1976

The America-theme: A Twentieth Century View of the United States in German Literature, Especially Represented by Uwe Johnson

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express his gratitude to the following people, without whom he might still be writing this Master of Arts thesis:

Dr. Nanda Fischer, whose time and effort in guiding the author are difficult to calculate and will never be forgotten;

Dr. S. Sue Nebel, whose critical evaluation made the final printing of this paper possible;

Dr. Joseph Wandel, whose warm and friendly encouragement made the task seem surmountable;

Pam Nelles Pasulka, the author's wife, who dissuaded the author from quitting the program on more than one occasion;

Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Pasulka, who always wanted something better for their son.
VITA

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of nations and nationalities, it has always been difficult for an individual or group of people to correctly and completely view themselves and their country in light of their neighboring nations or the entire world. In America, each citizen possesses his own attitudes about what his country does and should symbolize. Yet, even with the aid of statistical charts and stereotyping, whereby the number of opinions are reduced from potential thousands to a relative few, ideological and sociological charges about his country range from reactionary to radical, from capitalistic imperialism to socialistic godlessness. Further, each of these terminologies is usually made by a group of a completely anti-thetical nature and only contributes to a situation in which little of what America actually is can be known.

A different approach to discovering what America is and denotes emanates from the "out-sider." People removed from a situation have a unique advantage in that they see issues from a different perspective. Their opinions and observations, while in no way expertise, are highly desirable due to their general lack of familiarization and in-bred bias. These judgments, in conjunction with that which Americans themselves think, aid in the process of more objectively analyzing America, both in foreign and domestic areas.

It is becoming increasingly evident how external forces significantly affect and influence American policy. A French outcry against American fiscal irresponsibility, the burning of the American Flag in Panama or a Chinese broadcast lambasting American aggression in some area of the world appears as a culmination of
anger and impatience toward a particular American policy or Ameri-
can foreign policy as a whole. While this does not result in a
direct, immediate reversal of a certain program, it does, none-
theless, produce intense discussion which might initially alter
opinions and ultimately can lead to a re-enactment of policy.
Probably the most cogent, topical and extreme example of said
procedural alignment was Senator McGovern's proposed platform
theme of neo-isolationism, appropriately entitled "Come home, Amer-
ica," the goal of which was to greatly reduce undesired and unde-
sirable American foreign involvements.

Presently America is undergoing a dramatic, intense modifica-
tion in its position as "Brother Jonathon" to the world. It
appears that America, once so highly esteemed by her world neigh-
bors, has fallen to her lowest depth in history. Moreover, the
corrosion is more noticeable since it was only in the 20th Century
that America manifested herself politically and economically
throughout the world and assumed the pinnacle of mastery granted
only to the most successful of powers.

The reason behind such a decline, while at least in part at-
tributable to America herself, might never be discovered if han-
dled entirely from within and through single-faceted research.
There are political, economic, social and other possible causes
partially responsible for this American loss of esteem. More-
over, observations on these points emanate from areas other than
this country. In my particular situation, I am primarily con-
cerned with these external concepts and evaluations of American
society. One can read, hear and experience an overwhelming
amount of expository material, both fictive and factual, about
America. Yet the weakness of all this is that the information
is generally written by Americans for Americans. If only for the sake of a contrastive source, a foreign perspective on American society provides a refreshing variation.

With regards to this external nation, I would choose Germany, and for two equally-significant reasons. Germany, and especially its literature, is a focal-point of my personal interests. Thus, for subjective reasons, I have decided to examine some German works from the 20th Century which contain a copious amount of material about America and her people. The selection of these works is not necessarily representative. Rather, I have chosen a few of the more prominent writers and will ultimately focus on one particular author.

The second motive for the selection of Germany is the fact that Germany, perhaps more than any other nation, is at least indirectly responsible for creating the atmosphere in which the United States abandoned its relatively isolationist policy dating from the early 19th Century and entered into a position of leadership throughout the world. Though determined to remain aloof from Europe even following the conflagration of World War I, the United States found such a goal impossible and, after World War II, a war which dealt disaster to both victor and vanquished, America was literally compelled not to retreat to her "islandic" shores. Thus, more than two and one-half decades of intensive financial and personal foreign aid has occurred. Now, however events have transpired in such a manner that Americans are re-evaluating their entire system and questioning whether it is themselves or the "ingrates" of the world who are at fault.

It is in this frame that I began this literary research.
THE "AMERICA-THEME"

America as a subject or minor motif of a piece of literature is not peculiar to the 20th Century. There are numerous references to this country dating back very early in its history. For example, as early as Goethe's time America was written about, usually in the most-promising terms.

Goethe himself, shortly after the American War of Independence, had a small motif about America in one of his major works, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. Interspersed in the book are certain concepts about this country which Goethe never visited, but which, through the "Auswanderergruppe", he envisioned quite favorably.

In the 19th Century there were several books which depicted the robust, adventurous life of the American settler and his scenic countryside, focusing on all the positive elements this land had to offer; they read at times like a veritable land-developer's

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3 Just a few of such works are the following:

*Wanderungen zwischen Hudson und Mississippi* by Moritz Busch
*Aus Amerika, Erfahrungen, Reisen und Studien* by Julius Froebel
*Ein Lebenslauf* by Julius Froebel
*Fünfundzwanzig Jahren in der alten und neuen Welt* by Heinrich Boernstein
catalogue. Other writers during this time also paid passing com-
pliments upon America, but it was not until the current Century
that America came under close, more-individual observation by
major German writers and a large range of opinions about this
country was reached.

In the 20th Century, the description of America as simply
idyllically alluring discontinued. Writers became more precise
and attempted, through novel and non-fiction form, to present a
more critical study of America's strengths and weaknesses. A
substantial increase in the number of authors touching on the
America-theme occurred. However, the number who made America
their major theme, or at least an important motif, were fewer.

One of the earliest German works of the 20th Century about
America was a fragment written by Franz Kafka and entitled Der
Heizer. This short story was to be part of a novel, which re-
mained unfinished and which Max Brod, following Kafka's death,
edited and published under the title Amerika.

In Kafka's novel, sixteen-year-old Karl Rossmann is an immi-
grant with a problem not unusual for new-arrivals to this country:
he is in search of a fresh beginning to a life which has become
rather awkward due to his failure to heed society's conventions.
While the novel remains "characteristically Kafkaesque." the author
of this work nevertheless presents various situations which he feels
can happen to a European unaccustomed to American life.

Thus, a leit motif of the work is the theory of mechaniza-
tion, this idea that everything must co-ordinate itself properly
within the American machine, since, as Charles Osborne claims,
"in America the machine is master and throws out what it cannot
One sees how, though perhaps an injustice was done to the stoker and Uncle Jakob readily concedes Karl's point of "Gerechtigkeit," he hastily adds, "es Handelt sich . . . um eine Sache der Disziplin." That is, through his actions of questioning and agitating, the stoker had disturbed the placid order of the system, such an act being both intolerable and inexcusable. This conception of the all-powerful, smoothly-running machine reveals itself throughout the work, be it in the business offices of Uncle Jakob's trade commission or in the Occidental Hotel, that incessantly-growing monster of orderly activity. It is a theory which was staggering to Karl and one with which, due to its impersonal nature, he was unable to cope.

In a like manner Kafka deals with the idea of self-improvement. For centuries America has been viewed by people of other nations as the frontier, as the possibility for "working one's way up," even as the last hope. It was the land where the streets were paved with gold and an indigent, but industrious fellow could rise above all obstacles. Thus Uncle Jakob warns Karl against "... diese einsame Untätigkeit, die sich in einen arbeitsreichen New Yorker Tag verschaut . . . sie sei ein Verderben." As a contrastive incentive, Green speaks of the unbounded possibilities Karl might have if he's willing to work: "in Frisko können Sie ganz ungestört arbeiten; fangen Sie nur ruhig ganz unten an und

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4 Charles Osborne, Kafka (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc, 1967) p. 68
5 Franz Kafka, Amerika (Berlin: Schocken Verlag, 1935) p. 42
6 Ibid., p. 50
versuchen Sie, sich allmählich hinaufzuarbeiten." While Karl continually has visions of what he will do and never of what he is doing, America remains for him a "land of dreams." Yet, it is to America's credit that this concept should be utilized by Kafka as a possibility.

