

“Reparations and Education: A Comparative Discourse on Reckoning in Germany and the U.S.”

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Abstract

How do countries deal with the issue of financial reparations towards a victimized population? What factors motivate and justify commitments and policy decisions that favor reparations? More broadly, how do these reparations fit within the larger structure of commemoration? In the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic Germany has decided to financially support the remaining survivors of the Holocaust due to the additional hardship induced by the pandemic. This decision reflects an on-going policy commitment to reparations by the German state. While the United States has had intermittent debates regarding reparations for descendants of slavery over the course of decades, those voices have gone largely silent in general and specifically with regards to the pandemic. We position the German reparation discourse in contrast to that of the United States, and we ask how these two federal systems have developed such distinct ways of commemoration and reparation. We argue in this paper that primary and secondary education play a key role in shaping a narrative, an understanding, and a political commitment by the state towards victims and descendants of a state's shameful past. We demonstrate through our mixed-methods approach a comparative case study analysis between the United States and Germany, and we illustrate their different approaches to teaching their own history in a federally structured education system. Building on Susan Neiman's work in "Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil" (2019), we expand this field of inquiry by focusing specifically on the primary and secondary education systems in these two countries, comparing legislation, curricula, and policy implementation regarding commemorating a country's past. We argue that the politicization of teaching traumatic history in these countries varies, which impacts the way the discourse on reparations is being framed.

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Introduction

The discourse on reparations for descendants of enslaved people in the United States has been increasingly gaining momentum in the past decade. Most notably is Ta-Nahesi Coates' "The Case for Reparations" (2014), but one can also identify it in a nation-wide educational reckoning with a past long institutionally forgotten. This includes institutions of higher education implementing committees and researching their own pasts. Georgetown University students famously voted in 2019 to tax themselves a certain amount of money, which is dedicated to descendants of enslaved people, on which the University profited many years ago (Desali 2019). This action was then emulated by Brown University in a March 2021 vote (Amaral 2021). But it also includes a reckoning and learning about a state's past through localized initiatives in museums and sites of remembrances – small and large (Neiman 2019). The summer of 2020 was dominated by nation-wide and even global Black Lives Matter protests that reiterated the unequal dimensions of black and white citizens in the United States, institutional racism, and what equity and equality really meant.

Where, though, does a discourse about anything arise in a nation? How does the state play a role in shaping the country's narrative about its past and its future? How does it reckon with its past? Scholars have turned to Germany as a blueprint about reparation discourse, arguing that the country's structural commitment to reparations of victims of the Holocaust serves an example to how the United States could implement such a policy in order to politically reckon with a shameful past (Nieman 2019; Craemer; Meakam 2021). This includes not only vast amounts of money paid out to victims but also continuous verbal acknowledgements of guilt and responsibility by German leadership as well as a vast and developing memorial landscape. Germany has enshrined its commitment to reparations into federal law. Through its membership in the International

Holocaust Remembrance Association as well as their commitment to the European Union's remembrance culture, Germany has seemingly both politically and culturally been remembering and reckoning with its past and the responsibility to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust.

On the surface this comparison makes sense, given the two countries' broad democratic federal system, their division of states, and their respective agency delegations to the state level regarding educational policy decisions. Once we dig deeper though into Germany's *Aufarbeitungskultur* and its application/comparison to the United States, we can identify a glaring misconception on the effects of the shaping of the national discourse on Holocaust discourse. We argue that Germany's reparations and remembrance are enshrined in its laws and institutional political and educational framework but fizzle out in significance and impact in lower state and local levels. The narrative from the top is not finding its way to the people. The state's narrative is not impacting the people's narrative about their nation. Rather, in fact, the rise in lack of knowledge about the Holocaust in Germany coupled with increasing trends in antisemitism actually speak to a challenging narrative building up at the bottom.

We identify as a critical juncture in the dissemination of national narrative information, which spurs on discourse of any kind, the educational system in both of these countries. Understanding a country's history, place and role in the world requires the teaching of a national narrative, which occurs for most citizens in schools, universities and later on through memorials, statues, and museums. Where it fails to reach a wider and more receptive audience, though, is in the critical field of its secondary education system for young adults across the country. Instead of utilizing this necessary conduit between national narrative and its people, the German federal education system has shown over time that the Holocaust as a critical part of Germany's most recent history fails to achieve its recognition amongst its youngest citizens. We attribute

Germany's federal education system, which provides only guidelines as opposed to a clear structure to its states, to this disseminating of critical pieces in Germany's national narrative to its people.

The case of the United States tells a different and yet strangely similar story when it comes to commitments to any reparation and/or remembrance of enslaved people as part of the American national narrative. Here the federal legal commitment is in fact an absence of anything tying guilt or responsibility to the United States government's shameful past. This absence is felt throughout the educational framework of the country and its guidelines disseminated to the individual states. Not addressing an issue or incorporating it into a national narrative still rings loudly in the creation of a populum. Interestingly, though, it is through the missing or limited actions of the federal system and its guidelines that challenging narratives emerge at the bottom in the United States as well. And these challengers are slowly but steadily calling for a reckoning. While the call to view Germany as a blueprint may not be as apt as intended, the comparison of these two countries and their handling of shameful pasts serves as an interesting study in national narrative making and the emergence of challenging narratives. It allows us to put out the question as to where reparations take place, and how they meaningfully engage with their shameful pasts, as well as what 'meaningfully' means in this context.

So, what can the United States learn from Germany? How is this blueprint applicable in this comparative study? And what is the purpose of federal reparations if they seemingly inspire challenging narratives at the bottom?

Literature Review

Our argument is anchored within the academic study of nationalism. The scholarly consensus holds both nations and nationalisms to be artificial constructs, inventions of modernity that envision themselves as both limited and sovereign political communities (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1964 and 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990). These “imagined communities,” (to borrow Anderson’s classic phrasing) strive for political control via the state; however, as potential nationalisms far outnumber states, becoming the dominant expression of the state is often an unfulfilled wish (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1964 and 1983; Danforth, 1995; Shelef, 2010; Zubrzycki, 2016). These communities often foster identification on the basis of providing a framework for distinguishing self and others. Collectively, members of nations can define themselves exclusively by who they are not (*ibid*).

The core of adherence to nationalisms also contains within it inclusive elements of collective belonging. Although artificially designated, nationalisms hold together conceptually due to the mythologies associated with them, and those mythologies often turn on the concept of a ‘glorious past.’ Mythologies can be built around selectively chosen elements of the nation-to-be’s past. This could include the hagiography of a hero such as Alexander the Great in Macedonia’s case (Danforth, 1995) or St. Jean Baptiste in Quebec’s (Zubrzycki, 2016); it could also include co-opting existing sentiments of community and their attendant myths and symbols (i.e, proto-nationalisms) for nation-building purposes (Hobsbawm, 1990). Mythologies adhered to by nationalists can also be completely arbitrary inventions, rooted only loosely if at all in historical or ethnic-based inheritances. For example, Trevor-Roper (1992) details that the kilt often associated with Scottish history is actually a more modern invention, based more strongly on the needs of modernity than in any Highlander past. Indeed, to Roosens (1989: 15-17), the “ethnic

‘past’ is always a subjective reconstruction,” an “ethnic arsenal” that can be selectively consulted (ibid: 161).

Our argument involves differential approaches to reparations discourse in the U.S. and Germany. We privilege the role of education within the transmission of nationalist myths and values, which of course begin with common language. Education’s role in nation-building specifically has been researched in various contexts. Scholars have examined how transitioning to a common vernacular language relies, at least in part, on the state machinery of education (Weber, 1976; Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983). And, of course, along with that common language comes common mythologies. As Gellner (1983: 48) argues, “nationalism...[is] based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state.” Those high cultures are the new nation’s consolidation of previously local or regional cultures into the mythology that becomes disseminated through the state’s educational machinery. In fact, only the nation state has sufficient capacity to disseminate nationalisms through education (Gellner 1964 and 1983). So, the mythological content that states wish to perpetuate is often encountered in the educational system, and we argue that reparations discourse (or the lack thereof) is not an exception.

Additional areas of study have included language transmission in previously colonized spaces (Imam 2007), as a tool for perpetuating or even instigating national identity conflicts within multinational states (Clycq 2017), what the counterproductive effects of decentralized education policies can have within a state and its nation-building efforts (Telhaug et. al. 2004), and even state spending on public schools can increase or decrease voter turnout/voting for conservative and pro-nationalist parties (Cinnirella, Schueler 2018). Yet relating to the topic of the present research, a specific focus on Germany’s decentralized Holocaust education and its effects on the nation-

building context in Germany (as well as its juxtaposition to the overt federal nation-making efforts) lack research. While Nieman's (2019) work illuminates Germany's remembrance culture in comparison to the United States, thus cementing this 'blueprint' idea for the United States' reckoning with its enslaved people's past, it lacks a concrete focus on where the transmission between federal narrative and its people is failing. The blueprint idea then becomes less effective and convincing. Given that the state's education system is a nation-making tool to create a people that will seamlessly fit into the current national context, a decentralized education system will either create multiple narratives within one state context and/or weaken the federal narrative as it is espoused in its legal and memorial landscape.

Methodology

In this paper we focus on three reparation variables both Germany and the United States have engaged in: legislative, monetary, and memorial reparations. We compare and contrast both the countries' engagements with these variables, thus creating smaller case studies on these specific issues (Gerring 2008). Our comparison serves several purposes: (1) it provides the necessary informational framework for our comparison, (2) the vastness of Germany's engagement is represented visually through the amount of text dedicated to it and stands out to the lacking engagement of the United States, and lastly (3) it provides a backdrop to the overarching question in the discourse on shameful pasts how appropriate and how useful a case by case comparison actually is.

Given that our argument relies on the federal nature of the education system, meaning that Germany and the United States do not engage with educational guidelines in a top-down fashion

but that the states are in charge of that, our paper also provides an overview of the educational system in each country with a focus on how syllabi and frameworks engage with the respective shameful pasts. We rely mostly for the description of our four variables on the countries' legal codes, official documents from (local and federal) government entities, newspaper articles, and personal observations.

Case Studies

We focus our research on three factors that express a form of reparations at the federal state level: (1) Laws and Money (as these two usually go hand in hand); (2) visible and audible forms of apologies, including official acknowledgements; and lastly, (3) the federally funded memorial landscape in these respective countries. Then we compare the federal outline of the educational systems. We argue that the decentralized form of education, coupled with their states' vague framing of education guidelines, leads to a respective bottom-up response from the people. In Germany, this dependent variable is articulated through rising antisemitic crimes as well as an increasing lack of knowledge and awareness of the Holocaust amongst the youngest (and other) generations. In the United States, a similar education framework actually leads to a slow - but nonetheless - increasing support for reparations and a reckoning with the United States' culpability for chattel slavery. Both of these federal governments have set out to create federal narratives of and for their people, yet they are causing challenging narratives to emerge.

1. Laws and Money

(West) Germany- A Timeline

West Germany's history of reparations begins early on, shortly after the end of the Nuremberg trials, when the Allied forces, between 1947 and 1949 in their respective sectors,

enforced the decree to return assets to Jewish people and other populations harmed by the National-Socialist (NS) government. The United States' decree included in its language specifically the call for reparations “for damage done to life, freedom, body, and health”, which exceeds the realm of ‘simply’ returning possession (Bundesfinanzministerium 2012; U.S. Department of State 2021).

In 1952, West Germany and the State of Israel agreed on their first momentous international agreement, which guaranteed the pay out of 3 billion Deutsche Mark in goods and services to Israel. Their purpose was (over many years) “the global compensation for occurring inclusion and integration costs for uprooted and destitute Jewish refugees from Germany and the former German occupied territories” (Bundesfinanzministerium 2012). The so-called Luxembourg agreement between Israel and Germany also included 450 million Deutsche Mark to be paid out to the newly formed Conference of Jewish Material Claims against Germany (JCC) to assist in the integration of victims and refugees of the NS regime outside of Israel (Bundesfinanzministerium 2012; U.S. Department of State 2021). Additionally, this agreement between the two countries included a clause that guaranteed Germany would implement the sentiment of this agreement within its legal framework, thus ensuring the continuation of this material and financial reparation process (U.S. Department of State 2021). Further international agreements of a similar nature would follow between 1959 and 1964 with other countries (and in 1990 with the United States) (Bundesfinanzministerium 2012).

West Germany made good on its Luxembourg agreement ‘promise’ by passing two key pieces of legislation in the Bundestag: the Bundesentschädigungsgesetz in 1956 (Federal Law on compensation/reparation) and the Bundesrückerstattungsgesetz in 1957 (Federal Law on reimbursement), which focused largely on the return of assets or compensation for lost property (if proven). Similar iterations of these two laws had been passed since 1949 at the state level in

various new formed German states in the West. The Bundesentschädigungsgesetz was initially proposed in 1953 but was not passed at the time. When the 1956 version came to a debate and vote in parliament it was passed but was essentially applied retrospectively to 1953. The law stated that anybody persecuted or imprisoned due to political, religious, ideologically or racist reasons (and thus endured harm to their person and/or property) would be entitled to financial compensation.

Certain caveats and complications came with this 1956 version of the law. First, there was the issue of setting a claim's deadline for October 1957, which gave potential recipients only roughly a year to collect documents/proofs and submit them. Given the lack of documentation to prove victimhood as well as a slow mailing system (within Germany but also globally), it made for a difficult process. Substantially this law defined quite narrowly who'd be eligible for compensation. For one, there was a spatial and temporal limitation, as only those who resided in West Germany and/or West Berlin and maintained residence there at least until 1952 were eligible to file. People abroad were excluded from the process. Additionally, this law excluded several identified victim groups, including Asocials, Sinti and Roma as well as Homosexuals (Bundesfinanzministerium 2012;

While 'homosexual acts' were legalized in West Germany in the early 1970s, it was only after reunification when in 1994 homosexuality was completely removed from the newly formed Federal Republic's criminal code. In 2017, the German Parliament passed a statute allowing German citizens who had been victims of criminal prosecution because of their sexual orientation to file for compensation. This was not specifically targeted towards victims of the NS regime, but includes anybody who has been trialed, convicted, and imprisoned while it was 'illegal' to be homosexual. Many argue that this law comes many decades too late, given the increasing age of many of those who may be eligible to make a claim (Merkens 2018). As for the Sinti and Roma,

when appealing the exclusion in 1956 the highest federal court in Germany (Bundesgerichtshof) rejected the appeal, arguing insultingly that Sinti and Roma were not persecuted for their race but rather their ‘asocial’ nature. The court at the time argued that the Sinti and Roma’s unwillingness to comply with society’s norms of maintaining a permanent residence and engaging in thievery were justifiable reasons for the NS regime to order imprisonment for them. While the government eventually opened up this group’s eligibility, the federal court never reversed its racist ruling (Zentralrat Sinti und Roma 2015; Rath 2016).

The Bundesentschädigungsgesetz was eventually expanded in 1965, including more victim groups and also extending the deadline of filing to 1969, but officially declaring that that would be it for that piece of legislation. This was partially done to be more inclusive but also to shape the national narrative more positively (Bundesfinanzministerium 2012). Separately, though, more funds were made available in the 1980s, and again after the reunification of West Germany and East Germany. The reunification also prompted the creation of concentration camp pensions for anybody that had been imprisoned for more than six months, as well as ‘ghetto’ pensions for anybody imprisoned in them for more than 18 months (Bundesfinanzministerium 2012).

In the 2000s, Germany signed an agreement with the United States, in which it agreed to creating the “Memory, Responsibility, and Future” - organization, which would coordinate the payout of 10 billion Deutsche Mark, which would be raised 50/50 by the German government and the German economy, towards victims forced labor (5.000 Deutsche Mark/person) and slave labor in concentration camps (15.000/person). This money in its majority was paid to forced and enslaved laborers from Russia, Poland, Belarus, and the Ukraine, thus compensating a victim group that had been largely ignored up till then. The organization also commits itself to continuously engage in research, remembrance, and education (Bundesfinanzministerium 2012;

Stiftung - evz.de 2021). Additionally in a separate agreement at the 2009 Prague Conference, Germany agreed with the JCC that the country would assist in the payment of medical care for the increasingly elderly survivor population (Claimscon.org). Germany has also been paying 50% of the maintenance costs of Jewish cemeteries across Europe (US Department of State 2021). And lastly (although not least), it has now in 2020 agreed to also contribute to the survivors through Covid-19 relief aid (Lewis 2020). Until 2018, