anti-communist uprisings and threats to Soviet occupation. The two camp theory, which held that there were two opposing governmental forces in the world, marked policies and decisions made by the SED and the Soviets. 1947 witnessed a defining campaign for the transformation of the SED into a Soviet style communist party, in which "class warfare" was the ideology and repression was the means. A police force was created almost immediately after the Soviet occupation of eastern Germany and was one of the most important tools of the SED. The Soviet army commanders recruited "anti-fascists," who came mainly from the working class, as police chiefs. They carried out Soviet orders until August of 1946, when the East German Administration of the Interior (DVdI) was created and took over the authority of German security forces.⁴⁷ The Communist Party made sure that all important positions were filled by Communists.

The East German historian Richard Bessel described the dynamics of GDR policy thus: "The Volkspolizei during the later 1940's and early 1950's was increasingly occupied with problems to which the solutions gave the impression

⁴⁷ Gary Bruce, *Resistance with the People*, 44-45.

that they served a foreign political elite and a foreign occupation authority.’⁴⁸ The DvdI answered to the Soviets at least as much as to German officials. The police became more coordinated and centralized, established a border police force and removed opponents of the SED. In July 1948 the SED called for “cleansing the party of enemy and degenerate elements.”⁴⁹ The abuse of human rights that occurred was similar to the Nazi purge of political dissidents.

Nazis who worked in the SED were another connection between the Nazi era and the GDR. Many East Germans were not communists and feared the totalitarian nature of the SED. This resulted in a rise of popular resistance to the dictatorship. The Soviets were concerned by the threat that this resistance posed to the SED and took measures to increase support for the East German government. One way of doing this was to give amnesty to Nazi criminals. During the post-war period, large campaigns in all the occupied sectors were held to punish Nazi criminals and rid German society of fascist ideology. The Soviets took part in this campaign, using it for their political advantage. In searching for supporters, the Soviets felt they could gain the loyalty of Nazis by relieving them of their responsibility for past crimes. Many former members of the National Socialist Party were integrated into the GDR system and relieved of responsibility and blame for the crimes of World War II.⁵⁰ In the summer of 1948 alone, 28,000 prisoners were released from camps and eight of the eleven Soviet POW camps

⁴⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁵⁰ Heinz Lynen von Berg, “Die ‘streitbare Demokratie’ und ihr Rechtsextremismus: Die Entwicklung des deutschen Rechtsextremismus seit 1949 und politische Reaktionen,” in *Demokratie in Gefahr?: Zum Zustand der deutschen Republik*, ed. Rainer Schneider-Wilkes (Muenster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1997), 433.

were closed.⁵¹ A small number of these Nazis were then recruited for various official jobs, such as heading military reconstruction in the GDR. Vincent Mueller, a lieutenant general in the Nazi *Wehrmacht*, was the founder of the *Nationale Volksarmee* of the GDR.⁵² This established continuity between Nazi police practices and those of the GDR. It also allowed for racist ideology to continue as long as it did not endanger the legitimacy of the SED. Racist rhetoric was not officially documented or mentioned, as that would have delegitimized its anti-racist politics, but racist policies were implemented. These policies included the forced acculturation of Jews into society, which was driven by the SED's refusal to recognize the Jewish identity, and the segregation of non-German races because of the political danger they posed.

Anti-fascist ideology was important for the SED in order to claim complete separation from the Hitler era and to justify the GDR as the only legitimate successor state. In order to act on these claims the SED created a large campaign for the eradication of fascism in the GDR from 1946 onwards. One element of this campaign was the exclusion of direct reference to socialism in SED ideology, because 'Socialism' was a term tainted by the past acts of National Socialists. The term anti-fascism was used instead as a reference for the social movement that communists advocated. This social movement promoted not only economic equality, but also racial tolerance. Racist acts and statements, which the SED identified as characteristics of fascism, were claimed to be crimes against the democratic government of the GDR. Capitalism was also identified as a trait of

⁵¹ Gary Bruce, *Resistance with the People*, 93.

⁵² J.H. Brinks, *Children of a New Fatherland*, 46-49.

fascist. Show trials, confiscation of large land holdings, the punishment of select Nazi criminals and the expulsion of fascists from the GDR were all acts that aimed to convince East Germans that by the 1950's fascism did not exist in the GDR. Even though the SED granted amnesty to some Nazis in order to gain popular support, as mentioned above, many people were given sentences for Nazi war crimes. By 1965, 12,807 people had been sentenced, with 118 of those people receiving the death sentences and 3,171 sentenced to more than 10 years imprisonment.

As a public ideology, fascism had been eradicated. But as evidence shows, individual fascist beliefs still existed and influenced GDR politics. Influential politicians and officials from the NS held important public offices in the GDR, such as in the military and in parliament. In 1958 there were 56 former NS members who sat in the GDR *Volkskammer* (parliament). Around this time, 220 former NS members had political or public positions in the GDR, including in the press and in the diplomatic service.⁵³ The ideology of National Socialism and the SED were distinctly different and SED rhetoric was carefully constructed to prove this, but SED policies were not free from the influence of fascist thought.

Personal and ideological continuities between the GDR and the Third Reich were documented by Simon Wiesenthal in 1968 in his report "The Same Language: first for Hitler- now for Ulbricht."⁵⁴ Wiesenthal was an Austrian Jew who survived the Holocaust and dedicated the rest of his life to gathering information about and finding Nazi war criminals. Wiesenthal conducted an

⁵³ J.H. Brinks, *Children of a New Fatherland*, 64.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

experiment in the 1960s that proved that there were similarities between the Third Reich and the GDR and a certain continuity. He took former National Socialist papers, such as *Völkischer Beobachter* and *Schwarze Korps*, and replaced the word 'Jew' with 'Zionist.' He also replaced 'National Socialist' with the words 'Socialist camp' or 'peace camp.' He showed that with these changes, the articles seemed to have been written in the 1960's rather than the 1930's. He also discovered that articles in the 1930's, which had similar message as those in the 1960's, were often written by the same people. Doctor Richard Arnold who was responsible for the *Entjudung* (de-jewification)⁵⁵ of German intellectual life in the Third Reich was the editor and chief of *Der Nationale Demokrat* in the GDR. Kurt Ball was a staff member for the Bureau of Propaganda in the GDR and had been editor and chief of the SS magazine *Hammer*. Another example was Doctor Karlheinz Gerstner, who joined the Nazi party in 1933. During the Nazi period he wrote fascist pamphlets, such as one titled 'Negro-infected France.' In the GDR he became the chief reporter for the *Berliner Zeitung* and received the *Verdienstmedaille der DDR* in 1963 for his work.⁵⁶ Many of these former Nazi members continued their anti-Semitic sentiment under the banner of anti-Zionism in GDR politics. It is important to note here, however, the significant differences in Nazi and SED ideology. The SED focused on anti-Zionism as a means of achieving international peace and cooperation between nations. This differed dramatically from Nazi rhetoric that promoted anti-Semitic violence and the superiority of the German race. This change in rhetoric signified the SED's

⁵⁵ Entjudung, or de-jewification, was the process of removing Jews, or jewish influence, from various areas of society

⁵⁶ J.H. Brinks, *Children of a New Fatherland*, 53-54.

attempt to established its politics as diametrically opposed to Nazism and therefore, as anti-fascist, even it this did not actually work to eliminate racism.

The position of Jews in the GDR and the SED's anti-Zionist ideology illustrate that anti-Semitism that was still present. Anti-Zionism was officially included in GDR party doctrine by the 1950's. This was an example of racist ideology that the GDR attempted to cover up by labeling it a political policy in the name of state security. In the eyes of the communists, Israel, as a capitalist conspirator with the United States and other Western countries, led imperialist attacks against neighboring countries. Regarding the Nazi past, little attention was paid in the GDR to the persecution of Jews under the Nazis; reparations were never paid. Jews in the GDR were given the status of "Victims of Fascism," but discussion of what that meant never took place and reparations for their victimization were never paid.

The Slansky Trials in Czechoslovakia in 1952 greatly influenced anti-Zionism and ultimately anti-Semitism in the GDR. The communist parties throughout the Soviet bloc claimed that the trials concerned party members who were convicted of Titoist⁵⁷, Zionist and anti-Marxist acts and were executed. From the victims perspective, they had been arrested because they were Jewish and were gaining too much power in the party, which instilled anti-Semitic fear in their superiors. The convicts were given show-trials and sentenced to *Justizmord* (judicial murder). There were no show trials in the GDR such as those that took

⁵⁷ Titoists were those who followed Josip Broz Tito, the leader of the communist resistance in Yugoslavia. In 1945 Tito became Prime Minister of Yugoslavia and defied Stalin's leadership. Tito's form of communism was labeled Titoism by Moscow, which encouraged purges against suspected ,Titoists' throughout the communist bloc.

place in Czechoslovakia, but related persecutions were common. The trial of Paul Merker in 1955 is an example of a similar trial in the GDR. Merker was a non-Jewish German communist who was accused of being an agent of Zionism. During his exile in Mexico from 1942-1946 he had taken the fate of Jews to heart and upon returning to the GDR demanded reparation payments for German Jews. As a result of his advocacy he was labeled a threat and arrested in 1952. In 1955 he was given a show trial. The verdict stated, “Merker is an agent of the US financial oligarchy, whose demand for compensation for Jewish properties is designed only to infiltrate US financial capital into Germany. This is the real reason for his Zionism...”⁵⁸ He was sentenced to eight years imprisonment, but rehabilitated as a party member in 1956. Because of such proclamations and sentences, many Jews fled the GDR. “In early February, 1953 the West German *Allgemeine Wochenzeitung der Juden in Deutschland* reported that 500 Jews have left East Germany.”⁵⁹

The presence of anti-Semitism and Nazi officials in the GDR influenced the formulation of SED ideology. The SED’s relationship with the Soviet Union was also an important influence, as seen by the structural changes and political control that the Soviets demanded in the 1940s. These characteristics were present not only in the military but also in the nationalistic and patriotic sentiment that was propagated by the SED. These similarities are ironic because SED propaganda was based on the eradication of all of these historical elements. Prussian history was portrayed as one of imperialism, militarism and capitalism.

⁵⁸ J.H. Brinks, *Children of a New Fatherland*, 56.

⁵⁹ Jay Howard Geller. *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 175.

Its reactionary politics was labeled by the SED as the root of National Socialism. The Nazi past was condemned as capitalist and fascist and completely against the ideals of Marxist-Leninism. According to the SED, these elements had been eradicated by abolishing the state of Prussia, driving out the Junkers (Prussian landed aristocracy) and by informing young people about these acts.⁶⁰ Yet the parades, military and political structures, propaganda, education and ideological rhetoric delegitimize the SED's claim to being democratic and anti-fascist.

1.4 Implementing Ideology through Censorship

Because certain legacies of Germany's past, such as racism and anti-semitism, were not destroyed in the GDR, the SED implemented certain restrictions in order to secure the legitimacy of its anti-fascist and anti-colonialist ideology. Censorship of the press was one of the important methods used to ensure the propagation of its ideology. Newspapers, radio broadcasts and television programs were strictly structured, so as to broadcast the right picture of society, politics and the world to East Germans. "Following classical Marxist thought, these media were instruments that would, through propaganda and agitation, spread the ideology of the party as a 'collective organizer.'"⁶¹ However, censorship did not occur in a traditional manner, whereby a government agency specifically denies authors, journalists and broadcasters the right to publish

⁶⁰ Gary Bruce, *Resistance with the people*, 89.

⁶¹ Simone Barck and others, "The Fettered Media: Controlling Public Debate," in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 223.

certain material. Instead, other means were used were used, which created a “censorship without censors.”⁶²

Four systems of rule in the media were established in order to create a self-censorship program, which promoted a more grassroots censorship to be performed by journalists, artists and politicians themselves. The first of these systems was the practice of repressive personnel policies and restrictive recruitment. A journalist or reporter’s personal promotion was directly linked to his or her advocacy of party ideology. The establishment of a centrally organized institutional structure with a multi-level planning system enabled close supervision of employees and the coordination of messages sent out to the public in the media. Certain regulations governing the type of language to be used guided writers and reporters so that their writing and reporting was consistent with party ideology. The last method was surveillance by the *Stasi*. Reporters and journalists were monitored by the *Stasi* in order to ensure their adherence to party politics. These methods led media personnel to censor their own work in order to keep their jobs and insure their personal safety.⁶³

Rhetoric in broadcasting differed from that in newspapers because of media competition from the West. Radio and television had to compete with western broadcasts and the SED realized that if it wanted listeners to listen to East German broadcasts, it had to broadcast material that East Germans would listen to. As a result, rhetoric was more watered down. The balance in radio and television content was not found immediately and it took the SED a few years to

⁶² Ibid., 214.

⁶³ Simone Barck, “The Fettered Media,” 214.

create radio programming that retained listeners. In 1952 a State Radio Committee based on the Soviet model was established within the Council of Ministers. Federal states had to give up their own stations and programming and three centralized programs were established. Because of the omnipresent political propaganda and uniformity of programming resulting from this centralization, radio became progressively less popular. In response to its waning popularity, the government created three stations in 1953 that they identified as independent, which meant they were not as strictly controlled.⁶⁴ Newspapers, however, contained stronger rhetorical language and very severe criticism of the West because there was little competition from western print media.

Censorship became more and more important in the mid 1950's and 1960's as western media became more accessible to GDR citizens. By the late 1960's approximately 60 percent of GDR citizens could theoretically receive western programming. GDR media were increasingly forced into a defensive position because of western news that challenged the GDR's public claims to superiority. With both the East and the West seeking to discredit the enemy through exaggerated propaganda, the closed and highly regulated GDR society was more threatened by outside 'enemy' propaganda than the other side was with GDR propaganda. Outside information directly challenged what the SED told its citizens and put the SED's claim of omniscience in question. Regulation and censorship was a process that increased in intensity as outside threats increased.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 215-217.

“According to the famous statement by Lenin, press, radio and television are to be the collective agitator, propagandist and organizer.”⁶⁵ During the mid-1950’s and much more frequently in the 1960’s, this political agitation included direct attacks on the enemy in an attempt to delegitimize the media broadcasts from the West that GDR citizens were watching with increasing regularity. One way the media did this was to identify U.S. news reports as ‘whitewashed’ propaganda. One main topic that the SED was continually propagating was the fascism of its enemy, the United States. In a report broadcast throughout Eastern Europe on May 31, 1963, Moscow TASS Radio stated, “The Voice of America commentator Harold Courlander [...] claims that on the whole there is no segregation of Negroes in America [...] This assertion is intended to whitewash the Federal Government’s inability to end segregation.”⁶⁶ The SED even accused a New York reporter of having to “deliberately distort reality to divert attention from the disgraceful rampage of racist terror in the U.S.” when reporter Sulzberger “resort[ed] to malicious tales about imaginary racial problems in the socialist countries.”⁶⁷ GDR citizens were being told by the SED not believe a word of Western news they heard. In reality, however, many East Germans were aware of what the government was trying to do and knew that they had to be selective about the reports and information they believed.