Generally, however, while the author touches on various episodes in which Karl is involved, these are not peculiar to this country, but rather appear to be of a more cosmopolitan nature. The ideal of justice for which Rossmann fights, Rossmann's bewilderment in Pollunder's country house, Uncle Jakob's business and the episode with the singer Brunelda are not to be viewed as typically American, but as Kafka's own aberrations, depictions of universal situations which he felt actually existed.

Thus we see that Kafka does not view life in America as an unrealistically idyllic situation; however this does not mean he necessarily demonstrates a wealth of factuality in his Amerika. Although Kafka might have allowed his hero to fare worse in this new environment, Rossmann discovered that America was also no total panacea for his troubles. Still, there were numerous parts in the work, which, to say the least, would be obscure to many people natively accustomed to life in this country and would be thoroughly dumbfounding to those who knew little about America.

Franz Kafka's Amerika concentrated on an imagined, exaggerated description of America. In another major work of the 20th Century relating to this country, the author, Berthold Brecht, in one

7 Ibid., p. 109
sense, continues along the same lines. Yet Brecht goes farther in that, through this author, we enter a new realm in the evaluation of this country, one which questions and criticizes the basic framework upon which this land is founded while handling it, to a great extent, on an ideological plane.

In three Brechtian plays, Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe, Im Dickicht der Städte and Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui, one witnesses dramas which ostensibly occur in America (Chicago, to be exact), yet are of far greater cosmopolitan significance. A probe into one of these works, Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe, for example, will suffice to clarify this.

In this work we meet a version of the historical Jeanne D'Arc, Brecht's Joan combating the avarice of Chicago's meat barons as they prey upon the masses. While it must be admitted that, in some form, conditions existed as Brecht portrayed them, this descriptive representation does not seem to be his objective. Rather, he utilizes this situation to launch into an extremely unsubtle, extensive censure of Capitalism, wherever and in any form in which it may exist. Thus, while Brecht does portray an actual segment of a period of time in America, one must be cautious and differentiate between that which is related to America and that which belong to some ideological level and only uses America as a vehicle to attain that realm.

The expansion of Germany beyond its prescribed borders, so greatly feared by writers and other artists of that country, sent numerous German authors scurrying to safety. Most of the writers of reputation felt compelled to leave Germany itself, since to stay would require the compromise or abandonment of individual
values and ideas; a few, for various reasons, refused to emigrate. While often times neutral Switzerland became the focal point of escape, many authors continued further, to England and ultimately to America.

One of these writers was Carl Zuckmayer, who in 1939 became painfully aware of the fragile possibilities of publishing anything with the hint of liberalism or opposition to the National Socialist government. Zuckmayer held an advantage in the fact that he had acquaintances in this country, including actress Dorothy Thompson and fellow German writers. Unfortunately most of this comradeship lived in Hollywood, California, that "Vorhölle" where everyone was "happy." In fact, while Zuckmayer's opinion of this country was generally positive, the most thoroughly-negative aspect was his stay in the film center of the world.

Zuckmayer arrived in New York through Cuba on a visitor's visa and shortly thereafter changed his residence to Hollywood. Dissatisfied with the inartistic life to which he was required to adjust, Zuckmayer left Hollywood and rented a farm in the "Green Mountain" area of Vermont, so back-woods a place that his friends chided him of its "Hemingway-Nature" element. Yet it was here that he found peace of mind, if only temporarily, with living in America during the dying in Europe. The opportunity to return to Germany presented itself to him a year and a half after the conclusion of the war when he was employed by the government to study the bureaus for culture and artistic affairs in Germany.

Zuckmayer's importance to the America-theme is two-fold: primarily, his work, Als war's ein Stück von mir, is auto-biographical,
based on his adventures in America, a fact which gives his book a possibility of realism. A secondary consideration is the fact that he possesses an essentially positive attitude toward life in this country and will provide a type of thesis to the next author's (Max Frisch) antithesis of Americans.

In his lengthy stay in America Zuckmayer learned early the significance of knowing someone of importance (President Roosevelt, through Dorothy Thompson) and of addressing the policemen as "sir" in order to cut through any bureaucratic difficulties he might encounter. While initially being greeted warmly, he soon realized that America was not a land to idyllically meander through, reminiscent of Kafka. "Man befindet sich sofort unter Verwandten," was the realization he expressed. Yet this feeling of solidarity and security soon crumbled, as the attitude of "jetzt bist du da, man hat dir die Hand zum Willkomm gereicht, dich auf die Schulter geschlagen, dich aufgenommen - nun sorge für dich selbst" made itself evident.

While he was often disappointed with fellow-Germans who had also fled to this country, Zuckmayer came to appreciate and enjoy many aspects of the native American life. He received encouragement from Americans for his endeavors, he was physically aided by them when necessary and he perceived from Americans a certain respect for him as a German and his love of that "other Germany," not the land and people which were then controlled by the National Socialists.

In short, Zuckmayer displayed a strong appreciation of the

8 Carl Zuckmayer, Als wär's ein Stück von mir (Wien: S. Fischer Verlag, 1969) p. 471
9 Ibid., p. 475
American people and their way of living. More importantly, this generally-positive conclusion was founded on his personal experience, a fact which to some degree testifies to the authenticity of the material within his work. Yet, as we will see next, there is another America, one viewed from a different perspective by a different author, which may cause the reader quite a quandry as to what is the real condition of American life.

If Carl Zuckmayer supplied a positive outlook on America, her people and her life, Max Frisch, through his protagonist Walter Faber, provides a sharply negative tinge in his *Homo Faber*, the depth of his criticism being just what Zuckmayer so fondly praised: the American Way of Life.

Walter Faber, called "Homo Faber" (Working Man) by his ex-fiancée Hanna, is a perfected example of a regimented individual striking out at that which was directly responsible for what he became and remained throughout his life. As an engineer for UNESCO, Faber's job required that he travel extensively to various under-developed countries in order to assist them in their technological growth. It is only toward the end of the work, after his failure to save his daughter's (whose very existence was unknown to him up to that time) life that Faber becomes fully aware of the futility of all those machines on which he placed so much trust. He and his way of life had failed each other and he was in despair.

A summation of the plot affords little hint at any possible contribution to the America-theme. Instead, the obsession Faber had with mechanization, the over-whelming belief in all that was mechanical, the wanton disregard of the human element is enor-
mously useful in connecting the diatribes of the protagonist against America and the industrialization that was such an integral portion of his life. For, to Faber, what America had to offer was "die beste Installation der Welt" and a system by which "alles wird Highway,"\(^{10}\) thus allowing a type of mechanization, industrialization, if one wishes, to assume importance over the spiritual life of the people, over nature. The most obvious example of this dichotomy is when Faber visits Cuba and revels in the simple, dark-skinned, shining Spanish natives of that country as opposed to the "rosige Bratwurst-Haut"\(^{11}\) of the Americans.

Although Faber recognizes the wizardry of American technology (for example when his plane was downed in the Mexican desert; within hours Army helicopters were prepared for the recovery operation but were unable, due to diplomatic difficulties, to cross the border, relief for the stranded group arriving a day and a half later by an inept group of Mexican rescuers) and even confesses "dabei lebe ich von ihrem Geld,"\(^{12}\) his dissatisfaction with Americans and their manner of living gnaws at him progressively, reaching a fever pitch during the aforementioned stay in Cuba.

Initially we learn of the attitude of the culturally-deprived, yet ostentatiously refinement-seeking Americans through Herbert Hencke, who believed nonetheless that Americans had other virtues, their friendly attitude toward Germans, for example.

\(^{10}\) Max Frisch, *Homo Faber, ein Bericht* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969) p. 220

\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 219

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 218
While Faber voices no opinion on these remarks, he launches into his own tirades against the American culture seekers a short time later. Whether dealing with his "Ruinen-Freund" Marcel, who considers himself a higher or deeper being because he doesn't know "was Elektrizität ist" or the Americans in France whose excited, pathetic exclamations earned the deprecating title of "Stenotypistinnen von Cleveland" to be thrust upon them, Faber is merciless.

While possibly being able to forgive the American striving for cultural improvement in such a farcical manner, Faber could not reconcile himself to the "American Way of Life," the general attitude "als wären sie glücklich, weil Amerikaner." 

Schon was sie essen und trinken, diese Bleichlinge, die nicht wissen, was Wein ist, diese Vitamin-Presser, die kalten Tee trinken und Watte kauen und nicht wissen, was Brot ist, dieses Coca-Cola-Volk, das ich nicht mehr ausstehen kann --

He believes "sie leben, weil es Pencillin gibt" and even after life "ihre Kosmetik noch an der Leiche, überhaupt ihr pornografisches Verhältnis zum Tod" remains an enigma to him. All this was too much for Faber; this made American life, with all its "advancements" and "achievements," untenable.

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13 Ibid., p. 47
14 Ibid., p. 140
15 Ibid., p. 219
16 Ibid., p. 218
17 Ibid., p. 219
18 Ibid., p. 221
Walter Faber was a man caught up in his own way of living; this mode ultimately destroyed him. Thus his despair in his manner of living is understandable. But Faber's complaints, in one sense, taken as a reflection of Frisch's personal feelings, indicate a significant change of attitude about this country, its people and their way of living from Zuckmayer's experiences. Moreover, this negative aspect is more substantial than any other author's (Brecht, for example) due to the fact that Frisch, like Zuckmayer, had actually lived for some time in this country. In the Forties, Zuckmayer wrote of the friendly, considerate, wholesome American and by 1957 Frisch was issuing a scathing attack about American decadence.

While I am unable to definitely explain Frisch's motive for such a piece, a few conjectures can be submitted toward some type of clarification for the variation between Zuckmayer's and Frisch's America. Of great significance might be the time-differential between the two works, such a difference affecting all people, both in themselves and in their relationship to others. Also there is the fact that Zuckmayer's experience, after Hollywood, emanated from the "folksy" type of American, the simple farmer and small-town's person, while Frisch seemed to confront his Americans at smoke-filled parties or vacation resorts, an all-together different location from the quiet, unobtrusive New-Englanders known by Zuckmayer.

If we explore further the idea of the time-element, we realize that the post-war world afforded America little opportunity, if such a chance were desired at all, to revert to the isolationism prevalent following World War I. A decimated Europe and
Asia buoyed the hopes of American businessmen eager to invest capital in a rejuvenation process; crusaders of the country, fearful of the assertion of "immoral" Communism on untold millions, stressed the need to provide military and financial aid throughout the world; most Americans realized the necessity to care for the material, immediate needs of the less-fortunate Europeans, thus allowing various assistance programs to come into existence, the largest being the Marshall Plan; and finally, America's people had the financial means and the time available to them to work at a more-cosmopolitan make-up, the absurdity of which was parodied by Frisch with the episode of the steno-typists near Campagna. In effect, America became the big brother or rich uncle of the world (so many of her citizens imagined), giving all and asking nothing in return.

While this concept of time-differential is much too elementary and circumscribed to completely explain how such a diverse opinion between two authors could originate (other factors, such as a particular author's subjective experiences, a notion of the author completely foreign to his usual character, elements of a different nature, and so on all compound to make any theory more complex), it does, nonetheless, provide at least a partial answer to the modification on the attitude of these two authors (Frisch and Zuckmayer) to America, a modification which actually seems to exist and which has accomplished an almost volte face from the attitude presented by Zuckmayer, the extremity being reached by Peter Weiss in his Viet Nam ... Diskurs. In this work, which only deals with America through the Viet Nam conflict, Weiss ascribes to the United States the role of aggressor and actual
determinant of the destruction in Southeast Asia. As for the reason for such armed aggression, Weiss viciously attributes the following words to the late-President Kennedy, who is acting as spokesman for all Americans:

Viet Nam ist für uns die Probe aufs Exempel
wie können wir an jedem beliebigen Ort
einen Gegner besiegen der militärisch schwach
uns aber politisch überlegen ist
Ins Südostasien geht es noch nicht
um Leben und Tod
Wir erlernen dort nur die Methoden
für den Tag an dem es einmal wirklich geht
um Leben und Tod. 19

Yet, even without so radical an example of growing invective, it suffices to say that America became subject to a greater scrutiny throughout the world. For in the nineteen sixties America was beset with racial turmoils unknown to a European; further, this country was (and may be again) embroiled in a winless, draining unheroic war in Southeast Asia which has drastically divided the country. Finally, while domestic and foreign entanglements destroyed this country externally, a rising crime rate, like a cancer, infested the entire spectrum of society, leaving no one safe in its wake.

It is in this condition that we turn to a work largely devoted to the description of American life, in the hope of finding a relevant, contemporary viewpoint toward this country. This not-fully completed trilogy, *Jahrestage I, II, and III* is being written by a German who experienced the two dominant ideological

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19 Peter Weiss, *Viet Nam ... Diskurs* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964) pp. 447-448
systems, that of Communism and Capitalism. Also, it is a very recent work, the third volume due to be released in the near future. Finally, its voluminosity is such that the material concerning America is not just a short, passing motif, but rather is sizeable enough to offer the possibilities of an insightful study.
CONTEMPORARY AMERICA, AS EXPERIENCED BY UWE JOHNSON

Uwe Johnson is a young, modern German author who, through his works, is rapidly gaining recognition not only in Germany, but also throughout the world. Johnson was born in Kammin, Germany and grew up in post-war East Germany; in 1958 he fled to the western division of the country. He first visited the United States in 1960 and then returned for a two-year stay in 1966. It was during this last period that Johnson gathered material for his Jahrestage: aus dem Leben von Gesine Cresspahl. As stated previously, the work is planned for release under three volumes; the second volume, now in circulation, was unavailable to myself before I had completed the major portion of this work. Therefore, I have concentrated almost entirely on Jahrestage I for my information for this paper. Moreover, the major motifs in the work remained reasonably constant from the first to the second volume. Johnson's Jahrestage I is a work in which the Germany of pre-World War II is carefully integrated, sometimes directly, usually indirectly, into an equally important part of the story, a portion which deals with the current life of a German emigree in America. On the one hand we witness the efforts of Heinrich and Elizabeth (nee Papenbrock) Cresspahl to somehow discover peace in those foreboding days of the rise of National Socialism. On the other hand, one vicariously experiences the situation of Gesine Cresspahl, the daughter of Heinrich and Elizabeth, as she and her ten-year-old daughter, Maria, attempt to start a new life in New York.
Through Gesine, Johnson is able to not only relate the story of her parents, and thus return to the turbulent times of pre-war Germany, but he can also describe current conditions in the United States. In *Jahrestage I*, for example, we initially encounter Gesine in her search in New York for housing. This is no easy task, particularly in New York City, and is made more difficult by many suspicions and prejudices. In order to make his apartment more attractive, one landlord informs her that no Blacks will be given residence. In another incident Gesine must explain to her daughter what "you bastard of a Jew" means and has almost resigned herself to leaving America, since she believes "unter solchen Leuten ist nicht zu leben." However, Gesine does remain and through her and Maria, we discover the difficulties of adjusting to the "American Way of Life," where it seems crime, racism, and, at this time, an oppressive war are continually surfacing to upset any tranquility which might otherwise prevail.

Johnson's task of introducing the various current occurrences in this country and the world is greatly aided by a device whereby his protagonist, Gesine, daily reads *The New York Times* and reacts, emotionally and actually, to that which she learns from the paper. According to a newspaper set-up, Johnson has arranged the work into daily divisions and during the course of each section something of contemporary America and ante-World War II Germany is presented.

Moreover, the author seems to realize a connection between

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20 Uwe Johnson, *Jahrestage: aus dem Leben von Gesine Cresspahl* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) p.21
the two eras and gives early hints at a rather close relationship of times. One wonders whether only a tenuous connection to pre-war times exists or whether civilization really has advanced so little. For example, in the opening paragraphs, a summer beach resort is described with the indiscreet warning "aber Neger sollen hier nicht Häuser kaufen oder Wohnungen mieten oder liegen in dem weissen grobkörnigen Sand. Auch Juden sind hier nicht erwünscht." The narrator, in the next breath, continues, "Sie (Gesine) ist nicht sicher, ob Juden vor 1933 noch mieten durften in dem Fischerdorf von Jerichow ...." Thus one is immediately made aware of at least a secondary motif in the work, one which bears as much importance and relevance as the major issues which will be propounded. This motif is the relativeness of the events from the past in respect to those of the present.

For his information on the contemporary aspect of the work, Johnson relies heavily upon The New York Times, a highly-regarded, liberal newspaper; this causes that which he reports to be at least as journalistically-objective as possible without himself actually having experienced or witnessed the entirety of events. Certainly he makes comments, allows his characters their own opinions and does not permit this to read like a second edition of The Times. Yet a reader can easily distinguish between something that has actually happened and any editorializing, either

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21 Ibid., p.7

22 A critical analysis of The Times will be offered in a later portion of this paper.
by Johnson or The Times, of actual or abstract situations. 23

In his quotidian journal Johnson emphasizes various problems of this country and, at times, the world. Foremost in importance are the following: the Viet Nam war, especially its devisive effects in this country in the eyes of the world; racial difficulties and the internal disorder which is caused by them; and crime, both on the organized and individual levels.

While he offers no cure for the ills of this society, he portrays theses troubles so elucidatingly, forcefully and repetitiously that one cannot fail to comprehend the error and injustice which is being perpetrated. Whether the individual and his society will heed the warnings of Johnson to desist in his self-destructive progression remains to be seen. All Johnson was able to do was to caution the world, both through examples originating in the present and those occurrences from the barbarous times of the not-so-distant past, as to the unsteady ground being tread. The task of moral regeneration becomes man's own responsibility.

23 In fact, Johnson is determined to remain factual and objective to extremes. On October 7, 1967 there is a report of a Missouri man, Earl H. Duncan, who returned his letter of sympathy for his son who had died in Viet Nam to President Johnson and added "ermacht Johnson verantwortlich 'für den unnötigen Tod junger amerikanischen Menschen.'" What appears to be a strong anti-war theme is perceptively altered by an unconfirmed report that Mr. Duncan returned the letter not "weil er gegen den Krieg überhaupt ist," but rather since "ihm wird der Krieg nicht scharf genug geführt."

But immediately someone interjects: "Stand das in der Zeitung?" to which, after a pause, presumably by an unidentified individual hedging the question, the interrogator continues, "ja, aber wo?" and it becomes apparent that perhaps such is not the case and Mr. Duncan, at least as far as the facts are concerned, still wishes America out of the war. (October 7 and October 10, 1967 entries)
Perhaps the most prominent leit motif in Johnson's Jahrestage was the reference to the tragic war in Viet Nam. Johnson witnessed first hand the divisive effects the war had on the American people. During his short tenure in the United States he saw public sentiment reverse itself from cool indifference to heated dialogue and activistic confrontation toward the war, the pinnacle of which was reached by Senator McGovern, the Democratic presidential candidate, who made complete troop withdrawal from Viet Nam a focal issue of his election campaign.

Johnson faithfully reproduced and edited The New York Times reports on not only the death and destruction in Viet Nam, but also the military operations of countries throughout the world. Yet, in this area of belligerent countries he went further, allowing himself more freedom in the expression of his own opinions, rather than just letting the actual occurrences speak for themselves. Johnson was born prior to World War II and was young and impressionable at its conclusion. He saw the devastation of war, personally witnessed the suffering and depravation left in its wake. He also saw that mankind was once again determined to wage war. Johnson's reporting on the war developments is divided into two segments, one as destructive as the other: the war over the north and the fighting in the south.

In the air war above North Viet Nam Johnson succinctly, but accurately, depicts the rain of destruction dispersed by United States bombers. Perhaps most graphic of the descriptions is the October 21, 1967 entry in which The Times claims:
Ein westlicher Korrespondent beobachtete am Dienstag im Gebiet von Haiphong (Viet Nam) drei Luftangriffe, sieben Bomberwellen, zahlreiche Einzelflüge der Amerikaner und weitere acht Luftalarme; der Tag wurde ihm als normal beschrieben.24

"Normal" for the north perhaps, and, unfortunately, "normal" for the civilians of that section also (as such is the case for the south). The consequence of such bombing, even though it was totally unintentional, can readily be seen as The Times covers a propagandic North Vietnamese press conference during which it is exposed that "... auch zwei kleine (tiny) Kinder vorgeführt wurden, überlebende des Angriffs vom 27. September, eins so furchterlich im Gesicht zugerichtet, dass es nicht mehr sprechen konnte."25 And thus a spector of the war is revealed that touches not just the military, but also humanity as a whole. Yet conditions are not any different south of the DMZ than they are north of it.

In its initial stages, Johnson's reporting of the south consists of facts, figures and is rather bland and concise (cf. entry for August 31, 1967, a one-line remark: "Die Vietcong setzen ihre Überfälle im Süden des Landes fort;"26 or September 6, 1967: "In Gefechten im Queson-Tal sind seit gestern morgen 54 Amerikaner und 160 Nordvietnamesen gefallen, 136 Nordvietnamesen bei Tamky ... 34 Vietnamese in der Provinz Quangngai."27) Later he becomes

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24 Uwe Johnson, Jahrestage: aus dem Leben von Gesine Cresspahl (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) p.201
25 Ibid., p.145
26 Ibid., p.38
27 Ibid., p.56
more ironic, penetrating and symbolic in terms of this "ground war," as when he quotes a lieutenant who, when appraising the kamikazi-style raid of a N.V.A. soldier, almost single-phasically defines the character of the war: "Ein Nordvietnamese war wirklich voller Mut --- oder verrückt." 28

Once again, however, it is the civilian population who suffers improportionately to that of the military. As allied defensive missions at times resemble Viet Cong and N.V.A. offensive thrusts, the more apathetic peasant steadily becomes the tragic figure of the war, as witnessed in the following incidents.

Early in his journal, at the time of the South Vietnamese elections, Johnson disclosed from The Times that "die Vietcong haben den Wahltag in Südvietnam mit Angriffen und Attentaten gegen die Wähler in 21 Provizen begangen. Mindestens 26 zivile Menschen sind tot." 29

Prior to and following this election slaughter, newspaper reports concentrate on military casualty figures and list the disputes on said claims by either side. In all these reports any idea of civilian destruction in both lives and property is conspicuously absent.

In fact, seldom does The Times report on the civilian issue per se. The most prominent exception, taken from The Times and duly satirized by Johnson relates that

Die hauptsächlichen Krankheitsprobleme unter der Zivilbevölkerung Viet Nams sind Tuberkulose, Cholera,

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28 Ibid., p. 85
29 Ibid., p. 51
Typhus, Pest, Malaria, Kinderlähmung und Eingeweidenparasiten.

The war may be planned in Washington, D.C., Hanoi or Saigon. Were it restricted exclusively to these areas, certainly it would have been terminated long ago. As it is, however, suffering continues in direct proportion to strategy and armaments, with few prospects of relief for the people of Viet Nam, both north and south.

Leaving Viet Nam does not insure refuge from the Viet Nam conflict, however, as on several occasions there are references to the extension of the fighting into Thailand, Cambodia and, most dangerously, over Red China.

Nor are hostilities restricted generally to that Southeast Asian area. While no actual combat is occurring, reports emanating from around the world bear witness to bellicose attitudes (usually between Communist countries and the rest of the world) which at any time could plunge the involved nations, and perhaps the world, into warfare.

Thus China, with her arrogant, oft-times immature attitude about Oriental-recognition deals a physical blow to the British Chargé d'affaires ("Die Chinesen ziehen dem britischen Geschäftsträger in Peking den Kopf an den Haaren herunter."). The reason for such an assault: "Aus Rache." But revenge for what is never mentioned. On a different level we learn "Südkorea will eine

30 Ibid., p. 156
31 Ibid., p. 36
Zaun aus Draht und Elektronik an seiner Nordgrenze errichten."\(^{32}\) At the same time the Soviet Union announces that its military budget is "... für das kommende Jahr um 15 Prozent angehoben auf 16 700 000 000 Rubel."\(^{33}\) This does not include, of course, the fact that "die Sowjetunion hat seit 1955 wahrscheinlich 500 Millionen Dollar in Waffen an Entwicklungsländer geliefert"\(^{34}\) or that "die Sowjetunion hat den Arabern die Verluste an Kriegsgerät im Junikrieg zu 80 Prozent ersetzt."\(^{35}\) Finally, the East Germans are also induced to add to world tension as they and the Soviets "paradierten ... Streitkräfte Tanks, schwere Artillerie, Boden/Boden-Raketen, Panzer-Raketen, Boden/Luft-Raketen."\(^{36}\) And, as if foreboding doom, they proudly introduce the armored tanks which are "operationsfähig in durch Atomexplosion verseuchten Gebieten."\(^{37}\)

Undoubtedly such headlines and bylines would make even the most courageous individual timorous and would cause one's well-founded idealism to fester into vitriolic sarcasm. Such is the case with Uwe Johnson and an ever-increasing segment of the American public. The former, on a more intellectual plane, appeals to the minds of the people, the press and the world, criticizing not only the effects of the war, but also the vague, sometimes self-aggrandizing schemes to terminate it.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p.88  
\(^{33}\) Ibid., p.169  
\(^{34}\) Ibid., p.54  
\(^{35}\) Ibid., p.166  
\(^{36}\) Ibid., p.240  
\(^{37}\) Ibid., p.240
Thus after perusing the abbreviated list of war casualties, so shortened because only two of the victims were from New York State, Johnson sardonically observes "... als verschlüge die genaue Gesamtzahl ja doch nichts gegen einhundertfünfundneunzig Millionen Landesbürger." The lists and totals of dead seem to oppress Johnson to a great extent, as he constantly refers to the growing numbers of military victims, the climax of which occurs in a section on the sixth of October, entirely separate from the rest of the day: "13643 amerikanische Kriegstote bis heute in Viet Nam. Kann es sein, dass sie den 200 Millionen Bürgern der U.S.A. noch nicht ausreichen im Verhältnis der Zahlen?"39

Yet, this is not to say that Johnson approves of any scheme which might induce the cessation of hostilities; he reacts indignantly to an idea of boycotting products of the Dow Chemical Company (the producer of napalm for the Army and Air Force). Later, concerning Jean Paul Sartre's refusal to visit the United States because of its "immoral position" in Viet Nam, Johnson succinctly ridicules the reasoning: "Sartres Begründung machte jeden Ausländer, der in die U.S.A. reist oder dort lebt, zu einem Mitschuldigen."40

While being less analytical than Johnson, the masses of this country, whom George Gallup in two polls claimed were gathering considerable strength for their goal, utilized their own methods to end the war. Strikes and demonstrations were organized,

38 Ibid., p.36
39 Ibid., p.149
40 Ibid., p.397
the largest of this time being the peace rally at Washington, D.C. on the twenty-first of October, 1967. Yet according to Johnson and The Times, little was accomplished by this, as well as the other marches:

Die Regierung ist traurig wegen ihres beschädigten Ansehens in den Augen des Auslands. Die Aktivisten der Demonstration sind traurig, weil sie nicht genug Leute gegen den Präsidenten auf ihre Seite bekommen haben. ... es sei Idealismus missbraucht worden. 41

Other individuals, including such impressive people as former-Attorney General Robert Kennedy, protested United States involvement in the war, but with little immediate effect on the over-all conduct of it.

To say that Johnson is against United States involvement in Southeast Asia would be to simplify the entirety of this anti-war motif, for, as has been shown, he probes further. To claim that he believes this to be an immoral conflict is impossible, as such a viewpoint is not consistant with that which Johnson expressed personally. Perhaps the entry of November 25, 1967 best reveals Johnson's intentions on this section, as he relates:


41 Ibid., p. 212
42 Ibid., p. 353
While even many liberal protestors would be reticent and not so abusive as to attempt to equate the actions of Germany and the United States in these two different wars, and the author himself almost certainly did not wish to make such an inference, by this section Johnson indirectly informs us of the reason for all his efforts in this area. While he makes no attempt in equating this event directly with the war in Viet Nam, one is suddenly made aware of a relationship of the two which cannot be ignored. This connection might best be revealed through Gesine's criticism of herself for not participating in a massive peace demonstration at Washington. She offers (to herself) several justifications for not joining the rally: "als ein Krüppel (from any demonstrator-policeman confrontation) kann ich für das Kind nicht sorgen" and "die Politik ... wird nicht durch die Proteste von Minderheiten geändert." Yet Gesine cannot effectively convince herself that even if little could be accomplished by the demonstrations, the possibility of bringing the conflict to a quicker end suffices to justify her involvement. Furthermore, to her it is not just United States engagement in a war, but any country, anywhere. Concerning Viet Nam, Gesine claims: "ich brauche nichts als den Abzug der fremden Truppen (all of them) aus Viet Nam." On a more cosmopolitan scale, she questions the taxation of anyone made necessary "... für die afrikanische Waffengeschäfte Grossbritanniens, für

43 Ibid., p.207
44 Ibid., p.206
die Militärintustrie Westdeutschlands, für die Besatzungskosten der Sowjetunion. 46

It seems that Gesine has realized that too few had attempted too little to inhibit National Socialist aggression when it was still possible in the 1920's and early 1930's. Like Johnson, she experienced first-hand the devastations inflicted on her country by troops whose lands and people were almost equally war-torn. It is through Gesine and references to the National Socialists that Johnson reminds the world of that which has happened previously and could possibly again occur. If, because of him, people better realize the volatile possibilities engendered by aggression, Johnson has accomplished a formidable task in his Jahrestage.

46 Ibid., p. 209
WHAT'S WRONG WITH AMERICA, II

As mentioned previously, a second recurring theme of Johnson's (about which there were large amounts of information in The New York Times) is racial relations, particularly the violent, incendiary confrontations between Blacks and Whites which became an almost-common occurrence in the 1960's. In 1954 the United States Supreme Court initiated the modern Civil Rights movement by overruling a previous decree which stated "separate, but equal" education facilities could be tolerated. A new series of efforts toward more equal treatment of the Negro, focused primarily on the South, began, as Blacks endeavored to secure liberties others took for granted: the franchise, decent housing and employment opportunities, among others. Initially, and then generally, these efforts, though meeting with stiff resistance and brutality, were conducted peacefully. Yet, as impatience for individual and collective rights developed, the idea of non-violence moved in an inverse relationship. Groups and individuals preached the need of retaliation, the desirability of repaying hate with greater hate. It was in this frame that Johnson began his tenure in the United States. It was with these troubles that The New York Times so diligently occupied itself.

Beginning on the first day of Jahrestage I, Johnson observes "in New Haven sollen Burger afrikanischer Abstammung Schaufenster einschlagen und Brandbomben werfen." For the next two days he informs his readers as to the extent of damage, the number of arrests and such statistics peculiar to a race-riot.

47 Ibid., p. 9
Johnson later reports on another major conflagration, this one occurring after the fatal shooting of a Black youth who allegedly attacked an old (white) man. The dead boy was "Richard Ross, 14 Jahre alt."⁴⁸ This particular riot, which happened in Brownsville, Brooklyn, lasted several days and included the "usual" lootings, fire-bombings and arrests.

While these actions might be terribly disturbing, both for the participants and those uninvolved, embarrassing for the White community and self-destructive for the Black community, all groups should have been at least aware that a conflagration was imminently possible.

Johnson, in his entry for October 10, 1967 quotes from The Times that "Governor Romney hat sich neunzehn Tage lang in den städtischen Slums des Landes umgesehen. Er glaubt die Städte am Rande der offenen Rebellion."⁴⁹ And further The Times says "der Psychologe Dr. Clark, New York, hat den Ghetto neger von heute beschrieben als zynisch, verbittert, feindselig und entnervt, weil die beruflich Situation, die der Wohnhältnisse und die der Schule im nationalen Slum keinerlei Fortschritt aufweisen."⁵⁰ Still further a slum is described by Johnson in all its "glory," the sight of which must be stifling to any feelings of hope, any possibilities of creativity. Perhaps it is just because of this that Blacks feel perpetually oppressed and, in desperation and hate,

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⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 54
⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 133
⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 133
lash out at the White Community. And, due in part to these aggressive (or defensive) actions, and in part to prejudicial stupidity, a point on which both sides are guilty, this is the reason that Whites retaliate (or initiate).

Thus one sees an August 23rd entry in which The Times, as Johnson notes, claims "und wäre sie gestern nachmittag am Foley Square gewesen, hätte sie einen Führer der radikalen Afrikaner rufen hören können, dass Krieg sei mit den Weissen und Gewehre vonnöten ...."\(^{51}\) While such a remark is terribly racist and provocative, it is no worse than the comment of "haben Sie keine Sorge, wir halten die Schwartzes (sic) schon draussen"\(^ {52}\) made to Gesine and her child by a building land-lord. And the racial antagonism perpetuates itself and is in evidence repeatedly throughout this quarter-year journal, with both White and Black individuals being the aggressor and recipient of the racism.

Moreover, the racial problem is also integrated into that portion of the story which was set totally apart from The New York Times discoveries: the personal life of Gesine and her daughter, Maria. One sees, through Maria, a fifth-grader, that youth too is soon well aware of the color distinction. Maria must choose between spending Halloween with Francine, a Negro school-friend, or attending Marcia's party, a place where Blacks are not invited. "Es war nicht mein Fest,"\(^ {53}\) Maria offers as a rationali-

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\(^{51}\) Ibid., p.16  
\(^{52}\) Ibid., p.21  
\(^{53}\) Ibid., p.249
zation, and though she feels pangs of guilt over her decision to desert Francine, she nonetheless chooses to attend the all-white party. And yet, Maria is nearly blameless, since she is incapable of handling the situation differently.

On the one hand, what Maria recognizes is that Francine is "eine Ausnahme" and she feels it to be her particular burden that "von allen 21 Mädchen musste Schwester Magdalene mich aussuchen" to befriend the Black girl. After all, Francine is only an "alibineger," one whose attendance in that particular school is totally dependent upon the system of "token integration." It is therefore no marvel that Maria sees through the sham and subsequently revolts against her role as an "alibi-befriender."

On the other hand, what she fails to realize is that Francine is different from her or Marcia, the distinction is more complicated than race and it is only from this basic understanding that a functioning relationship can be established. It seems Francine is both a "victim" and a part of her culture, which, in this sense, is a direct result of her poverty. Indigence confines her to an area much like a jungle, where brute strength reigns and clever deception is a tool for survival.

In Jahrestage II, Francine must live with the Cresspahls for a time while her mother is recuperating in the hospital following a physical assault. During these weeks, Gesine and Maria discover that living with Francine is impossible; she violates all the rules of "their" society. But what Gesine gradually becomes

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54 Ibid., p.218
aware of is that Francine is not able to act any differently. To herself, Francine is behaving quite normally and conversely, the rules of the Cresspahl society seem rather odd. Thus it becomes increasingly apparent that, while an alteration in Francine's behavior might be desired, it's impossible to condemn her as she is; this is just the way she was raised and "educated." Further, unless a grass-roots reorganization of the impoverished level of society (both financially and educationally) is undertaken, Johnson, by his remarks, feels that there is no real solution to the problem.

To Johnson, the entire racial question in the United States must be terrifying in all its explosive possibilities. Moreover, in all likelihood it must also be reminiscent of the troubles in Germany prior to the war, although the degree of suffering by the minority group in the latter country was greater than any minority in America. While Johnson might accept the "fact" that racial and ethnic prejudice in some form has almost been in direct juxtaposition with the "advancement" of civilization, it no doubt distresses him that even in America, during the era of supposed tolerance and enlightenment, the system of intolerance breeds itself.

Having experienced first-hand the extremes which persecution can reach, Johnson recognized a certain responsibility for reminding this country of the terrible, existing conditions between the races. To his mind, the resolution of the matter required immediate attention by everyone, either those directly, indirectly or totally unconcerned.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH AMERICA, III

A third recurring theme in Johnson's work is that which is contemperarily known as the "law and order" issue, or better, the lack of said control. For it seems that, while the United States is a nation which prides itself on its Bill of Rights insuring individual freedom, basically this country is unable to guarantee that the citizen can fully utilize these privileges. During the four months Jahrestage I covered, there was an over-whelming number of crimes from which Johnson could select highly conspicuous incidents as being "typical" of the criminal elements in this country.

Thus, the reader is informed of numerous examples of rape, robbery, with and without violence, and politically-motivated turbulence. These crimes one could almost classify as callously and satirically as Johnson's one-line summary (given at the end of the day's news report): "... und die gewöhnlichen Morde."55

What is undoubtedly more troubling is the "senseless" acts of violence which appear to be assuming a more commonplace role in this country than even "motive crimes," a condition which makes no individual safe from anyone's neurotic desires. Thus Johnson reports on an incident in which one innocent person died and two were wounded. The murderer "... gab acht Gewehrschüsse ab und verliess das Lokal ohne ein Wort gesagt zu haben."56

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55 Ibid., p.134
56 Ibid., p.56
two year old student, upon being asked for a cigarette by a group of youths, responded that he was a non-smoker and "dafür bekam er ein sechzölliges Messer in den Bauch." Perhaps most neurotic of the criminal irrational acts is that perpetrated by the mass-murderer, an individual who is becoming all too-well known in America. On October 24, 1967, we learn of Leo Held, "Vater von vier Kinder ..., 'ein ruhiger, friedlicher, für seine Familie lebender Mann.'" Held appeared at work one day with a .38 caliber revolver and a .44 Magnum. He then proceeded to shoot von seinen kollegen fünf, offenbar ausgesuchte, verwundete auch vier. Gegen viertel neun erschoss er die Frau in der Telefonzentrale des Flugplatzes Lock Haven, eine Nachbarin. Zu Hause, siebzehn Kilometer weiter, schoss er auf ein schlafendes Nachbarnehepaar, tötete den Mann, versorgte sich mit seiner Munition und schoss sich mit zwölf Polizisten, bis sie ihn endlich auch in die Hände trafen.

It is such insane, unanswerable acts which cause Americans to seriously question the continuing survival of their society.

Yet, the responsibility for this violence must be attributed to a great degree to the same society which is in such dreadful fear of it. In a time when the prohibition of "Saturday-night specials" must be strenuously and, at times, despairingly entreated, Johnson caustically reminds the reader "die leichte Artillerie kann man mit der Post bestellen." And even when an individual has been apprehended in a felony, he is generally free in a short time to once again trample on

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57 Ibid., p.367
58 Ibid., p.214
59 Ibid., p.21
the rights of others. Witness the case of Gary Sickler, a twenty-six year old, convicted of rape, free on parole, who clumsily revealed a second crime by leading police "...zu einem Auto, in dem die Leiche von Kathleen Taylor lag. 22 Jahre, erstochen."60

According to an entry dated September 15, 1967, Johnson informs us "in sechs Monaten sind die privaten Verbrechen um 17% angestiegen. Bei täglich zwei Morden in New York."61 Further evidence of the breakdown of individual rights and, moreover, the judicial system can be seen in the fact that trials are increasingly being termed "forums for political repression," as witnessed in the case of dramatist LeRoi Jones, who "beschimpfte den weissen Richter und die weissen Jury-Kandidaten als seine Unterdrücker."62 For justice to function thoroughly and impartially in this type of atmosphere, it becomes proportionately more difficult. A crime as spectacular and all-interesting as the Kennedy assassination seems subject to speculations (cf. November 16, 1967 and December 6, 1967) as to what actually occurred.

Concerning Johnson's main characters, Gesine herself often feared for her own safety, and that of her child's, since crimes were committed within a short distance of her apartment on two occasions. Even young Maria, due to the repetitious news items in The Times (which the precocious child also read) on crime, especially the Mafia and its inter-family wars, becomes involved

60 Ibid., p.267
61 Ibid., p.89
62 Ibid., p.219
in a surrealistic confrontation with family-head Vito Genovese, who has kidnapped her friend Karsch, the journalist.

As Johnson saw it, Americans, quite out of necessity, were occupied in fortifying themselves from a cancerous element which threatened to destroy the country as easily and thoroughly as any racial or foreign entanglement could. Moreover, the possibilities of this domestic terrorism precluding anyone, of any station in life were becoming slimmer. It was because of this that Johnson dealt with the subject with such urgency and importance. To have given less effort to the endeavor would have minimized the seriousness which he realized was actually present.
After portraying and, at times, analyzing concepts from various major German works of the 20th Century with regard to the "America-theme," it is painfully apparent that there are still questions to be asked, reservations about an author's experiences to be made.

One wonders if Kafka's and Brecht's works can be accepted without any background knowledge on the life of the particular author. In the cases of Zuckmayer and Frisch, while little of what they related can be disputed, certain qualifications must be imposed; that is, does the fact that because either author virtually limited himself to one type of American and was fairly subjective in his appraisal of situations, are the general conclusions each posited about America and her society in some respects modified? Even with the principal author, Uwe Johnson, whose work, **Jahrestage I**, ostensibly possessed a balance of unbiased, comprehensive insight into America and her people, it seems an analysis of his various issues and also the source of his information on this subject matter is in order.

Perhaps to first discuss the source from which Johnson chose his material for the work would be in order, after which the discussion of Johnson's primary leit motiv, the war in Viet Nam, would more naturally follow.

During the course of **Jahrestage I**, Johnson relied almost exclusively on *The New York Times* for his information about current situations, both here and abroad. That which Johnson quotes and edits cannot be faulted with regard to accuracy. The source from which he quotes, however, perhaps should be subject to a more in-
depth evaluation.

Throughout the work Johnson lampoons *The Times* as being that most like an aunt ("Tante")

... eine ältere Person. Auf der Oberschule in Gneez wurden so Lehrerinnen bezeichnet, vorgeschrittenen Alters, humanistisch gebildet, die in gutem Willen den Lauf der Dinge missbilligten, in Gesprächen unter vier Augen, wehrlos. 63

Perhaps to Johnson's mind *The Times* is "wehrlos". There is, however, a more serious and controversial viewpoint toward *The Times*, one which, in effect, accuses that newspaper of malignantly disposing the citizenry against its country.

In his book, *All the News That Fits*, Herman H. Dinsmore, a former make-up editor for *The Times* believes "the NYT achieves very considerable editorial effect by selecting and positioning the news." 64 The title of his work, an obvious take-off on the NYT motto of "All the News that's Fit to Print," is intended to justify, as Mr. Dinsmore's opening remarks bear out, that

*The New York Times* today is deliberately pitched to the so-called liberal point of view, both in its news and editorial columns. Although *The Times* still prints a large body of news, it is not as objective in its news as it was when it was making its name as the finest newspaper in the world. 65

and thus the news must fit the liberal or left-wing attitudes of managing editors.

Besides criticizing editorial policies of *The Times*, Mr.

63 Ibid., p.38

64 Herman H. Dinsmore, *All the News That Fits* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1969) p.25

65 Ibid., p.13
Dinsmore charges failure in items of news which should be above subjective control.

Throughout the work he lists countless examples of pre-medative culpability in fictitious reporting by the paper. For example, on June 7, 1965 The Herald Tribune had, as its headlines: "U.S. Marines Score a Viet Victory." That same day, in a duplicate edition, The Times reported: "8 U.S. Marines Die as 2 Helicopters Crash in Vietnam," with, according to Dinsmore, "no mention of victory by the Marines" anywhere to be found in The Times. 66

It is significant here to consider that, while this single example may appear to bear little importance in itself, it is representative of the numerous instances in which Dinsmore accuses The Times of managing and moulding the news.

There is, however, one qualifying aspect of Mr. Dinsmore's attitude toward The Times. In his introduction, Dinsmore remarks

There is an out of this world quality to Times editorials because they seem to assume that The Times should be neutral as between the U.S. Government and the Soviet Government (which The Times nearly always calls the Soviet Union, even when it is talking about the government) and, secondarily, Communist China, which it often calls merely China or mainland China in keeping with its editorial drive to get the Communist Peking regime accepted into the United Nations. 67

Thus one deduces that Mr. Dinsmore does not consider it irregular or inconceivable that a newspaper retains, at the minimum, a certain allegiance toward its home country.

66 Ibid., p.311
67 Ibid., p.14
While this issue now becomes a controversy of theoretical importance, relegated to only a subjective, oft-times emotional area, perhaps observations on two of Johnson's leit motifs in *Jahrestage* I are in order at this point, as it is now desired to show some type of dependency between what Johnson discussed and the vehicle from which he obtained his material.

If one assumes that *The Times* is slanted to some degree, one can expect that that which Johnson learned, for example about the war (i.e., the conduct of the war itself, the victories and defeats of the United States in the war and the anti-war sentiment at home) is also, to some extent, incorrect. Thus how he saw America, because he relied heavily on *The Times* accounts, is an imprecise impression itself.

Upon examination of the war, little definite can yet be said. There are those who argue that had the United States remained united toward the "enemy," the war might have been quickly terminated, that it was only a vocal minority, in conspiracy with the various media, who resisted the efforts of this "moral" war. Others claim that the war was "immoral" from its initiation and that the people of this country should admit the mistake and quit striving for some "honorable" solution. As far as Johnson is concerned, it is doubtful that he himself feels negatively or bitterly disposed toward the United States and its actions in Southeast Asia. However, much of the rationale behind the war and the apparent passivity with which the fighting is received must be disturbing to him.

Early in the work Johnson mimics the United States Secretary of Defense, who, concerning the recent bombing of North Vietnam,
announced: "mit Bomben kriegen wir die (the Communists) nicht an unseren Tisch." 68 In a later portion of the book, Johnson presents an inane dispute between the North Vietnamese, who claim American casualties for the past six months totaled 110,000 and the U.S. Command, who report "es (the casualties) sind 37,038." 69

Johnson felt this conflict was steadily causing increasingly-severe physical and social dilemmas in this country; this he received implacably, with a cynicism unmatched by any other problem afflicting this country.

Concerning Johnson's second theme, that of racism, it might be helpful to proffer a different point of view of the racial situation in this country, one which a reader might not discover in some of the more conservative journals in this country and would probably never read anywhere in The Times.

Racism, tribalism and religious hate are not peculiar to the United States. These intolerances burden India, Pakistan, Algeria, Sudan, Britain, et al. It seems the world literally crackles with hate, discrimination and nationalistic passions. What distinguishes America from these other nations is the fact that many Americans are ashamed of their racism and endeavor to improve existing conditions, while other peoples occupy themselves with the defense of racial and religious intolerances and the explanation for the impossibilities of over-night abolition.

68 Johnson, op. cit., p. 26
69 Ibid., p. 40
While this in no way constitutes an excuse for the regrettable condition of racial relations in this country, it is necessary to recognize the amazing, successful strides taken toward improvement of the situation and to respect America and her people, in this world of hate, for their efforts.

This basic recognition was not present in any of the numerous references made by Johnson on the subject, perhaps due in large part to the fact that The Times similarly ignored such achievements. This absence strikes one as unfortunate, moreover, since Johnson, in the concurrent, pre-World War II portion of his book is perseveringly aware of ethnic inequalities inflicted upon another minority: the Jews.

In several instances he refers to that group of people so incessantly persecuted by the National Socialists. Further, even during times like these, he was able to report attempts to alleviate the situation, even if these efforts were more or less symbolic, Johnson's most cogent example being the suicidal hanging of Gesine's mother, Elizabeth, in protest of the disgusting situation. In America, while gladly admitting the circumstances have not degenerated to such depths as those of Germany in the 1930's, it is nonetheless important to note that an attempt is being made to rectify the disparate conditions here. Yet it appears this effort continues virtually unnoticed.

Little in the way of explanation or rationalization can be tendered concerning the third motif of the Johnson work, crime in America. Robbery, assault, and even murder are no longer acts which are alien to the great majority of Americans, but rather touch, either directly or indirectly, a significant portion of the
inhabitants of this country. And the situation appears to be de-
generating rather than improving. Just what the solution to the
problem could be is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain.

Johnson himself was unable to offer any, as even his prota-
genist, Gesine, was under continual trepidation for her own and
her child's well-being in this country. Ever present in her mind
was the fact that there were "bei täglich zwei Morden in New
York" and she wondered when she would become a victim. It was unlike
anything Gesine had ever experienced in Europe. Only Maria, in
her childish self-assurance, was free from anxiety wherever and
by whichever means (usually the subway) she travelled.

That Uwe Johnson remained clear and unbiased in that which
he reported is to his credit. While at times possibly disagreeing
with the urgency of some matters as opposed to others, I must ad-
mit that his attempt to acquaint himself with America and to mir-
rer what he learned cannot be faulted.

Initially, in my own experience, I felt Johnson was treating
the United States unnecessarily harshly and therefore I became
indigant. After considerable re-evaluation, however, I realized
that he only expressed that which he felt was basically true and
was doing so only to illuminate real problems in a society which
otherwise had a wealth of advantages to offer.

70 See September 15, 1967 entry, p.89

71 In fact, if there was ever any doubt of Mr. Johnson's sense
of candor, it was immediately dispelled in a section of Jahrestage
II. In this second book, Johnson takes to task a certain Hans
Magnus Enzensberger, a German poet studying on fellowship at Wes-
It seems that Johnson learned well how difficult it is to
impetuously assume, accuse and disparage. He saw in America great
promise. He also saw obstructions to the ultimate fluid realiza-
tion of that promise. It was the latter that he intended to under-
score in hopes of some possible, future redress of the conditions.
To one who reads him conscientiously, the extent of his accom-
plishment in this endeavor achieves a good deal of success.

leyan University. It seems Mr. Enzensberger became irreconcilably
dissatisfied with the American government and its alleged goal
of "politische, Ökonomische und militärische Weltherrschaft." He
accused this country of "Imperialismus," "Ausbeutung" and oth-
er Marxist terms, while he steadfastly refused to discuss in detail
any of these accusations, claiming, "es ist hier nicht der Ort, um sie wissenschaftlich zu belegen und zu differenzieren."

Perhaps his most blatant, desperate generalization was the
following: "der Zustand der Vereinigten Staaten erinnert mich heute,
in mehr als einer Hinsicht, an die deutsche Situation in den
dreissiger Jahren."

While Johnson caustically answers these and other charges of
the poet, he repeatedly strikes the themes of "how long did he
(Enzensberger) live here" and "how many different Americans, with
varying perspectives, could he possibly have encountered?"
(The Enzensberger quotes are from his essay: Warum ich Amerika
verlasse.)
When the survey of these 20th Century German writers and their thoughts about America are summarized, there are some similar recurring motifs in several of the works.

Primarily, America is a country devoted to mechanization, to producing and demanding a certain subservience of those involved in her manufacturing. In the most negative sense it is depicted by Franz Kafka's dehumanizing treatment of his protagonist, Karl Rossmann. Carl Zuckmayer fled Hollywood, where compromising demands made an artist a veritable machine, and took up residence in an idyllic recluse unknown even to most Americans. And while Walter Faber attempted to deprecate this country in much the same fashion as Kafka, he was less convincing, though perhaps more insistant, in his assertion that the machine was, indeed, "master" in America.

A second motif recurring in the works is the idea of achievement being possible in America. By diligence, as seen through Kafka, one could hope for limitless success and, according to Zuckmayer, it was never too late to begin anew. Even in Frisch one could visualize the opportunities made accessible by technological development, though he stressed the decadence which seemed to necessarily follow.

It is concepts like these which might be relatively unknown (or at least unrecognized) by most Americans, but which are conceived of this country by an "outsider."

In recent years the works have tended to point to some degree of realism, as witnessed in Zuckmayer, Frisch, and especially, Johnson, about this country. No longer would the reader be subject to the imagined situations similar to Kafka and Brecht, as the
post-World War II writers attempted to relate that which they personally experienced or had vicariously known to be correct.

In Johnson we reached the pinnacle of discovery about America. We learned that America has problems both common and peculiar to the rest of the world, including a heavy crime rate, a burdening war and severe racial predicaments. Perhaps just as frightening were the smattering of attempts to analyze a problem in America in terms of a situation in National-Socialist Germany. However, Johnson did not wish to establish a direct correlation between the two countries; he only sought to admonish America about the particular problem, awaken this country to certain possibilities if the conditions were not rectified.

Yet inherent and perhaps attributable to both the positive and negative elements composing the picture of America is one fact so often ignored: contemporary America, it seems, strives to grant more freedom than most countries of the world, painstakingly working to guarantee the absolute rights of even the most heinous criminal or destructive anarchist. This in itself may be incomprehensible to any foreign-born individual and may even be difficult for him to grasp after personally witnessing the "system" in action, and can often be the case with even a native American.\(^7\)\(^2\)

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\(^7\)\(^2\) There is, in fact, a current, fictive best-seller in America which depicts well this difficulty of an American who feels he has an accurate conception of his country. In Mary McCarthy's *Birds of America*, Peter Levy, the son of professional, upper-class parents, concerns himself with, among other things, civil rights, police brutality and over-strenuous drug laws, conditions which he feels make life in America overbearing, bordering on Fascism. It is only during a tenure in Europe (France and Italy) that Levy realizes how deceptively inflexible European standards are: drug laws are more rigid, penalties more severe, police allow little "academic foolish-
To be sure, America is not the bizarre unintelligibles envisioned by Franz Kafka, nor the Capitalistic oppressor of the masses, as Berthold Brecht imagined. It is less than the pastoral scene of back-woods Vermont, as Carl Zuckmayer believed, and Americans are more than the artificial, over-confident back-slappers of Max Frisch's visions. In fact, Uwe Johnson, while capturing more Americans in more "natural" situations than any previous author, still seems not to fully grasp the "secret," that is, the spirit of America, that type of description which encompasses much of which America is composed. And yet, such a conclusion should not be surprising.

To some degree, America and her citizen are described by these German authors. Yet this country and Americans are so much more; a still greater degree of insight is required. As mentioned earlier, for an American this insight can be limited; for a European, who is often so unfamiliar with life in this country, the difficulty of gaining the proper perspective is more severe. Perhaps by beginning with a synthesis of each one's thoughts and experiences and building from there, we can then hope to construct a more complete picture of that which is America in her multifarious aspects.

ness" and an individual's civil rights are certainly not the primary concern of the establishment. Added to these facts the idea that some of the technological advancements of America which Levy considers to be necessities are on the level of luxuries in European society, the young man rather quickly alters his harsh, personal judgments toward America. If, as he ultimately believes, "nature is dead" (throughout the world), young Levy would then prefer to live his non-spiritual, mundane existence in a country which could afford him the most comfortable life. Yet, it is only through knowing America natively that Levy is finally able to approach his "accurate" judgment.
Books

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


Articles and Periodicals


The thesis submitted by Walter R. Pasulka has been read and approved by members of the Department of Modern Languages.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date

Signature of Advisor