At times, GDR media policies also included attempts to restrict the reception of Western programming by sending disruptive signals and banning

⁶⁵ Hermann Budzislowski, „Socialist Journalism,“ in: *East Germany: A New German Nation Under Socialism?* (ed.) Arthur W. McCordle and A. Bruce Boenau (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 331.

⁶⁶ Moscow TASS, „Afonin on Official Inaction.“ *FNR*, 31 May, 1963, 19.

⁶⁷ Moscow TASS, „Racial Unrest Prevalent in United States,“ *FNR*, 7 June, 1963, 13.

roof antennas.⁶⁸ But because western media could never be completely eliminated, the SED used anti-racist rhetoric in its effort to combat the West and avoid having to deal with its own problems at home. It accused the United States of being racist and highlighted the bigotry in American society and politics. In contrast to American racism, the SED portrayed the GDR as anti-racist and free from prejudice. The SED was able to use this rhetoric as a point of continuity throughout its rule because new examples of racism and racist politics in America could always be found. The degree, however, to which racism was used as a point of attack varied depending on the international political situation and the level of threat from abroad felt by the SED.

1.5 The GDR in the Cold War

Between the 1950s and 1960s, the position of the GDR in the international arena stayed relatively consistent. During the Korean War, the Vietnam War, conflicts in Africa and the Cuban Missile Crisis, GDR foreign policy was more or less dictated by the Soviet Union. The GDR maintained hostile relations with the FRG and the U.S. until early in the 1970s, when Cold War détente was gaining importance. As relations between the Soviet Union and the United States were changing, western Europe was developing into a strong international community. As democratic movements in other communist bloc countries were gaining strength, the GDR remained relatively static. Other than the demonstrations of June 17th 1953, no large public demonstrations or revolts took place in the GDR.

⁶⁸ Simone Barck, "The Fettered Media," 220-223.

Domestic politics were strictly controlled to maintain stability and GDR foreign policy reflected this stagnation.

Because the GDR was strictly controlled by the Soviets until the mid-1980's, Soviet influence was evident in SED politics. As a tool of Soviet foreign policy, the GDR was drawn into the Soviet struggle with the U.S. over spheres of influence. The third world, where some of the largest Cold War battles over power were fought, became an important target for communist politics. The GDR was crucial in helping to establish communist power through diplomacy and acts of 'solidarity' in Cold War battlefront such as Vietnam and Chile. The Middle East, with its oil reserves, and Africa, with its many anti-colonialist movements, also became important Cold War fronts where the GDR, along with the Soviet Union, used their resources to try and establish communist governments. This influence, however, was continually threatened by the possibility of covert U.S. military operations and CIA activity. The cautious relations that the GDR initiated with battlefield countries, as well as other non-Soviet countries, reflected the threat of American militarism and showed a level of suspicion in GDR Cold War diplomacy. The SED trusted no country that was not 'behind' the Iron Curtain. As a result, this outside threat was used as a justification for GDR domestic policies that allowed and promoted racism. GDR national and foreign policies became directly linked by an effort to legitimize SED ideology at home and secure the GDR's legitimacy and power on the international level. SED domestic policy was a direct result of international threats to the SED and GDR foreign policy was consistent with the ideology of anti-racism and international solidarity.

The historically racist elements of German identity were difficult to eradicate in post-war Germany. The SED was given the task of creating an ideology that would deal with the past and give hope for the future, but in the end the SED neglected the first and concentrated solely on the second. The GDR also had to cope with its dependence on the Soviet Union and had to compete with the mature foreign policies of the West. The SED attempted to create an image for the GDR that divorced the new country from history, but this was unsuccessful. Not only were historical prejudices against certain groups like the Jews and Slavs still present, but important Nazi politicians and intellectuals remained influential. The SED committed itself to anti-racist ideology, but its commitment was limited to implementing only those ideological policies in its domestic and foreign politics that were absolutely necessary. Because of the direct connection between domestic and foreign politics, the racism that marked SED domestic policy was reflected in its foreign policy.

Chapter II

Racism in the GDR

In East Germany a contradiction existed between party ideology and the social and political reality. For the SED, GDR history started in 1945 with the development of an anti-fascist, socialist country. Free of racial problems and embracing of an ideology that would help free all people from oppression, the government claimed to be the antithesis of the Nazi regime and to be omniscient. No public disagreement or debate concerning history and politics was allowed. Societal problems were denied, but that did not make them go away. Racism had not been wiped out and denazification had been a front. Solidarity was not a popular movement among the citizens and the 'People's Democracy' was a lie; trust and cooperation between the government and the people was very shallow. In addition, the SED's anti-racist rhetoric did not accomplish its purpose. The SED tolerated and in some cases promoted racism. Case studies of specific groups of people in the GDR, namely Eastern Europeans, people from outside the communist bloc, and Jews, highlight problems of racism in East Germany that were never dealt with and in some cases were officially supported. These case studies reveal the complexity of racism and anti-racism in a dictatorship where a dichotomy existed between reality and rhetoric, equality and slavery, enemies and privileged guests and between the government and its people. In revealing problems of racism in the GDR, this chapter will highlight the use of anti-racist rhetoric in education and foreign policy and show how racism linked national and foreign politics in an interdependent relationship.

During the 1950s, as the GDR was struggling for recognition from the West and for economic and political stability after the worker demonstrations of June 17th, 1953, the SED used very nationalistic propaganda to create a sense of unity. It claimed that the GDR was representative of the true German nation and was the first worker and peasant's state on German soil. The 1960s saw a turn towards proletarian internationalism or socialist patriotism as the Cold War came to a height and Germany became permanently divided with the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The development of proletarian internationalism marked an effort to gain international respect and power, as well as national recognition. This concept of ethnically defined nationalism was important in the GDR because the German nation "was something with which most of the population could more easily identify than with the twists and turns of socialist ideology and its demands for an abstract international solidarity."⁶⁹ Ethnic nationalism was nothing new to Germans. The SED used this sentiment and presented it as socialist patriotism in an attempt to connect to the people.

This nationalistic and patriotic rhetoric, however, did not help to unify the people with their government. As popular resistance to the SED shows, the average East German did not want to live under a dictatorship. Programs that the government set up were not widely supported by the people and were often viewed with disdain and distrust. One of the programs implemented was for the promotion of international solidarity, in which the SED brought small numbers of foreigners from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe to the GDR as contract workers

⁶⁹ Jan C. Behrends and others, "Xenophobia in the former GDR-Explorations and Explanations from a Historical Perspective," American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, <http://www.aicgs.org/Publications/PDF/xenophobia.pdf>, 5.

or students. Germans commonly regarded these foreigners as agents of the government and distrusted them. East Germans also resented the specific privileges that some of these foreigners received. This distrust and resentment was often manifested as racism. The irony is that both the government and the people distrusted foreigners. The SED distrusted foreigners because they could be potential dissidents or enemy spies. International solidarity was constructed to present a friendly image domestically and abroad, while at the same time implementing restrictive and protective measures.

The racism that prevailed in the GDR was a combination of xenophobia and racism and had similar causes to racism in Wilhelminian and Weimar politics. One of the main factors that propagated racism was economic tension during the reconstruction of post-war East Germany. East German policy and ideology were easily formulated by the communist dictatorship in 1949, but the reconstruction of its economy was complicated. Many East German workers blamed the poor economy on foreign workers and used this to justify their racism. Between 1949 and 1989, approximately 3.5 million people left the GDR as a result of the dictatorship and economic problems, with the majority of them leaving before 1961 when the Berlin Wall was built. This caused a significant labor shortage.⁷⁰ As a result, the GDR started importing foreign labor, first from its brother socialist countries in Eastern Europe and eventually from newly independent developing countries in Asia and Africa. By the mid 1960's there were approximately 15,000 Bulgarians, 10,000 Poles and 5,000 Hungarians who were

⁷⁰ Bernd Broeskamp, „Vom Auswanderungs- zum Einwanderungsland.“18.

working in the GDR under 3 to 5 year contracts. By 1967, 15,000 Hungarians were employed in the GDR electric, machine and light-industries.⁷¹ While this was still a small percentage of the population, foreign labor was essential to the survival of the East German economy. Many East Germans resented the presence of non-integrated foreigners. The GDR posed its import of foreign workers and students as an act of social solidarity at home and abroad, which encouraged and masked the transformation of economic conflict into ethnic conflict.⁷² This ethnic conflict was answered with more rhetoric of solidarity and anti-racism in an attempt to secure legitimacy for the GDR at both the national and international level. Programs which promoted friendship between the GDR and its brother countries were set up, yet they were unsuccessful in affecting the sentiments of individual East Germans. Rhetoric in educational policies was also unsuccessful in promoting social change. The racism that prevailed in the officially anti-racist state marked the failure of SED rhetoric in securing its legitimacy and further linked national and foreign policies in a relationship of interdependence.

2.1 Eastern European *Others*

Solidarity with fellow socialist countries was one of the most important ideologies of the GDR in order to help solve economic problems and to present the communist movement as strong and united against the capitalist West. But solidarity was mainly an official sentiment and did not filter down to GDR citizens. Foreigners were referred to by the party as *Klassenbrüdern* (class

⁷¹ Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg, *Freundschaft! Die Volksbildung der DDR in ausgewählten Kapiteln* (Berlin: BasisDruck Verlag GmbH, 1996), 278.

⁷² Jonathan R. Zatlin, "Race and Economy in Soviet-Style Regimes," (Unpublished manuscript), 30.

brothers) who were all working towards a world dominated by socialism, but this sentiment was felt less at the local level. „Hungarian or Polish guest workers were regarded merely as labor and not as socialist brothers.“⁷³

The first large group of workers to come to the GDR was from Poland. Some came in the 1950s as commuting workers. In 1963 an official agreement was signed between the two governments after political stabilization was reached in the GDR due to the building of the Wall. The agreement provided for 500 qualified Poles to work in East German coal mines. Shortly thereafter agreements were signed with Hungary and Bulgaria. Seventy percent of these workers were men.⁷⁴ Anti-Polish stereotypes depicted Polish workers as lazy and dishonest, which led to general intolerance of Polish people in East Germany. An East German worker in Frankfurt an der Oder said, „Everyone knows the mentality of the Poles. For the most part they are timid in their work and often earn their money in dishonest ways.“⁷⁵ Instead of recognizing the historical conflict between Germans and Poles the SED implemented an artificial solution. Economic solidarity had, in the eyes of the SED, resolved this problem and established friendship. The economic solidarity between Germany and Poland, however, resulted in economic strife between the two groups. „Economic reasons were used to justify the residence of foreign workers in the ‚laborer and peasant state.‘ Official propaganda claimed these workers represented cooperation between labor

⁷³ Harry Waibel, *Rechtsextremismus in der DDR bis 1989* (Koeln: PapyRossa Verlag, 1996), 140.

⁷⁴ Eva-Maria Elsner and Lothar Elsner, *Ausländerpolitik und Ausländerfeindschaft in der DDR (1949-1990)* (Leipzig: Rosa-Luxemburg Verein, 1991), 12-23.

⁷⁵ Rita Roehr, „Ideologie, Planwirtschaft und Akzeptanz: Die Beschäftigung polnische Arbeitskräfte in Betriebe des Bezirkes Frankfurt/Oder,“ in *Fremde und Fremdsein in der DDR: zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin: Metropol, 2003), 280.

forces within the context of socialist economic integration.⁷⁶ Polish workers and tourists, who, thanks to the reformed GDR-Polish border policy established in the 1950's could freely travel to Germany, often bought goods in East Germany and took them back across the border. Germans accused Poles of stealing their goods and of increasing shortages. "Although the source of this conflict lay in the shortages of consumer goods created by economic planning, cultural perceptions mattered more than material reality."⁷⁷

As sentiment against Poles in border cities grew, so did the violence. Murders and harassment motivated by racism took place. In 1965, four boys near Cottbus killed a 17 year old boy because he was Polish and could not speak German well.⁷⁸ In 1972, a girl was harassed and physically attacked by classmates because she was Polish. The school and local government responded by setting up a *Deutsch-Polnische Freundschaft* (German-Polish Friendship) group in her town.⁷⁹ With this establishment, however, came no discussion or active solution against racism or xenophobia. This method of artificial problem solving was inherent to SED politics.

Animosity was particularly severe towards Soviets. Prejudice against Soviets was connected more to political than economic problems, as it was an example of the distrust between the GDR citizens and their government. After freeing Berlin in 1945, the Soviets were regarded by the government as the

⁷⁶ Dennis Kuck, „Für den sozialistischen Aufbau ihrer Heimat? Ausländische Vertragsarbeitkräfte in der DDR,“ in *Fremde und Fremdsein in der DDR: zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin: Metropol, 2003), 246.

⁷⁷ Jonathan R. Zatlin, "Race and Economy in Soviet-Style Regimes," 8.

⁷⁸ Harry Waibel, *Rechtsextremismus in der DDR*, 139.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

liberators and best friends of the East Germans. The Soviets had defeated the Nazis, supported the authority of the East German Communist Party and kept order with its army. However, most GDR citizens felt even less friendship with Russians than they did with contract workers. Post-war contact between the two groups was therefore problematic and prejudice ran both ways. Soviet soldiers' mentality towards the Germans was not friendly. Their feelings of revenge for Nazi era crimes created problems, such as violent acts against Germans, including mass raping of German women. On the German side, left-over fascist sentiment from the Nazi era provoked problems. „Nazi propaganda impressed a picture on the German people of the inferior Slavs, as a murderous and pillaging yellow mob from the East.”⁸⁰ As a result, contact between the Germans and Soviets was curtailed in 1947, but feelings of hatred remained.⁸¹ The Soviets lived in separate barracks outside of cities; „Personal contact was supposed to only take place through official channels.”⁸² The *Einheit* (unity) and *Freundschaft* (friendship) that was propagated by the SED towards the Soviet Union remained solely an official political stance. Similar to the lack of discussion about anti-fascism, there was no real discourse regarding *Freundschaftsideologie* (the ideology of friendship), which could have helped to develop mutual understanding and friendship.⁸³ This led to greater resentment and hatred on both sides.

⁸⁰ Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg, 282.

⁸¹ Gary Bruce, *Resistance with the People*, 47.

⁸² Jan C. Behrends, „Sowjetische „Freunde“ und fremde „Russen,“: Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft zwischen Ideologie und Alltag (1949-1990)“ in: *Fremde und Fremdsein in der DDR: zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin: Metropol, 2003), 79.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 77.

This hatred grew into neo-Nazi protests and violence in the GDR. In 1966, two students at the Erich-Vogel Highschool near Leipzig posted a note in the classroom of an SED secretary saying, „We will not let the Sovietization of schools take place any longer. The bomb will soon explode. With fascist greetings. Heil Hitler”⁸⁴ In 1968, students in Rathenow (a city outside Berlin) provoked Soviet soldiers. Violent conflicts caused loathing of the occupation force and had serious consequences for the SED, which many Germans saw as the Soviet’s political partner in crime. The connection between the occupation force and the ruling political party led to distrust of the SED by citizens and to increased intolerance of Slavs. This distrust created room for East Germans to reverse official ideology of friendship and unity and to hate the Slavs.

It is important here to mention the role that gender played in conflicts between Slavs and Germans, or for that matter simply between foreigners and Germans. The majority of foreigners present in the GDR were males who worked as manual laborers, or in the case of the Soviets, as soldiers. There was a fear among East Germans for the women among them, who could become victims of the sexual hunger of Slavs. Mass sexual assault by Soviet soldiers between 1945 and 1948 confirmed this fear and increased the animosity that Germans felt towards foreigners in general. The role of gender was particularly important for the relations between Germans and Africans, as will be discussed in the next section.

⁸⁴ Harry Waibel, *Rechtsextremismus in der DDR*, 103.

2.2 Non-Communist Bloc *Others*

As the basis of East German foreign policy, official solidarity was propagated not only towards eastern European countries, but also towards other countries working towards socialist goals, including movements against colonialism. In the *Wörterbuch der Außenpolitik und des Völkerrechts* [Dictionary of Foreign Politics and International Law] from 1982 the foreign policy of the GDR was partly defined as following:

The most important responsibility of socialist foreign policy is to secure favorable international conditions for the development of socialism and communism. Important tasks of foreign policy are the support through solidarity of national liberation movements, the consequent position against every form of colonialism, neo-colonialism and racism and the development and solidification of solidarity relationships with nationally liberated states in Asia, Africa, Latin America, among them the countries with socialist orientations [...] Foreign policy supports the fight for political and economic independence and takes steps towards the democratic reorganization of international economic relations that are shaped by imperialism.⁸⁵

Even though the above quote is from the 1980s, the purpose of GDR foreign policy in the 1950's and 1960s was quite similar. In committing itself to helping the democratization and economic development of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America in the early years of the GDR, the SED was helping to increase the labor supply in the GDR. Over time, economic agreements were signed between the GDR and 10 African countries, as well as Asian and South American countries. The main agreements with non-Soviet bloc countries were with Guinea, Congo, Somalia, Mozambique, Angola, Chile, Cuba and Vietnam and led to

⁸⁵ Hans- Joachim Doering, "Es geht um unsere Existenz" *Die Politik der DDR gegenüber der Dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mozambik und Aethiopien* (Berlin: Christopher Links Verlag), 31.

workers and students coming to the GDR. Through these acts of solidarity, the SED was attempting to secure favorable conditions for socialism abroad and was directly affecting the stability and effectiveness of its domestic policy.

The number of these extra-European foreigners coming to the GDR was insignificant compared to the number of Eastern Europeans in the GDR. Exact numbers are hard to find because the small number of statistics kept by the SED are unreliable. However, an approximate figure can be surmised for comparison. In 1951 the first group of Africans arrived: 11 Nigerian students. By 1966, there were approximately 2,000 Vietnamese workers. 1973 saw the largest group of Chilean refugees, numbering about 2,000 people.⁸⁶ The 1980's witnessed a large group of Mozambican workers as well as 60,000 Vietnamese workers.⁸⁷ Yet, even with such small numbers, the experiences of Africans and Asians in East Germany highlight the racism that was cultivated in East Germany.

Unlike East European workers, workers from Asia and Africa all came as contract workers through bilateral government agreements. The conditions that they lived under and their relationships with Germans were even worse than those of Polish or Hungarian workers. Official agreement conditions varied from country to country and by the 1980s new elements had been added to contracts. However, during the 1950s and 60s the basic components were the same. Two different categories of exchange- students and workers- were established. The worker agreements allowed for 2 to 5 year work contracts, with contractually guaranteed adequate housing, weekly payment (some of which was kept until the

⁸⁶ Eva- Maria Elsner, *Ausländerpolitik und Ausländerfeindschaft*, 18-21.

⁸⁷ Ministerium fuer Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg, *Freundschaft!*, 276.

workers' contracts ended and then was transferred to their home country), German language instruction and the opportunity to receive a vocational degree. The jobs guaranteed in the contracts were meant to cultivate the worker's technical knowledge so that upon return to his home country he would provide industrial knowledge valuable for the economic growth of the country.⁸⁸ Student contracts were more frequent among Chileans and Vietnamese. The students could come for part or all of their higher education and depending on the contract, they were normally forced to leave afterwards.

The agreements were meant to show the goodwill, friendship and solidarity of East Germany towards foreign countries by helping to educate and train the less fortunate, but the agreements were also used to increase East Germany's labor force. Unfortunately, the goodwill of the GDR was subjugated to the SED's fear and distrust of foreigners. The SED feared that foreigners could be enemy spies or political dissidents and this fear manifested itself in complete regulation of the foreigners' public and private lives, with no regard for their legal rights. Patrick Ireland, a professor of politics and international relations at the University of Houston, explains the legal situation of foreigners in the GDR: "Officially, the foreigners were on equal legal footing with citizens of the GDR, as long as the bilateral accords did not specify otherwise. However, these were kept strictly secret."⁸⁹ This secrecy enabled the SED to take advantage of the foreigners' ignorance.

⁸⁸ Bernd Broeskamp, „Vom Auswanderungs- zum Einwanderungsland,“ 15-22.

⁸⁹ Patrick R. Ireland, „Socialism, Unification Policy and the Rise of Racism in Eastern Germany,“ *International Migration Review* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 548.

The Ministerium für Arbeit and Soziales (Department of Labor and Social Programs) was responsible for regulating foreign workers. It kept strict watch over the workers' daily routines and made sure that contact between workers and Germans was strictly official. Contact outside of the workplace between the two groups was forbidden. At universities and in some workplaces, Germans were forced to sign a paper saying they would not have contact with foreigners.⁹⁰ It is important here to note that it was not just the wish of the German government that foreigners and Germans be kept separate. The foreign countries often stipulated this restriction in order to protect their citizens from foreign influence and to ensure that their citizens returned home.⁹¹ The compounds where the foreigners lived were outside of the city and often enclosed by walls or fences. They were poorly kept and contained very minimal comforts. In the communal housing for foreigners, men and women were separated. Some contracts, such as those for Mozambicans, stipulated that men and women had to be separate regardless of marriage status in order to hinder the possibility of procreation. Women who became pregnant had the option either to abort or to be sent home.

The personal and social needs of the workers were not attended to and no support was offered for bringing workers' families to the GDR. Marriage between foreigners and Germans had to be approved by the state, which normally rejected the marriage applications.⁹² Such a marriage would mean a higher number of permanent foreigners and less SED control over the acts of its potential enemy. It

⁹⁰ Bernd Broeskamp, „Vom Auswanderungs- zum Einwanderungsland,“ 23.

⁹¹ Britta Mueller, *Ausländer im Osten Deutschland, Eine Rostocker Studie* (Koeln: ISP, 1996), 52.

⁹² Marianne Krueger-Potratz, *Anderssein gab es nicht- Ausländer und Minderheiten un der DDR* (Muenster: Waxmann, 1991), 176-178.

also would mean a change in the ethnic characterization of Germans. The accepted thought in the GDR concerning foreign, esp. black, and German relations was, „Clan to clan. German to German. Black should be with blacks, where they belong.”⁹³ A strict rotational model was implemented in the contracts, which brought workers for 2 to 5 years and then sent them back for a new group, ensuring short relationships between Germans and foreigners if unofficial contact was made.⁹⁴ The type of work foreigners received was also not always what was contractually guaranteed. Most often they received jobs that native East Germans did not want, but that needed to be filled for economic purposes.⁹⁵ Because of this, an association was often made by the East Germans between socially unattractive work, such as working in coal mines and unskilled factory positions, and people of color.⁹⁶

These worker programs were a form of indentured servitude contracted between states in the name of anti-colonialism. Extreme control was exercised over foreign workers from Asia and Africa in order to maintain the workers' position as economic investments. Even though the percentage of foreign workers was very small in the GDR, the government wanted to prevent all possibility of enemy danger and foreign influence on German society. The workers' living and working conditions and social welfare were of no concern to the SED. Because the percentage of foreign workers was very small, which limited their visibility in

⁹³ Landolf Scherzer, *die Fremden- Unerwünschte Begegnungen und Verbotene Protokolle* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag GmbH, 2002), 22.

⁹⁴ Bernd Broeskamp, „Vom Auswanderungs- zum Einwanderungsland,“ 18-23.

⁹⁵ Britta Mueller, *Ausländer in Osten Deutschland*, 45.

⁹⁶ Jonathan R. Zatin, „Race and Economy,“ 25.

East German society, the SED was able to treat foreign workers like slaves without causing much social or political resistance.

The servitude of foreigners was complicated, however, by the SED's anti-colonialist politics, which gave certain foreigners distinct privileges while treating others as slaves. Foreign students often received special treatment in the name of anti-colonialism. A university student complained about this special treatment: "Foreign exchange students could take the tests as many times as they wanted... but that didn't go along with our system here, with what we as socialists were trying to accomplish. That was a contradiction."⁹⁷ These foreign students, some of whom came from non-communist countries, were considered by the SED to be disadvantaged and therefore, they were not held to the same standard as GDR students. Even though the lifestyle of these students was strictly controlled, the SED ensured that their educational achievements, which were an important aspect of socialism, appeared equal to those of East German students. This system of advantage was resented by East Germans and gave them a reason to reverse government ideology and dislike foreigners.

2.3 Personal Reports

Exchange students were not confined to the same type of restrictive and degrading life as workers. However, restrictions concerning travel and association with Germans were similar between the two groups. Annette Kahane, an East German Jewish woman who had extensive contact with foreigners in the GDR from the 1960's through the 1980's, tells stories of foreign students in her book

⁹⁷ Britta Mueller, *Ausländer im Osten Deutschland*, 51.

Ich sehe was, was du nicht siehst [I see what you don't see]. During her studies in Rostock in the mid 1970's she met a group of Chileans. The Chileans were not under the same restrictions as people from Africa and Asia, as they did not come as contract workers. Many came as students and stayed to work. However, their contact with Germans was also regulated. Chile was not officially part of the communist bloc, and thus, the SED had cause for suspicion of Chileans in the GDR. The Chileans could have been spies or foreign agents and thus, close watch and control was kept over them. The Chileans that Kahane knew in Rostock all lived in one building together in a special district that was only for foreigners. They described their daily life to her, which consisted of „Bureaucracy in offices... street car doors close before your nose, open racism from the children's teachers, an atmosphere against foreigners in stores, attacks against sailors from North Africa.“⁹⁸ One of her Chilean friends went to Berlin to visit his brother and was arrested and taken back to Rostock solely because he had left the city. Every time he tried to visit another city he was arrested and sent back to Rostock. Kahane also tells of her own run-in with the law when officials found out that she was making friends with foreigners. She was confronted by the University and asked “if I knew that the [Chilean] students were spies and that I wasn't allowed to have contact with foreigners.”⁹⁹ She was told that if she did not cut off contact with the Chileans she would lose her place as a student as well as any future job serving the GDR. Kahane's story is testimony to the reality of the SED's control and the fear that it had of foreigners.

⁹⁸ Anetta Kahane, *Ich sehe was*, 77.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

The official control and management of foreigners in the GDR strongly influenced East Germans. Another part of Kahane's story tells of her experience with racism when she was with East Germans in Brazil. In the late 1950's and early 1960's when she was young her family lived in Rio, Brazil where her father was a foreign correspondent for *Neues Deutschland*, the official East German newspaper. Brazil was not a communist bloc country and therefore, the SED went to extreme measures to separate the East Germans from Brazilians. Because her father worked for the newspaper, the family lived outside the complex in Rio where all the East German officials lived. However, government regulation regarding contact with the Brazilians, which was supposed to be limited solely to official contact, still applied to her family. Kahane attended the official East German school sponsored by the GDR, but because her family was different from the other East German families, she was an outcast in her class. In observing those around her she said that, „When the children and their parents spoke together, they often made fun of the Brazilians, especially the blacks.”¹⁰⁰ The East Germans did not try to speak the native language, did not have contact with the locals and thought of themselves as superior. Even as a child she noticed the racism that resulted from government efforts to keep East German citizens separate from the local population. This directly undermined the SED's rhetoric of anti-racism and friendship with all peoples of the world.

After receiving her college degree in Rostock in the mid 1970's, Kahane was sent as a German translator to the island of Sao Tome. She, like all other

¹⁰⁰ Anetta Kahane, *Ich sehe was*, 24.

GDR citizens, was strictly forbidden to have any contact with ‘foreigners’, or non-GDR citizens, outside of her official daily work.

The GDR foreign service had implemented a strict ban against contact with foreigners. At the first instructional session with the Attaché I asked who he considered to be foreigners. He was astonished at my question. Naturally, all non-GDR citizens were meant. The Sao Tomoners as well? Yes, of course, he said, and the Soviets, Cubans and all others as well. He found my question, as to whether it was not we who were the foreigners here, inappropriate.

¹⁰¹

The reason for this strict separation is multi-faceted. On the one hand, if the SED had let the two groups intermix, it would have had to address existing racial problems within the German population that were officially denied. This was a Pandora’s box that it could not open in its campaign to legitimize its anti-racism and superiority over capitalist West Germany. On the other hand, this strict separation occurred because of the all-consuming suspicion that the SED had of foreigners from non-communist countries. This suspicion translated into distinct prejudice, because all peoples from countries like Chile and even the FRG were seen as dangerous and inferior people who should not mix with East Germans. This claim to superiority propagated racism among East Germans. As Kahane so deeply felt, „I experienced [...] how deep the racism of these people was and how deeply it was ingrained in the East German state.“¹⁰² There was no room for public discourse regarding East German relations with foreigners because of the omniscience claimed by the SED and therefore, racism continued.

¹⁰¹ Anetta Kahane, *Ich sehe was*, 90.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 119.

Reports from foreign and German workers themselves show the conflict that developed between the two groups in the GDR. Reports from different time periods differ little in the experiences of discrimination and racism. The following accounts span a time period from the 1950s through the 1980s. Circumstances of Mozambican workers in the 1980s were different than those of the early Vietnamese workers in the 1960s, but SED rhetoric concerning these groups, the racism that was tolerated and the intolerance it fostered is enough to show that racism existed in the GDR throughout its lifespan and was never officially addressed.

A Vietnamese worker who was interviewed in the early nineties regarding his position as a contract worker in the 1980's in the GDR said that in the workplace he did not feel any initial discrimination from fellow workers. He knew he was getting paid much less than the German workers because he did not have a vocational degree. As time passed, relations changed. „When I started at the bottom, they all recognized and accepted me and felt pity for me... But then, as I worked my way up, came the others that started at the beginning. As a result, jealousy developed and perhaps also hatred.“¹⁰³ Once his presence created economic competition for East Germans, racial hatred arose. This is an example of where economic conflict was expressed as ethnic hatred. *Fremde und Fremdsein in der DDR*, an analysis of interviews from the mid 1990's with GDR citizens about their memories of contact with foreigners in the 1970's and 1980's, illustrates the other prejudices that East Germans had against foreigners. On the

¹⁰³ Britta Mueller, *Ausländer in Osten Deutschland*, 47.

whole, Asians were more accepted than Africans. „The best and most disciplined were the Vietnamese... they were also the hardest workers, so there were no problems there.”¹⁰⁴ This account by an East German factory supervisor, who had had experience with both Vietnamese and Africans workers, goes on further to describe the common view that East Germans had of African workers and the racism that developed in East Germans’ minds. “They came from countries where European discipline was unknown... They were young people, away from home, who came partly out of the bush, especially those in the beginning from Mozambique.”¹⁰⁵ Cultural differences between Germans and Africans, such as ‘European discipline’ versus ‘African lazyness,’ were portrayed in a hierarchical manner with German culture being superior. Asians were seen as better than Africans because of their stronger work ethic and the goods that they made to sell on the German market, such as jeans. The role of gender also played a large role, as concern for the harassment of German women was also expressed. A master craftsman said that German men harassed German women, but that „Sexual harassment came more from the black African men than from their German colleagues.”¹⁰⁶

As a result of this racial conflict, fights occurred between workers. „There were also offences, discipline offences, we also had a few [...] fights and [...] also

¹⁰⁴ Annegret Schuele, „’Die ham se sozusagen aus dem Busche geholt,’ Die Wahrnehmung der Vertragsarbeitskraefte aus Schwarzakrika und Vietnam durch Deutsche im VEB Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei,“ in *Fremde und Fremdsein in der DDR: zu historischen Ursachen der Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin: Metropol, 2003), 286.

¹⁰⁵ Annegret Schuele, “Die ham se sozusagen,” 285.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 289.

a court incident.¹⁰⁷ The violence resulted from problems concerning culture, languages, work ethics and economics and was never handled in a way that overcame racial prejudice. When problems arose the foreigner „would then be sent directly home.“¹⁰⁸ There were a few reasons why the SED did not or was unable to address these problems between foreigners and its citizens. On the one hand, the SED felt no responsibility for the well-being of the foreigners and therefore, it did whatever it wanted with them. Because foreigners were seen as replaceable economic investments it was easiest to get rid of them if problems arose. The SED also could not acknowledge that a German had been the cause of a conflict because such an acknowledgement would have delegitimized its ideology. According to the SED East Germans were non-violent and non-racist who looked upon foreigners as their brothers.

The racism expressed by East Germans was a problem that spanned all generations. Frau K., a German woman who worked for the *Kulturbund* (Culture Society)¹⁰⁹ in the GDR, told of the Mozambican workers that she had had contact with and befriended in the early 1980's. She described the good relationships she had had with the Mozambicans she encountered, how they came over for dinners on the weekends and how they were good to her children. Her children, however, started getting harassed in school and called *Negerschlampe* (Negro sluts) because of their contact with Africans. This racist tension between the children was

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 285.

¹⁰⁸ Annegret Schuele, "Die ham se sozusagen," 285.

¹⁰⁹ The German Cultural Society was originally called the German Cultural Society for Democratic Renewal, founded in 1945. Its mission was to help develop an anti-fascist, democratic culture in Germany. In 1958 it became the German Cultural Society and focused on developing a socialist culture. By 1977 it had 209,000 members.

recognized by the SED and in the end, Frau K. was reprimanded for having too much contact with foreigners and for allowing her children to be put in danger. She was told that „The foreigners are here to work! And so it came out: the foreigners should work here, go to bed, sleep and work again, and as a result they get their salad.“¹¹⁰ Foreigners were solely an economic interest and ‘Solidarity’ was a sham.

These personal accounts reveal the multiplicity of relations between foreigners, Germans and official ideology. Some Germans realized that the ideology was a sham and worked personally to improve relations with foreigners. Others were disaffected by ideology and continued their racism. At the official level SED ideology promoted anti-racism, yet racism was not punished. The SED treated foreigners like economic investments instead of communist brothers; they kept foreigners working and traded them in when problems arose. The SED claimed to be a democracy, but discourse regarding official ideology and societal problems was not tolerated in public due to the totalitarian nature of the SED. All these contradictions and inconsistencies in the GDR tolerated and promoted racism.

2.4 The Other *Others*

It was not only foreigners who were discriminated against. The presence of Jews in society was not recognized in post-World War II East Germany and as a result, prejudice against Jews also continued. Questions concerning Jews in the GDR surrounded different issues than questions concerning Africans or Slavs, but

¹¹⁰ Bernd Broeskamp, “Für Hoyerswerde ist das wichtig,” 69.

the reality of discrimination against these various groups of people was consistent. Here I will only focus on the general racism that was felt by Jews in the GDR in order to give a broader perspective of the social situation. The state of Jewish affairs in the GDR is another case where racism was tolerated and solidarity was not embraced by the East Germans. 1945 was declared by the SED as a new beginning- no racism, no anti-Semitism, no imperialism and no fascism. Therefore, Jewish history began anew as well and Jews were „in no way [...] distinguished from other GDR citizens.”¹¹¹ The *Nicht-Reden-Über-Juden* (no discussion about Jews) policy meant an exclusion of Jews in society. There was “in the East German press and literature no Jews, only Jewish people or Jewish citizens [...] that [Jew] was still considered a swear-word. That is definitely anti-Semitism.”¹¹² By making the word ‘Jew’ taboo the SED was reinforcing its social perception of Jews. There were a few people who tried to discuss the Jewish problem, but they were promptly punished. Paul Merker was one of these people and because of his efforts in the mid-1950’s to start dialogue about the Holocaust and East Germany’s need to reconcile the past, he was imprisoned. Similar events, which were mentioned in the first chapter, were successful in basically eliminating further discussion of Jews in the GDR and making it a ‘non-issue.’

Other incidents showed the presence of anti-Semitism in the GDR. During the 1950s and 1960’s, the presence of right-extremist groups that modeled the Nazi SS increased. The SS was the elite defense squadron of the Nazi army. These extremist groups not only attacked SED members, who they often claimed

¹¹¹ Marianne Krueger-Potratz, *Anderssein gab es nicht*, 61.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 60.

were Jewish or heavily influenced by Jews, but also painted schools and factory walls with swastika signs saying *Juden raus* (Jews out).¹¹³ These acts mirrored Nazi attacks on communists and Jews. In 1966, anti-Semitic riots broke out in Quendlinburg, where a band of 20 youths, some of whom were members of the Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth),¹¹⁴ chanted “Jews out!”, “We need firewood again”, and “Die Jews.”¹¹⁵ These neo-fascist activities were labeled as *Rowdytum* (hooliganism) by the SED and little was done to stop them. Because a number of the youths involved in this hooliganism were FDJ members, the FDJ conceived of a strategy to deal with the violent youth groups; the strategy was consistent with SED politics.

1. All cases of hooliganism and the formation of armed gangs should be recorded.
2. These people should be connected in some way with the West.
3. The subordinate groups should be exposed and suggestions for minimizing the problem should be filed.¹¹⁶

The events were not to be recognized as anti-Semitic, nor was any recognition given that these problems could have been instigated by realities in the GDR. Instead, the West was blamed.

Besides blaming the West for this hooliganism, the SED directly linked Jews to the West, which further complicated the accusations because of the SED’s strong anti-capitalist rhetoric. A GDR made-for-TV movie called *Ohne Kampf kein Sieg* (Without a Fight there is no Victory), which was aired by Duetschen Fernsehfunk (German Television Station) in the GDR in 1966, revolved around a

¹¹³ Harry Waibel, *Rechsextremismus in der DDR*, 28-30.

¹¹⁴ The Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ) was the official youth movement of the GDR. It was founded in 1936 as an underground Communist movement in opposition to Hitler’s rule.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹¹⁶ Harry Waibel, *Rechsextremismus in der DDR*, 36.

Jewish man who fled Germany during World War II and returned in 1945 with U.S. occupation troops. The movie connected Jews with American capitalist interest in West Germany and West German reconstruction politics.¹¹⁷ By prohibiting discussion about Jews in domestic politics and linking Jews to the enemy, the SED indirectly tolerated and promoted anti-Semitism from the top down. These examples show the connectedness of the SED's national and foreign policies and how they were both marked by anti-Semitism.

Anetta Kahane wrote more in-depth accounts of the anti-Semitism that she encountered. As a child she became interested in her Jewish background and in exploring her religion. One day she decided to wear the Star of David to school as a symbol of her faith. Her parents were very much against it and upon reaching school she realized why. „, Shortly after I encountered some of the kids from my old school, they started to tell nasty, aggressive anti-Semitic Jew-jokes, which they came up with in an amazingly quick manner considering the situation.“¹¹⁸ When a girl asked her why she was wearing a Star of David, Kahane responded that she was Jewish. The girl laughed and said that it couldn't be true because Kahane didn't look like a Jew. She didn't have black hair and a crooked nose. Kahane encountered further racism when she visited a friend's house. When the mother found out that Kahane was Jewish, she refused to give her lemonade along with the other children. “Ewa came back annoyed and told me that her parents, both important socialist officials, didn't serve Jews in their house.”¹¹⁹ Ewa's parents are a perfect example of the interaction between the racism tolerated from

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 76.

¹¹⁸ Anetta Kahane, *Ich sehe was*, 52.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 53.

the top and the racism already present at the bottom of GDR society. As officials, her parents had to uphold the SED's ideology of anti-racism, but this contradictory ideology allowed for manifestation of personal prejudice. Officially, „There was no anti-Semitism anywhere in the GDR anyways, and Judaism had to do with relatives.“¹²⁰ If the SED said it was so, then it must be true. But reality dictated otherwise. This reality delegitimized the SED's political rhetoric for Jews and all others who experienced prejudice and racism.

The intolerance and racism towards Soviets, Slavs and Jews, along with the general distrust that the SED felt towards them, had deep effects on GDR society, especially among youth. The SED's ideological counter-politics were ineffective and racism persisted, which produced right-extremism. The majority of young people in the GDR, regardless of their socialist upbringing, did not feel connected to society and rebelled. This rebellion took the form of a reversal of SED ideology in the form of racism. In 1959, 200 extremist groups with 2,000 members were broken up by authorities. Over one-third of those arrested were FDJ members. Even though this is a small number of people publicly involved in extremism, it is significant because the presence of these groups challenged SED anti-racist ideology. In the mid-1960's criminal statistics increased dramatically along with the influx of foreigners to the GDR.¹²¹ In response, the SED increased its anti-fascist rhetoric and its military control. The SED claimed complete separation and non-responsibility for crimes of the Nazi regime and for any possibility of continued effects of Nazi propaganda among the German people.

¹²⁰ Anetta Kahane, *Ich sehe was*, 53.

¹²¹ Harry Waibel, *Rechtsextremismus in der DDR*, 170.

This ideology, which the SED used in trying to counter and prevent these social problems, can be seen distinctively in education and politics. These two elements influenced and connected SED national and foreign policy, in an attempt to stabilize the SED's claim to omniscience, while tolerating racism on both the national and international level.

2.5 Rhetoric in Education

Education was an institution that revolved around SED ideology and rhetoric and avoided handling issues of racism. Topics such as fascism, anti-imperialism, and solidarity were discussed using static rhetoric that did not develop with the emergence of new issues or topics of concern. Racial problems were never recognized nor dealt with, which led to a division between the letter and spirit of the dictatorship. This section will attempt to provide further understanding of how rhetoric was used to govern society, enabling the topic of racism to be shut out of discussions, while tolerating its presence in society.

The education of GDR youth provided the basis for the societal structure by inundating students with ideology in every subject, leaving students little room for dissent. This rhetoric was based on the concept that the world was divided into two groups: friends and foes. Those who supported the socialist class struggle and were antifascists were friends. Those who did not support socialism were enemies. The world was drawn out in black and white, with ideological answers to all questions. Racism in the GDR was never fought against using education as ammunition, which left it to develop as a result of fear, ignorance and rebellion.

Education was used directly by the state as an instrument for the ideological indoctrination of the population. The purpose of elementary education was to give a base for further ideological training, while indoctrinating patriotism and an understanding of socialism. In the *Protokoll der Wissenschaftlichen Konferenz zu Fragen der Politisch-Moralischen Erziehung in der Unterstufe* (Protocol for the Scholarly conference Regarding the Question of Political-Moral Education at the Elementary Level) from 1961, the goal of elementary education was presented. „The purpose of elementary education is to establish in the first four years of school a solid foundation for understanding the development of socialism, which is the basis for further education and practical jobs that require knowledge, ability, skills, discipline and specific behavior.“¹²² The main focus of geography for classes 1-4 was that it led to „an important contribution to patriotic education...The students should learn about their homeland and its beauty and learn to love it.“¹²³ This love for the fatherland was the basis for later lessons on hatred of non-communists. In the geography curriculum for classes 5-10, the goal was that „students should be educated to detest and hate imperialists. They should feel a connection with the peoples in Africa and Latin America, who are exploited by imperialism, as well as the suppressed classes in the USA and for their party, which is just and struggling.“¹²⁴

Not only was solidarity taught, but so was intense hatred and detestation towards societies that were different. This created a clear us-versus-them paradigm for students. Patriotism and solidarity were learned by students, with a

¹²² Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg, *Freundschaft!*, 192.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

specifically tailored history to support these sentiments. History classes were meant to educate students in the development of socialism. The classes highlighted the historical class struggle and the victory of socialism over capitalism, which was the basis for ideological concepts such as proletarian internationalism and patriotic solidarity. This propaganda was meant to ensure the loyalty of young people to the GDR, but it easily could have had the opposite effect. Many GDR citizens learned to distrust the dictatorship because of its hypocrisy. Citizens who distrusted the government could well have reversed SED ideology as a form of rebellion. Instead of feeling solidarity towards foreigners, they could have hated foreigners as a sign of hating their government. Evidence of this is seen in the right-extremism of a minority of GDR youth and in the accounts of people like Kahane and Frau K.

The political ideology of the SED created new terms to express an artificial relationship between East Germany and the rest of the world. Political terms such as proletarian internationalism and solidarity were the basis of SED ideology, but had no actual connection to everyday life. They were impersonal terms that were implemented from the top down.¹²⁵ In everyday life East Germans rarely had a personal experience that could be characterized by either term except in the classroom. Here the SED mandated that students learned about their foreign communist brothers, learned foreign languages, had officially regulated contact with foreigners, and did projects to aid in the fight against imperialism. The SED believed by personally experiencing the intended effects of the ideology, students

¹²⁵ Christiane Griese and Helga Marburger, *Zwischen Internationalismus und Patriotismus: Konzepte des Umgangs mit Fremden und Fremdheit in den Schulen der DDR* (Frankfurt: Verlag fuer Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1995), 42.

would continue life with an understanding of how to be good socialists. Children were taught that they could find answers to their concerns and questions within the ideological tenets of socialism.

One of the most important terms in the classroom, proletarian internationalism, was defined as follows: „The specific underlying principle of proletarian internationalism is the union of workers in all countries and nations in a fight against capitalist exploitation and suppression and for the construction of socialist and communist societies.“¹²⁶ In support of this ideology, students learned about the history and culture of fellow socialist countries. They were required first and foremost to learn Russian, which was considered the world language, the language of socialism and the most important language for trade. English and French were also offered in some schools so GDR students could establish a feeling of solidarity with and help support the communist fight over imperialism in other countries.¹²⁷

The concept of equality taught in East German classrooms was a particular construct that mixed Karl Marx’s theory of class warfare with Stalinism. Marx’s theory divided the world into two groups: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The proletariat propagated equality of condition, which the bourgeoisie worked against. Under Stalinism, these two categories were renamed ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’. The theory of equality taught by the SED defined the communists, or proletariat, as friends and equals and the non-communists as bourgeoisie and enemies. Because this concept of equality was based on the idea of equality of

¹²⁶ Christiane Griese, *Zwischen Internationalismus*, 38.

¹²⁷ Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg, *Freundschaft!*, 205.

condition, it tolerated racial discrimination. Marx's description of the world highlights this racism. "Just as it [the bourgeoisie] made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones..."¹²⁸ Children were being taught in the classroom that the world was divided and that some people were less equal because of their culture, politics or skin color. All communists, however, were friends and equals. According to the SED, all students needed to learn „about ideas of equality and inequality and the application of values, not only to enable the assessment of the positive situation of ones own material living situation, but simultaneously to assess inequality abroad."¹²⁹ In stating that all friends were equal, the SED was able to circumvent potential questions of inequality within its own country.

Because of the ideology of equality between all socialist brothers, problematic differences between socialist countries and nationalities were not discussed. All peoples had the same communist values, lived under the same danger from capitalism and lived the same kind of life.¹³⁰ The potential problems of ethnic inequality or conflict were played down through ideology based on non-ethnic concepts, such as political solidarity. This resulted in policy which turned its back to historic problems and left them unresolved. Middle Eastern countries were portrayed, with the European socialist countries, as being in the same camp; Conflicts between these countries were not acknowledged. They were all equal and fighting under the same ideology. "If ever national differences were

¹²⁸ Karl Marx, "The Class Struggle," in *Culture and Consciousness: Perspectives in the Social Sciences* (New York: Georg Braziller, 1967), 80.

¹²⁹ Christiane Griese, *Zwischen Internationalismus*, 63.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

mentioned in GDR schools, they were minimized.¹³¹ The most important of the ‘equal’ countries was Russia, the liberator from German Nazi rule. In textbooks, the Soviet Union was always referred to as the best friend of the German people. This lack of discussion concerning cultural differences presented a huge problem for those Germans who actually came in contact with foreigners, realized their cultural differences and the error in SED ideology, and did not understand how to be tolerant.

In juxtaposition to friendship between communists, hatred of enemies was propagated. The class struggle permitted this hatred, because of the black and white picture it painted of the world; Those who didn’t support the proletarian struggle fought against it. These enemies were in foreign countries, but also had the potential of being inside the GDR; they were the opponents of socialism and unpatriotic. *Fremde* (strangers or outsiders) was not only an ideological definition associated with the enemy, but it was also a moral construct. Outsiders were seen as comprised of negative elements of the human character. They were lazy and abnormal.¹³² As the curriculum for the eight grade dictated, “For the enemies of our worker-peasant state there is no freedom.”¹³³ This concept of an enemy was strictly adhered to in education and was the basis for the political construction of the SED- one that attempted to get rid of all enemies, both inside and outside of the GDR. Outsiders were identified not only as those who opposed socialism, but overall as those who were different. This construct of the enemy, as anyone who

¹³¹ Ibid., 73.

¹³² Christiane Griese, *Zwischen Internationalismus*, 158-163.

¹³³ Ibid., 162.

did not fit the strict definition of a patriotic German communist, promoted intolerance, prejudice and allowed for racism.

Anti-fascism (which included anti-racism) was another concept that was highly developed in the classroom. Racism was presented as a phenomenon of the capitalist/imperialist countries- a construct that enabled students to distance themselves from the topic. Dictatorship was also marked as a capitalistic characteristic and an element of fascism. In the classroom, fascism was connected to the history of National Socialism and to the current United States and students read literature highlighting racism in the U.S. To prove their own tolerance children were instructed to sing songs like *Über allem strahlt die Sonne* (The Sun Shines over Everyone), which is about peace-loving children of the world who are of all different colors.¹³⁴ In 1959 the lesson plan for the first grade's celebration of 'World's Children Day' stated, "We maintain friendship with all children; the happy children of our homeland; the children of other countries: different skin colors, different clothes, different languages, foreign sounding names."¹³⁵ A two sided world was taught to the children- one in which they should accept all children, yet hate those who could be termed enemies or fascists. This rhetoric of anti-fascism allowed future generations in the GDR to develop prejudices and racism, because of the contradictions in the ideology and its removal from reality. All of these issues, from international solidarity to equality to anti-fascism in education, are direct reflections of how the SED was trying to control East German society.

¹³⁴ Christiane Griese, *Zwischen Internationalismus*, 178.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

All of this ideology was legitimized by the version of World War II history that the SED promoted. A close read of a sixth grade history textbook published in 1961 highlights the national and patriotic rhetoric that was used to recount history and legitimize the GDR. Throughout the history of World War II, workers were highlighted as the victors, with all socialists rebuilding Germany shoulder to shoulder.¹³⁶ It was German militarists, imperialists and fascists who were responsible for the war- “the German workers could not have prevented it.”¹³⁷ The war criminals were not regular Germans; they were large landholders or capitalists and these people were punished after the war. Without responsibility for what had happened, German socialists and anti-fascists could be free of guilt and start a new country that was completely free of fascism and capitalism. Jews were portrayed as fighters against fascism both in the ghettos and in concentration camps, but they were not highlighted as victims. Instead, the German people as a whole had been victims.¹³⁸ The Soviet army was depicted as the ultimate victor alongside the German socialists. “With their heroic fight the Soviet Union freed the German people from fascism.”¹³⁹ After the war the textbook claimed that Soviet soldiers, engineers and technicians worked next to Germans to rebuild Germany. The United States was labeled the enemy with the various efforts of the United States, such as the bombing of Berlin, depicted as hindrances to the Soviet efforts at liberation. ¹⁴⁰ Lastly, a negative picture of West Germany was painted in

¹³⁶ *Lehrbuch für Geschichte der 6. Klasse der Oberschule* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1961), 168.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 160-61.

textbooks. “As under fascism, the communist party is forbidden and pacifists are persecuted and locked in prison.”¹⁴¹ As Otto Grotewohl, Minister President of the GDR in the 1950’s, said, “An old dream is realized: the unity of the German working class.”¹⁴² This workers’ nation was the basis of a successful and revolutionary country that would stand as a model for the rest of the world. All evidence that went against this ideologically constructed version of history, such as the war crimes of the Soviets, absence of active resistance to Nazis and the presence of Nazis in post-war East Germany, was systematically excluded.

This brief overview of the content of GDR education highlights the ideology and artificially constructed reality that was taught to students in order to legitimize the national and foreign politics of the SED and to present the GDR as the antithesis of the fascist Nazi regime. History, social studies, geography and even music classes were inundated with socialist rhetoric so as to further the indoctrination of students. Reality was covered up and education became one of the main tools in constructing this ideal image of GDR society and politics. From a young age, children were indoctrinated with very strong political ideology that often contradicted itself, yet allowed no opportunity for the recognition of these contradictions. This led to a very distant relationship between the SED and the people, in which most people realized the hypocritical ideological rhetoric of the party, but played the game of being a good obedient citizen and staying quiet. The intolerance, prejudice and racism that was never dealt with from the twelve years

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 184.

¹⁴² *Lehrbuch für Geschichte*, 178.

of fascist Nazi rule reinforced the separation between the party and the people and the illegitimacy of the SED's rule.

2.6 Rhetoric for Foreign Policy

Political speeches became a principle mode for the SED to broadcast its ideology domestically and internationally in an attempt to improve the GDR's public image. This meant not only glorifying the GDR, but vilifying West Germany and the United States. Political speeches and documents concerning racism used a static, formulaic and ideological approach similar to the approach used in education. They acknowledged the anti-racism of the GDR and accused its enemies of fascism while ignoring or denying domestic and international situations that contradicted SED ideology. SED rhetoric was formulated more for the protection of its image rather than for the economic or social development of East Germany.

Political speeches given by GDR politicians all had much the same message. Speeches discussed the GDR and its place in the world, concentrated on the importance of the German workers' state and emphasized the SED's fight against fascism. The GDR's relationship with the Soviet Union was also highlighted. The successful efforts of the GDR to establish a racism-free society were pointed out in contradistinction to the harmful fascist and imperialist policies of the United States or West Germany. The GDR was always presented in a positive light, as an activist state fighting for the good of humanity. This political approach was a defensive method during a time of international political

instability and the threat of the Cold War, when the GDR was fighting for legitimacy next to its brother state, the Federal Republic of Germany.

On the birth date of the GDR, October 11, 1949, Prime Minister Wilhelm Pieck identified the threat to the GDR's legitimacy in his inaugural speech. He dedicated himself to fulfilling the GDR's obligations under the Potsdam Agreement,¹⁴³ which included making reparations for the war and securing the country's peaceful development in the world, and highlighted the main hindrance to this progress. "We must create throughout the whole of Germany the conditions necessary for the fulfillment of these obligations and seek to put an end to the policies being pursued in the west of Germany, by means of which the forces of fascism and militarism are again winning the upper hand and preparations are being made for further aggression."¹⁴⁴ This aggression, according to the GDR, was taking the form of a close connection between Washington and Bonn, the capital of the FRG. Bonn's first ruling party was the Christian Democratic Union, a conservative party, and in response the SED accused the FRG of supporting a movement "to gather together all rightwing radical, Nazi and neo-Nazi forces under the CDU/CSU..."¹⁴⁵ The relationship between Bonn and the West had also opened up the possibility for future West German membership in the European Defense Council. The GDR used this political relationship to

¹⁴³ The Potsdam Agreement was an agreement on policy for the occupation and reconstruction of Germany and other European nations after World War II. It was drafted and adopted by the USSR, USA and UK, at the Potsdam Conference between July 17 and August 2, 1945.

¹⁴⁴ GDR Committee for Human Rights, *Allies in the Struggle Against Racism* (Berlin: GDR Committee for Human Rights, 1971), 67.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 26

characterize the FRG as an enemy state, which further supported its claim as the legitimate state for the German people.

Public participation in the fight against racism was critical for international legitimacy at a time when the world was struggling with discrimination and racism. The GDR played this card like other countries: by affirming its dedication to the fight against racism. This was the same technique used by countries like the U.S., only the GDR had a specific advantage. It could make sure that the reality of racism in the GDR was not broadcast along with its political and ideological claims. From the early 1950s onward the interaction between racism and anti-racism in the world was changing. The American civil rights movement and South African apartheid were two of the most visible and influential anti-racist campaigns. The GDR, however, was not visibly active in either of these movements. In 1965 an important international initiative regarding racism occurred, in which the GDR participated. The International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), sponsored by the United Nations Human Rights Commission, was signed on December 21, 1965. A further initiative on the part of the UN, an International Year of Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, was declared for 1971. The GDR took these opportunities to present an elaborate agenda for fighting racism. A GDR Committee for Human Rights was established and held a conference in Berlin on April 27, 1971. Conference participants comprised of members from multiple organizations in the GDR, including representatives from the Association of Jewish Communities in the GDR, the Council of the Free German Youth, the

Union of German Journalists, the GDR Peace Council, the GDR League of Friendship Among the Peoples and the Union of Democratic German Women. Even though participants in the conference were not all SED organized groups, the same measures of self-censorship and political propaganda were exercised by each one of them. All speeches at the conference contained the same concerns and issues and called for the same action. This testifies to the formulaic approach with which the SED devised its rhetoric and policies. This approach provided a unified and strong image of the GDR to be broadcast.

Two very important elements were present in the presentations of the participants at the conference. The first was the prominence given to the success of the GDR in combating racism. The second was the failure of the FRG and the United States regarding the elimination of racism and their hypocrisy in promoting foreign policies that contradicted their domestic politics. The remarks delivered by Dr Heinrich Toeplitz, the chairman of the GDR Committee on Human Rights, highlighted the GDR's commitment to the fight against racism.

The socialist German national state... unreservedly supports the objective of this International Year of Struggle. The anti-imperialist forces regard the fight against racism and racial discrimination as an important element of the worldwide struggle for peace and against the policy of aggression by imperialism.¹⁴⁶

The principles of the anti-Hitler coalition [...] have in the GDR been made the firm foundation of the country's domestic and foreign policies [...] Imperialism and militarism have been eradicated. The evil spirit of Nazism and warmongering are in our country a violation of the constitution and subject to criminal prosecution [...] Our young generation is brought up in the spirit

¹⁴⁶ GDR Committee for Human Rights, *Allies in the Struggle*, 5.

of peace and solidarity with the peoples fighting for their freedom and independence.¹⁴⁷

It is important to mention that the antifascist principles and the elimination of racial discrimination that Toeplitz mentioned did take place in one respect: in the formation of rhetoric. Rhetoric was free of racist and intolerance terminology, but the ideals conveyed through this rhetoric were not realized. Toeplitz also emphasized the problematic and dangerous politics of the U.S. and the FRG.

For practically ten years now the USA has been conducting a savage war against the heroic people of Vietnam, who are fighting for their freedom. [...] US warfare is marked by a systematic violation of human rights on a massive scale [...] Through close alliance with the apartheid regime, whose practices are an ominous reminder of the dark night of Nazism, the [FRG] tries to gain access to nuclear weapons.¹⁴⁸

The politics surrounding Vietnam and South Africa were highlighted as examples of the militaristic policies of the West. The GDR was fighting against these policies under the name of communism, thus attempting to prove the superiority of the communist bloc.

The U.S. court trial in 1970 of Angela Davis, a black woman and a communist, was also a large topic of discussion. She was charged with conspiracy, kidnapping and homicide due to her alleged participation in an attempted prison-escape.

The shameful trial now being instigated by the ruling circles of the United States against the colored communist Angela Davis throws a glaring light on racist terror in the USA [...] Like all staunch peace partisans everywhere, the GDR declared its solidarity with the noble aims of this young democrat.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴⁸ GDR Committee for Human Rights, *Allies in the Struggle*, 6-7.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 8.

The discussion then turned to neo-Nazism in the FRG.

It must be said that the West German Federal Government misses no opportunity to protect the neo-Nazis and to belittle the spread of Nazism and neo-Nazism in the [FRG]. In this connection it is one of the methods of the West German Government to put Communists and Nazis on the same level and lump them together under the label of left and right extremists.¹⁵⁰

This was referred to as a “defamation of Communists, who fight uncompromisingly against any manifestation of neo-Nazism.”¹⁵¹ Communists were highlighted as victims of capitalist fascism in their fight against racism, similar to African Americans in the United States.

In all the condemnation of enemy politics, the speakers at the GDR Conference for Human Rights in 1971 were very careful to make clear the distinction between GDR and FRG politics. Dr Toeplitz stated, “I wish to make it quite clear once more that there are no so-called inner-German relations and that there never will be any.”¹⁵² This separation was important because of the common history that the two countries shared. The GDR denied the presence of fascism and racism, rejected culpability for Nazi atrocities and declared itself a ‘People’s Democracy’. The SED claimed that as racism and fascism were exclusively in West Germany. However, the SED was aware that the same claims could be brought against itself and therefore, the SED took cautious measures to try and prevent public accusations of racism. As a military dictatorship the SED punished any claims or acts against its ideology and politics.

¹⁵⁰ GDR Committee for Human Rights, *Allies in the Struggle*, 9.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 12.

In order to further bolster the position of the GDR, images of solidarity and anti-racist activism within the GDR were presented by all the organizations. The Chairman of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee of the GDR talked about the schoolbooks that the GDR had sent to liberated territories throughout the world, as well as literary publications for African nations that were being published in the GDR. Such examples of international solidarity and anti-colonialism provided the basis for growing friendship between the Afro-Asian peoples and the GDR. “This organized fight against racism contributes towards the ideological development of our own people and towards combining patriotic pride and solidarity with genuine internationalism.”¹⁵³

A significant affirmation was made by the President of the Association of Jewish Communities in the GDR, who claimed that “racism and anti-Semitism have been completely wiped out. Here, we have genuine equality, whatever a person’s religion or outlook on life.”¹⁵⁴ This assertion was perfectly in line with SED ideology, but not with reality, and indicates the superficiality of the conference. The purpose of the conference was not to establish a stronger community to fight racism, but rather to glorify the GDR. Instead of acknowledging the continuation of problems of intolerance and anti-Semitism in the GDR the President denied it, thereby tolerated their continuation. Another example was voiced by the Vice President of the GDR Peace Council who said that,

¹⁵³ GDR Committee for Human Rights, *Allies in the Struggle*, 19-20.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

The cultivation of genuine international friendship between Black, Yellow and White is a living reality in our country. [...] The first project to be financed with the funds raised by our evangelical church communities will be the printing and purchase of schoolbooks to help with organizing an educational service in the liberated territories of the former Portuguese colonies. Other projects we have in mind are financial assistance with the establishment of a public health service and to pay for medical drugs and other simple things.¹⁵⁵

This humanitarian view of the GDR was useful in claiming the GDR's value in the world, but it was only a portion of the truth. The East Germans "must pay a few marks every month for solidarity, which were collected by the union. For most people it was pretty formal and set and there was no specific information about how the money was being spent."¹⁵⁶ This money was supposed to go towards acts of solidarity, such as the printing of textbooks for the third world. However, the money was never publicly accounted for and it was speculated that this solidarity money often went towards political propaganda or secret military initiatives that secured communist interests during the Cold War. Small acts, such as those mentioned at the conference, were made symbolic proof of solidarity, but in reality they were few and far between. The SED's humanitarian and pacifist image was complicated by the communists' fight, both political and militaristic, against capitalism. In the end, this rhetoric delegitimized SED politics and left social and political problems in the GDR unanswered.

The speeches from this conference are perfect examples of SED foreign policy rhetoric. By concentrating on a two-sided world, one of friends and

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵⁶ Eva Engelhardt, "Die haben uns beigebracht, wie man arbeiten kann," in *Schwarz-Weisse Zeiten, AusländerInnen in Ostdeutschland vor und nach der Wende: Erfahrungen der Vertragsarbeiter aus Mozambik* (Leipzig: Milde Multipring GmbH, 1993), 75.

enemies, the SED presented itself as the legitimate German state. Its foreign policy was based on its need to legitimize its politics, not on its desire to act on its ideology. The rhetoric was formulaic and devoid of reality. In actuality the Nazi past was shoved into history and the consequences of Nazi ideology was not dealt with. Jews were forced to forget their religious and cultural identity and the atrocities committed against them by the Nazis. Government policies labeled certain people as lesser and dangerous. Foreigners were kept separate from Germans and their living and working conditions were comparable to those of slave labor. The SED organized society on the basis of distrust of foreigners and without any recognition of the cultural differences of these people. Solidarity and anti-racism came through strongly in rhetoric but were a hoax in practice. The SED attempted to legitimize its foreign and national politics, yet in doing so, it systematically denied racial problems that resulted from its policies. Because SED rhetoric never addressed and condemned these problems in GDR society, it tolerated and even promoted them in its domestic and foreign policies.

Chapter III

American Racism in Communist Propaganda

The Cold War was marked by a struggle on both sides for political legitimacy and success. Both camps wanted to secure and support their foreign interests, yet both had to deal with certain questions of legitimacy. For the GDR, it was a question of the legitimacy of communism and the division of Germany. It was also a question of the GDR's immunity from Nazi influence of the past. The SED created an ideology based on anti-racism to answer these questions and to prove the GDR's legitimacy on the international stage. The SED's Cold War politics, based on anti-racist rhetoric, reveal a desperate attempt to delegitimize the enemy. In conjunction with highlighting its own anti-racist ideology, the SED used racism in America as evidence to prove the danger of its enemy. This chapter attempts to reveal the relationship between the SED's anti-racist ideology and the role that racism played in Cold War politics. It highlights the static nature of SED rhetoric and reveals two prevalent themes in East German media articles about American racism: GDR solidarity and anti-fascism. Furthermore, as the example of American racism in SED propaganda shows, the role of racism in Cold War politics played a defining role in both camps.

On April 5th, 1968 listeners of Moscow TASS International Radio Service throughout the Soviet bloc received another of many reports revealing the terror reigning in America. "The assassination of King is a new example of genocide against the black population of the United States."¹⁵⁷ The death of Martin Luther

¹⁵⁷ Moscow TASS International Service. „Nationwide Repercussions.“ *U.S. Foreign News Report* (henceforth cited as FNR), 5 April 1968. 12.

King, a hero and martyr in the eyes of communists worldwide; the black lynchings of the 1950s; the bombings of African American churches in the South; the race riots of the North and increasing number of civil rights marches throughout the United States were portrayed by communists as examples of America's failure in democracy. During the 1950s and 1960s at the height of the Cold War, international awareness of American racism increased as African Americans found a stronger public voice in fighting an unjust system. Examples of racism in America were used by the communists as ammunition in their international fight to delegitimize the West and legitimize their own system. The contradiction between the politics of freedom and democracy advocated abroad by America and its racist and segregation policies at home was also emphasized by the SED. In exploiting this hypocrisy in American politics, SED propaganda portrayed the communist system of government as superior to American capitalist democracy. It accused the U.S. government of being a totalitarian dictatorship that ruled from the top down, ignoring citizen movements and punishing those who spoke against the government. These accusations attempted to relieve the SED of similar allegations and to legitimize and bolster its regime on the international level. This shows the link between SED domestic and foreign political rhetoric and the hypocrisy and racism in both. The three main elements of SED rhetoric highlighted in this chapter- its static nature, solidarity and anti-fascism- will be examined in news reports on America and the civil rights movement in the SED party newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, and in various radio broadcasts. Official East German radio reports controlled by the SED will be analyzed along with

reports from Moscow Radio. Broadcasts from the two countries contain very similar themes and rhetoric and because of holes in available reports from East Germany, Moscow reports will be used in order to gain a fuller perspective.

3.1 Static Rhetoric

The communist media constructed an image of the world using factual evidence, in which the United States was portrayed as a fascist, imperialist power that had to be fought against in order to protect the safety and security of the world. Newspaper articles about America were written using key terms such as fascism, genocide, barbaric imperialism and terror. Titles of articles reveal the focus of SED media propaganda, with some striking examples being, “U.S. Police Torture Negro Children,”¹⁵⁸ “Hate and Terror rule Mississippi,”¹⁵⁹ “Martin Luther King Victim of Inhumane System,”¹⁶⁰ “Fascist Terror Rages,”¹⁶¹ „For the USA- an inhumane regime of power and terror.”¹⁶² Horrendous pictures of beaten black civil rights demonstrators,¹⁶³ a black puppet being hanged by white men,¹⁶⁴ a burning cross at a Ku Klux Klan ceremony in Alabama¹⁶⁵ and a picture of a terrorized black mother and child after the bombing of a Birmingham church¹⁶⁶ marked the pages of *Neues Deutschland*. Many of these articles headlined the first

¹⁵⁸ „US Polizisten foltern Negerkinder,” *Neues Deutschland* (henceforth cited as ND), 9 July, 1963,

¹⁵⁹ „Hass und Terror regieren Mississippi,” *ND*, 12 July, 1964, 1.

¹⁶⁰ “Martin Luther King Opfer eines Systems der Unmenschlichkeit,” *ND*, 6 April, 1968, 6.

¹⁶¹ „Faschistischer Terror Wütet,” *ND*, 10 April, 1968, 1.

¹⁶² „Für den USA: ein unmenschliches Regime der Gewalt und des Terrors,” *ND*, 10 April, 1968, 6.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶⁴ „Konjunkturrückgang in USA“ *ND*, 25 Sep., 1957, 1.

¹⁶⁵ „Wie sich die Bilder gleichen,” *ND*, 13 July, 1963, 1.

¹⁶⁶ „Kennedys Tatenlosigkeit ermuntert Rassenhetzer,” *ND*, 18 Sep, 1963, 1.

page, emphasizing the importance the SED placed on showing the evil of America.

Throughout the 1950's and 1960's the extremity of rhetoric in *Neues Deutschland* did not change. The fascist terror that was growing from day to day¹⁶⁷ in the 1950's was the same threat as in the late 1960s.¹⁶⁸ However, in the midst of the critical and static rhetoric of the GDR, two topics received varying reports in SED propaganda. The first was American attempts to correct its erroneous policies, which SED propaganda portrayed as failed attempts that increased in number during the 20 years. The second topic was the growing strength of the civil rights movement. The progressive changes that took place in U.S. government policies, such as the civil rights acts, were not recognized by SED propaganda as progress, but rather as failures. In contrast to the negative reports on American civil rights acts, reports on the civil rights movement were positive. The 1950s and 1960s saw a sequence of events that led to greater freedom and equality for African Americans. The ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, which made segregation in public schools illegal, the admission of James Meredith to the University of Michigan in September 1962, the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are examples of important progressive steps. Very little was mentioned about any of these developments in GDR media and when they were mentioned, they were always portrayed as failures.

¹⁶⁷ „Amerikas Neger sind Freiwild,“ *ND*, 13 Sep., 1957, 5.

¹⁶⁸ „Martin Luther King Opfer,“ 6.

The Little Rock Nine, a group of nine African American school children who finally gained admittance to Little Rock High in Arkansas in September 1957, is a good example of an important step towards equal schooling that SED propaganda used against the United States. All negative aspects of the Little Rock incident were highlighted in *Neues Deutschland*. An article from September 25, 1957, entitled “USA- Police shoot at Negroes,”¹⁶⁹ portrayed the black students who were admitted to the school as victims of beating and violence. While violence did occur in Little Rock, there was no recognition in *Neues Deutschland* articles that these nine student were heroes of progress in the fight for equality. Failure of cooperation between the state and national governments to ensure progress was also highlighted. The Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, refused to follow national law against segregation and said, “the government in Washington has absolutely no right to interfere in Little Rock.”¹⁷⁰ Faubus was a prime example for SED propaganda of the typical fascist, capitalist and imperialistic politicians who were running the United States and who were the enemies of communism. Eisenhower’s “mild and careful”¹⁷¹ response to the Little Rock incident showed the failure of the national government to act against racism. *Neues Deutschland* mentioned the heroic efforts of African Americans to gain equality, but the SED branded all efforts made by the U.S. government as doomed to failure. In characterizing such events as failures, the SED was minimizing the importance and success of the civil rights movement in affecting change in the democratic system. The SED was accusing the U.S. of problems in its own

¹⁶⁹ „USA-Polizei schießt auf Neger,“ *ND*, 25 Sep, 1957,5.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

society, so as to draw attention away from its failures. This theme in SED rhetoric did not change during the first twenty years of its existence.

Another American step towards progress that received very negative attention from the SED was the Civil Rights Act of June 19, 1964. This step towards equality for blacks was just another way, in the eyes of the SED, that the United States was trying to improve its image while still allowing fascism to exist. The SED was accusing the U.S. government of its own domestic problems. In a Moscow TASS Radio broadcast on June 20, 1964 entitled *Racists Hope to Impede Rights Law*, the negative aspects of the process were once again the foreground for the article. The “fierce clashes by fighters for civil rights with racists,” the vote against the bill by Republican presidential nominee Senator Barry Goldwater and the 100 amendments added to the bill after going through the Senate were key to portraying the bill as a failure. It was the “longest debate in the history of the U.S. Congress” and “approval of the civil rights bill shows that adoption of this law is a far cry from its realization.”¹⁷² The success of the Civil Rights Act challenged SED ideology, which claimed the United States was fascist. According to the SED, an act of anti-racism, such as the Civil Rights Act, could not have been passed by a racist government and therefore, the SED had to portray the Act’s success as an illusion. Had the Act been portrayed as a success for the U.S. government, the SED would have opened the door to a discussion of the dynamics of improvement in its own country. The state claimed to be omniscient and left no occasion for civil discourse. Discussion of political and societal improvement was

¹⁷² Moscow TASS International Service. „Racists Hope to Impede Rights Law.“ *FNR*, 20 June, 1964, 11-12.

not called for by the totalitarian state because it claimed that the GDR was faultless.

In support of communism, however, the SED could and did acknowledge progress in the civil rights movement, a movement they portrayed as one based on communist ideology. It saw the African American struggle for equality as a struggle for a communist ideal- equality of condition. This equality was based on the principle that every citizen had the right to a job. The level of poverty among the black population showed the dire need for African Americans to have work. "In the United States 20 percent of the entire population, around 37 million Americans, are officially considered poor. The largest portion is the black families."¹⁷³ Capitalism was to blame. „The Negroes are the hardest hit by the scourge of the capitalistic social order."¹⁷⁴ The SED saw the black struggle for freedom as a struggle against the capitalist system that kept jobs from them. "The discrimination against the Negro population penetrates every sphere of American everyday life. It is especially evident with the conditions of employment and income."¹⁷⁵ Therefore, African Americans were fighting against the United States in the class struggle that Marx and Engels had identified. The class system under U.S. capitalism had kept blacks from obtaining jobs, which the SED saw as the basis to equality. This characterization of white American racism towards African Americans made light of the prejudice and daily discrimination that African Americans experienced. For the SED, racism had little to do with believing that a group of people was lesser than it did with withholding jobs from people. By

¹⁷³ „Wahlkampfthema: Bürgerrechte," *ND*, 25 July, 1964, 5.

¹⁷⁴ „Parias in Johnsons Wohlstandsstaat," *ND*, 10 April, 1968, 6.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

using this definition, the SED cleared itself of racist accusations because it provided jobs not only for all Germans but also for peoples disadvantaged by colonialism.

The poverty that African Americans lived in, the racism that they experienced and the lack of democratic rights given to African Americans were considered crimes under communism. As Heinrich Toeplitz, the chairman of the GDR Committee on Human Rights, announced at a meeting of the United Nations in 1971, "In the GDR there are no classes or sections of the population who are interested in expansion and oppression or in the exploitation of other peoples. [...] the bourgeois demand for equality of all humans- whatever their race- can only be fulfilled under socialism. For here racism has been abolished at its deepest roots with the disappearance of class antagonism."¹⁷⁶ According to the SED, universal employment solves racism. The civil rights movement was the only sign of progress that SED propaganda recognized in its portrayal of the United States, yet even this acknowledgement was made through communist bias. The civil rights movement was depicted as a struggle towards communism and as supportive of communist ideology, but the real issues of deep-seated racial prejudice and social reform addressed by the movement were purposefully omitted in *Neues Deutschland* reports.

3.2 Solidarity

The most prominent theme in SED propaganda concerning the U.S., and the one that developed the most over the 20 years, was solidarity between the

¹⁷⁶ GDR Committee for Human Rights, *Allies in the Struggle*, 10,20.

GDR and African Americans. The theme of solidarity was vital in order to show that communists were united in opposition to the western world and that they were winning battles in the Cold War. Any disagreement within the communist world would endanger the communist struggle because the struggle was based on an ideology that was removed from reality and enforced by totalitarian regimes. Any challenge to the system would break it down by revealing the superficiality of the regimes and their ideology. As a result, the regimes relied on a dictated united front as their main claim to legitimacy and strength.

Through the ideology of proletarian internationalism, the SED portrayed the civil rights movement as having been made possible by the rise of communism and as a struggle for recognition of communist ideology in American society. Leaders of the civil rights movement were portrayed as supporters of communism and as opponents of America's blanket anti-communist policies. Overall, as claimed by the SED, it was thanks to communism that the civil rights movement was started and gained support through the 1960's. On August 27, 1963 the East Berlin Domestic Service broadcast,

The system of suppressing Negroes has been so perfect and brutal that a change in the balance of world power had to come, weakening U.S. imperialism outside its border, to give the American Negroes the strength and courage to do what we have been witnessing now for months...The socialist countries together with young national states prevent this [American imperialism].¹⁷⁷

According to SED propaganda, it was the socialist victory in eastern Europe that empowered African Americans to stand up to American tyranny and fight back.

¹⁷⁷ East Berlin Domestic Service, „Negro Action to Climax in Freedom March,“ *FNR*, 27 Aug, 1963, 6.

Communism was the victor. The irony of this claim is that the SED's totalitarian dictatorship used similar means of repression to those they were accusing the United States of using. Their rise to power had launched a new form of totalitarian repression in their own country.

Gus Hall, the president of the Communist Party in the United States during the Cold War, was a key figure in SED anti-American propaganda and was often quoted as being one of the only U.S. politicians who held the American president responsible for racial terror in the United States. In a speech given to 'millions' of Americans in September 1963 Gus Hall spread the rhetoric of communist propaganda throughout the United States and was venerated for it by the SED. Hall pronounced that

There must be measures to liquidate the Ku Klux Klan, the rage of white citizens, the American Nazi Party and the National Party for States' Rights, as well as measures to discontinue racial terror. [...] You, Mr. President, carry personal responsibility for the life and property of the American people who are threatened by this racial terror.¹⁷⁸

Not only did the civil rights movement help to legitimize the SED's communist foreign policy, but so did anti-communism in the U.S. In a news broadcast by Moscow TASS Radio to Europe on June 14, 1963, the reporter highlighted a speech made by Senator Russel, who was the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Russel was a Democrat from Georgia who persistently fought against the civil rights movement and who claimed that steps towards desegregation and equal rights were evils brought about by communists. This accusation was a gift for communist propaganda. The radio reporter said,

¹⁷⁸ „Kennedys Tatenlosigkeit ermuntert Rassenhetzer,“ *ND*, 18 Sep., 1963, 1.

Russell [...] described the timid measures planned by the administration to protect the civil rights of the Negro population as a step towards socialism and communism. This is a significant admission. Without realizing it, the racist senator confirms that genuine democracy and freedom for all nationalities can be ensured only by the most progressive social system.

Southern racists who used this argument against the civil rights movement ended up providing more ammunition for the communist's propaganda attacks against the American government. This not only helped communists discredit the United States, but it also hurt American foreign policy in countries where the U.S. and Soviet powers were fighting for influence.

The Governor of Georgia from 1941-1943, Eugene Talmadge, is another example of a U.S. politician who, in attacking communism, actually provided the communists with more ammunition. In his book *You and Segregation* (1955) he wrote, "Too many things are being done in this country and by our country because we keep looking back over our shoulders at the Communists. Who cares what the Reds say?"¹⁷⁹ Could there be any clearer sign of the immorality of racial integration than its support by Communists? This accusation was perfect material for the communists in order to confirm their claim that support of racial integration *was* purely a communist principle and thus, only communism could bring equality to a nation.

Civil Rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King and WEB DuBois, were also referred to as supporters of communism and the communist struggle against American imperialism. WEB DuBois was an African American advocate for black civil rights who joined the Communist Party, USA in 1961 at the age of 93.

¹⁷⁹ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War*, 108.

The connection the SED made between the two was not incorrect. Martin Luther King's respect for WEB DuBois, as well as his respect for certain communist ideals, gave the communists an excuse to call him an avid supporter of communism as well. On April 6, 1968 *Neues Deutschland* published a quote by Martin Luther King that stated, "Dr. DuBois was a genius and a communist." The report also said that Dr. King warned against a new witch-hunt of the "best sons and daughters of America" and said that the country should be more concerned with a takeover by fascists and the political right.¹⁸⁰ King warned that the country's focus on eradicating communists in the U.S. was overlooking the real threat. Statements like these were used by the SED to promote its agenda while disregarding King's motives.

Martin Luther King was not a supporter of communism. Yet, he was also not a supporter of blanket anti-communism. King wrote in his essay *Pilgrimage* in 1957,

Communism had laid hold of certain truths which are essential parts of the Christian view of things, but [...] it had bound up with them concepts and practices which no Christian could ever accept or profess. Communism [...] should challenge every Christian [...] to a growing concern about social justice [...] Communism in theory emphasized a classless society, and a concern for social justice.¹⁸¹

This acknowledgement of positive values in communism was used and distorted by SED propaganda in order to portray Dr. King as a participant in communist solidarity. In another article on November 11, 1968 *Neues Deutschland* declared that, "We in the German Democratic Republic feel ourselves closely connected

¹⁸⁰ „Martin Luther King Opfer," 6.

¹⁸¹ Keith D Miller, *Voice of Deliverance. The Language of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Its Sources* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 101.

with Dr. Martin Luther King.”¹⁸² It is important here to note that Dr. King was assassinated on May 4, 1968 and that this connection between King and the GDR came after this death. This association of Martin Luther King with communism is another perfect example of how the SED manipulated evidence to try and prove the legitimacy of its politics and defend its national and foreign policies against accusations from the West.

Another element of solidarity propaganda was the attention paid to the theme for the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. “The basic slogan of the March- freedom and jobs”¹⁸³ was the same as the ideology of communism- freedom from fascism, imperialism and capitalism and jobs for everyone. It was not only East Germany that supported African Americans, but also fellow communist brothers in the United States. “Major sectors of the American people, such as scientists, clergymen and workers, headed by the Communist Party, have expressed their solidarity with the Negroes.”¹⁸⁴ This bond of solidarity symbolized hope for the overthrow of the American regime and the creation of a more peaceful world.

As the civil rights movement grew in strength, the number of articles in *Neues Deutschland* increased. *Neues Deutschland* reports became more in-depth, highlighting more and more the fight of African Americans. Articles about Martin Luther King and the March on Washington were abundant with information concerning the victimization of communist supporters. This increase in attention

¹⁸² „Die Dollar- „Demokratie-„, System des Schreckens und der Barberei“ *ND*, 11 Nov, 1968, 6.

¹⁸³ Moscow Domestic Service, „U.S. Negro March Shows Anti-Imperialism,“ *FNR*, 30 Aug, 1963, 9.

¹⁸⁴ East Berlin Domestic Service, „Negro Action to Climax in Freedom March,“ *FNR*, 27 Aug, 1963, 6.

paid to communist solidarity and the gains of the civil rights movement reflected the tense international situation. Conflicts like the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War increased the SED's need to strengthen and legitimize its ideology and propaganda for the East German people, who on the whole were critical and skeptical of the SED. The SED also had to counteract the progress being made by the U.S. government in overthrowing American racist policies. In addition to rhetoric which propagated proletarian internationalism and anti-racism, the SED had to find aspects of its foreign policy that promoted these ideals and proved that SED ideology was successful. The civil rights movement was a perfect example for the SED to show the success of communist anti-racism and to delegitimize its enemy. This propaganda put 'racism' at the forefront of SED foreign politics.

3.3 Rhetoric of Anti-Fascism

The static nature of SED rhetoric and the rhetoric of solidarity went hand in hand with its rhetoric of anti-fascism. In order to prove its anti-fascism and its superiority over its enemy, the SED used every possible chance it had to try to prove the fascism of the West. Racism in the United States provided the SED with an opportunity to do this. The U.S. government was a fascist government on account of its racist senators, its lack of democracy and the absence of freedom. One report stated, "The Washington leaders are too strongly linked with those monopolist circles, which are too interested in the preservation of racial discrimination to be able to act decisively."¹⁸⁵ In another report the SED claimed, "It is characteristic that the American authorities are not undertaking any real

¹⁸⁵ Moscow Domestic Service, „U.S. Negro March,“ 8.

measures to stop the excesses of racism, but limit themselves to declaratory statements, which in fact leave the racists alone.”¹⁸⁶ These images of officially tolerated and supported racism were similar to government-propagated racism of the fascist Nazi regime. According to the SED, racism, intolerance and inequality were characteristics of the enemy, not the GDR.

Some of the most direct references to Nazi fascism in *Neues Deutschland* were reports that linked the black ghettos in American cities with Nazi concentration camps.

Hence, we declare our solidarity with the 25 million American Negroes incarcerated by the U.S. ruling classes in ghettos in conditions unworthy of human beings. In the 30s and 40s, we fought against the ghettos set up in Europe by the Nazis. [...] Should we keep silent about the ghettos set up by the richest capitalist country in the middle of its big cities, where millions suffer imprisonment in black poverty because of their color?¹⁸⁷

On February 3, 1965 *Neues Deutschland* reported, ‘On the same day [Dr. King was arrested] 470 Negro children, who were demonstrating outside the Courthouse in Selma, were arrested. As AP reported, the children were put into a concentration camp.’¹⁸⁸

The SED took this accusation of fascism further and applied it to its neighbor, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). By making a connection between the ‘fascist’ American and FRG regimes, the SED was able to further justify its view that the FRG was an enemy state. Pictures in *Neues Deutschland* were printed comparing the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) with demonstrations by groups

¹⁸⁶ Moscow TASS, „U.S. Racist Gangs Continue Excesses,“ *FNR*, Sep 19, 1957, 23.

¹⁸⁷ East Berlin ADN Domestic Service, „King Lauded, Assassination Widely Condemned,“ *FNR*, 8 April, 1968, 5.

¹⁸⁸ „Dr. King verhaftet- KZ für Kinder in Selma,“ *ND*, Feb 3, 1965, 1.

of expelled Germans from Poland, who were demonstrating for the return of 'German' land in Poland. The report said, "The organization representing Silesian refugees is responsible for the flames which fill the night sky of Cologne. 100,000 members of the revisionist hate group called upon Minister Schelthaus to order the lynching of TV journalist Neven DuMont."¹⁸⁹ This link between the KKK and the expelled Polish-Germans supported the SED's claim that all old Nazis lived in the West and that Bonn was just as much an enemy of the GDR as the United States. The racism of FRG groups, like the racism of the American KKK, confirmed the presence of fascism in the western world and the need for a strong fight against these forces.

In an East Berlin Radio report on April 8, 1968, listeners were told, "It will forever remain the disgrace of the great coalition government in Bonn that it approved all the crimes of the United States government as part of the American global strategy and what is a thousand times worse, participates in them."¹⁹⁰ By claiming that Bonn supported and participated in crimes such as racism, the SED was able to further relinquish responsibility for the division of Germany. They claimed it was the criminal West German state that was responsible for the problems between the two countries.

The aggressive goals of the ruling party in the FRG, the commitment of their political power to undermining and liquidating the worker-peasant state in the GDR, make it clear that an understanding between the GDR and the FRG regarding the steps towards a united peaceful country require the elimination of aggressive imperialist power by West Germany.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ „Wie sich die Bilder gleichen,“ *ND*, 31 June, 1963, 1.

¹⁹⁰ East Berlin ADN Domestic Service, „Norden Speech,“ *FNR*, 8 April, 1968, 5.

¹⁹¹ Institut für Internationale Beziehungen, Potsdam-Babelsberg, *Geschichte der Aussenpolitik der DDR* (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1984), 43.

The GDR was a victim of this imperialism.

Another element that connected the Nazi regime with the United States was the way the SED focused on the American police in its reports. The police were an agent of the state and similarly to the Nazi regime, were used by the state in order to further its racist policies. Titles of *Neues Deutschland* articles revealed the terror and racism of the police: “U.S. Police Shoot at Negroes,”¹⁹² “U.S. Police Beat Negro Children”¹⁹³ “Police terror stirs Harlem’s Negroes.”¹⁹⁴ Racist riots against blacks in cities like New York, Chicago, Detroit and Newark in the summer of 1964 received considerable attention. Just as the Nazi soldiers murdered people, so did the U.S. police. “Every second policeman in the area is a neurotic murderer.”¹⁹⁵ These accusations were mostly true and were based off of real events. Highlighting the inhumanity of the police, an agency of the state, and focusing solely on the terror was another way the SED justified its claim that the United States was a fascist country.

The escalation anti-U.S. rhetoric by the SED was a result of the international situation. The Cold War was intensifying and the U.S. was making progress with civil rights. Both of these developments had to be dealt with by the SED in order to legitimize its ideology. Using rhetoric the SED worked to prove the supremacy of communism and the victory of SED anti-racism in the international realm against the growing strength of western democracy and capitalism. The SED used static rhetoric to try and portray the world as

¹⁹² „U.S. Polizei schießt auf Neger,“ *ND*, 25 Sept, 1957, 5.

¹⁹³ “U.S. Polizisten foltern Negerkinder,” *ND*, 9 July, 1963, 1.

¹⁹⁴ „Polizeiterror erregt Harlems Neger,“ *ND*, 23 July, 1964, 1.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1.

changeless. This portrayal of the world enabled the SED to deny problems that put its legitimacy and success in question.

3.4 The American Side of the Story

SED politics and rhetoric were greatly defined by the Cold War. The SED had to legitimize communism, the division of Germany and its anti-fascist ideology. In attacking the U.S, the SED was successful in pointing out the hypocrisy in U.S. foreign and national politics. In response, the U.S. was forced to answer these claims of hypocrisy and legitimize its own politics. Unlike the GDR, the U.S. could not cover up major societal or political problems and could not simplify its politics with one dictated platform. As in the GDR, race played a significant role in U.S. domestic and foreign politics and helped to create an interdependent relationship between the two politics. This section provides a deeper analysis of race and racism in the Cold War and how racism was significant for the politics of both camps.

During the Cold War racism and civil rights were important for both American domestic and foreign politics. With increasing power and influence in the world, the U.S. was being looked to as an example of certain ideals and it became clear that racism caused a dilemma for America's international success. President Harry Truman recognized the conflict of inequality in America and became known as the president who finally put civil rights firmly on the national agenda, both in domestic and foreign politics. "The free people of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world- and we shall surely endanger the welfare of

this Nation.”¹⁹⁶ However, racial issues were not only a topic on Truman’s political agenda, but they also influenced the outcome of the agenda through the personal bias of many politicians. The Truman administration’s policies were prime examples of the role that race played in American administrations, all the way through the presidency of Jimmy Carter. While the Truman administration did not explicitly characterize its foreign policies based on race, the distrust that it had of particular racial and ethnic groups and the blatant racism in the personal lives of U.S. officials prove the influence that race and racism had on the administration’s foreign policy.

America’s categorization of the world by race is one example of how racial prejudice influenced U.S. government policy. This influence can be seen in the rhetoric used by the government to explain its fight against communism. George Kennan,¹⁹⁷ the author of the Containment Doctrine in 1946, explained that a major root of Soviet despotism and tyranny was its Asian identity. “It was Asia and ‘Asian-ness’ that had done so much to corrupt the healthier, ‘European,’ elements of Russian life and character [...] and that now made it imperative to contain the USSR within its own boundaries.”¹⁹⁸ According to Kennan and his followers, communism was not a construct of the Enlightenment that had been implemented in an increasingly totalitarian form. It was an inevitable result of the Asian race.

¹⁹⁶ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 27.

¹⁹⁷ George Kennan (1904-2005) was an American advisor, diplomat, political scientist and historian. In 1946 he wrote his ‘Long Telegram’ from Moscow. This document became the basis of his containment theory, which claimed that the Soviet regime was inherently expansionist and that its influence had to be contained in areas of vital strategic importance to the U.S.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War*, 50.

In addition to racism in political rhetoric, there were three other venues in which American racism was apparent. The first place was Washington D.C., where visitors could not help but notice racial discrimination. Foreign visitors with dark skin often experienced discrimination, such as being barred from eating in restaurants and riding on public transportation. The second venue was in New York, an American city known globally as the city of immigrants and the home of the United Nations. Discrimination in an international city like New York was a great embarrassment and danger to the U.S. With the commitment of all UN member states to racial equality embodied in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, U.S. officials feared potential UN involvement in human rights issues within the United States. Presidents during the 1950's through the 1970's had to make extra efforts to ensure the safety and comfort of foreign diplomats with skin color other than white. Americans traveling overseas presented the third display. Discrimination and racism within U.S. military ranks was a strong telltale abroad, as were U.S. missions in Panama, the Caribbean islands, Asia and Africa. Here locals were often treated with disrespect and intolerance. This kind of behavior was not expected from a country fighting globally for democracy and human rights. Racism was an American ambassador all over the world and put U.S. foreign policy in jeopardy.

Because of international attention to U.S. racial problems, the government had to formulate various responses and explanations, many of which were not well accepted on the international playing field. Its standard explanation for events such as race riots, lynchings and segregation was that these events were

regional and declining phenomena in the United States and that because of the federal system, the national government lacked the power to intervene in order to stop such bigotry. However, it was clear to American politicians, as well as to foreign governments, that the excuse was a poor one.

Another tactic used by the government was to put events in the United States in perspective with difficulties that other nations faced. In particular, the crisis in September 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas provided an opportunity to compare the United States with Cold War adversaries.

In the U.S., national authority is being used not to suppress individual equality and freedom but to uphold them. In the Little Rock incident national authority has been invoked to maintain equal rights of a minority. In the Soviet Union national authority has been repeatedly invoked to suppress the rights of minorities.¹⁹⁹

This accusation held great truth and provides evidence of similar tactics used by the East and West to legitimize their governments while trying to delegitimize their enemy. However, this tactic also gave the communists more ammunition because they identified these claims as desperate attempts to ‘whitewash’ the reality and severity of the American social and political scene.

Racial issues played a significant role in U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. U.S. politics not only had to defend what went on at home, but they also had to struggle to secure influence abroad where communism threatened U.S. interests. The U.S. implemented certain tactics, such as focusing on problems with the enemy and highlighting progress with the civil rights movement, yet politicians still struggled against national and foreign accusations and against their

¹⁹⁹ Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 143.

own prejudices. The significance of race and racism in U.S. domestic and foreign policy mirrors its significance in SED policy during the Cold War. The national and foreign politics of both camps included racism and prejudice and both camps had to find ways to legitimize their policies against accusations of hypocrisy. Even with the many basic differences between the East and the West, racism made the foreign and domestic politics of both camps during the Cold War interdependent.

Conclusion

Racism in the GDR: The Lasting Impact

The German Democratic Republic was proclaimed on October 7, 1949 in response to the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany on May 23, 1949. The two states quickly became enemies as Cold War politics predetermined the direction of their policies. Because East Germany had been occupied by the Soviet Union after World War II, it became bound to Russian Cold War politics, while the FRG followed the influence and politics of the United States. The GDR was created as a German communist state that declared itself to be the antithesis of the Third Reich: anti-fascist, anti-colonial, democratic and socialist. This was a hoax. The totalitarian regime, run by the Socialist Unity Party, carefully formulated its rhetoric and policies in order to promote this illusion, but the illusion did not solve some of the major social problems in the GDR. Officials from the Nazi era remained influential; anti-Semitism was replaced with anti-Zionism; the SED refused to recognize Jewish identity; all publications and broadcasts were censored and public dialogue was forced to remain within the confines of government ideology. These contradictions, however, only mark the surface of the conflicts between racism and government ideology in the GDR and the effect these conflicts had on domestic and foreign policy.

In attempting to legitimize its rule the SED denied the existence of racial problems in the GDR, promoted solidarity with all communists and peoples from colonized countries and accused its enemies of racism and fascism. The relationship, however, between the government, the citizens and racism had many layers that contained significant contradictions. Many of these contradictions can

be seen in the political programs sponsored by the SED, which included guest worker programs and student exchanges. These programs were formed to prove the solidarity, anti-colonialism and anti-racism of the GDR.

The first important group of foreigners to arrive in East Germany comprised of Slavs. Soviet soldiers occupied eastern Germany after World War II and stayed even after the formation of the GDR. Violent conflicts between East Germans and Soviet soldiers increased the already present racist sentiment and led to the segregation of Soviets in East Germany. While the SED was declaring the Soviet Union to be the liberator and best friend of the GDR, personal contact between Soviets and East Germans proved to be problematic. Guest workers from Poland and Eastern Europe made up another important group of foreigners in the GDR who were victims of the SED's hypocrisy. Anti-Slav stereotypes left over from the Nazi era marked the relationships between East Germans and Slavs and also resulted in violence. This grass-roots racism, however, was denied by the SED and left to grow. Declarations of friendship between East Germany and Slavic countries were presented by the SED.

A third important group of foreigners consisted of non-European workers who came to the GDR as contract workers from southeast Asia, Africa and South America. These workers were guaranteed adequate housing, training, jobs that would help their domestic economies and opportunities to receive college degrees. Instead, guest workers lived as indentured laborers in fenced-off complexes outside East German cities. The personal and social needs of the workers were not attended to and they were strictly forbidden to have any

unofficial contact with East Germans. Foreign exchange students also suffered from government regulations. They were not allowed to associate with East German students, they were housed separately and they were not allowed to leave their designated cities.

Jews are a fourth example of a group of people that the SED claimed to support and treat equally, but who were ultimately discriminated against by government policies. The word 'Jew' was considered taboo. The fate of Jews under Nazism was not a topic in public discourse. No acknowledgment of the past took place and instead of recognizing Jews as victims of fascism, the SED characterized all East Germans as victims. These policies hindered the ability of East German Jews to publicly talk about their heritage and incorporate Jewish tradition into their lives.

Besides promoting anti-racism and solidarity in its political programs, the SED used education and public speeches to indoctrinate its citizens. In school each subject was formulated to teach school children about communist ideology. Children were taught that communists were free from responsibility for Nazism because they had fought against the Nazis and had been victims of fascism. They were told that they were friends with the Poles, Vietnamese and Mozambicans and that their best friends were the Russians who had saved them from Nazi rule. The United States and the FRG were racist, fascist countries and were their enemies. These same themes ran throughout public speeches by GDR officials, who relied on static, formulaic rhetoric to explain every domestic and international situation.

The hypocritical and totalitarian politics of the SED had an unintended effect on its citizens. For the most part East Germans distrusted their government, resented many of its policies and looked for ways to disassociate themselves from government policy and ideology. The SED's propaganda, which dictated who were friends and who were foe, could be easily reversed by East Germans in an attempt to defy the SED. Instead of believing that Slavs and Africans were their socialist brothers, East Germans could see them as agents of the SED who were undeservingly taking East German money and goods and receiving special benefits. Interviews and memoirs by foreigners in the GDR and by GDR citizens reveal this racism which was tolerated and promoted by SED propaganda and politics.

Anti-fascism was another key theme in SED rhetoric that was characterized by contradiction and racism. The concept was also referred to as anti-capitalism and was used by the SED to support the GDR's foreign policy in the Cold War as a member of the eastern camp. The SED claimed that American capitalism was a racist, imperial force that was spreading throughout the world and endangering the GDR's efforts to spread socialism and peace. *Neues Deutschland* gave extensive coverage to the racial violence and discrimination in the United States and to America's hypocritical politics. These attacks on the United States show the role that racism played not only in the domestic and foreign policy of the communist camp, but also in the politics of the West. Because of communist accusations of hypocrisy and illegitimacy, the American

government had to find ways to justify and legitimize its own domestic and foreign politics that were ridden by racism.

The civil rights movement in America was depicted as a brother movement to East German communism in attacking capitalist injustice and exploitation. East German anti-racist ideology, however, was fundamentally different from the civil rights movement in the United States. America is a democracy where the government represents the ideals, prejudices and politics of its people. The civil rights movement was a movement founded primarily by black Americans against white American supremacy. Anti-racism in the GDR transpired from the SED's totalitarian dictatorship, which was removed from its citizens and from reality. The SED claimed to be omniscient and to have policies which were direct results of absolute truth. This claim, however, did not keep GDR citizens from rejecting SED rhetoric and seeing the West as better than the East. The 2.5 million people who left East Germany between 1949 and 1962, when the Berlin Wall was built, are a testament to the failure of the SED in connecting GDR citizens with its ideology. Racism and anti-racism in America were both citizens' movements, whereas in the GDR anti-racism and internationalist solidarity were in large part hypocritical, insincere bureaucratic movements.

On November 9, 1989 the Berlin Wall fell. A year later East and West Germany were united. The integration of communist East Germany into capitalist West Germany has proven to be a difficult task. For many East Germans reunification symbolized the occupation of East Germany by West Germany. The

socialist system that East Germans had known for 40 years was abolished and replaced with the capitalist system of the West. After reunification problems arose partially from the political tradition of resistance against the government in East Germany. Many GDR citizens had a very cynical view of government and resisted its ideology. The East Germans struggled with trusting the new West German government because its anti-racist rhetoric was so similar to that of the GDR and because the policies that the FRG forced upon the new German states caused economic and political problems for East Germans. Unemployment in East Germany rose significantly, the currency changed and their political system was dissolved.

In addition to political problems, social unrest laid siege to Germany after reunification. Many East Germans felt that their economic situations were being put in even greater danger by the large number of foreign immigrants in Germany. The racism that had been cultivated in East Germany intensified as East Germans came in contact with large numbers of 'foreign' citizens and guest workers from West Germany. Many blamed foreigners for Germany's economic problems, which added fuel to political movements driven by xenophobia and racism. The East German neo-Nazi movements of the 1980s grew significantly after reunification, as disaffected East German teenagers used racism as an answer to their problems. Violent attacks against foreigners increased, with hundreds of violent crimes occurring between 1990 and 1992. These attacks were largely concentrated in the new eastern German states. This use of racism as an answer to social and political problems can be linked to the national and foreign policies of

the SED and its anti-racist rhetoric. The racism that was tolerated and fostered by the SED helped prepare the ground for the development of racist political groups. The significance of changing national and foreign politics of the 1970s and 1980s, which helped spur the rise of neo-Nazi groups in Germany, should not be disregarded. However, the anti-racism of SED rhetoric tolerated and promoted racism throughout the existence of the GDR. It laid the foundation for the revival of racist political movements and contributed greatly to social problems with which German is struggling today.

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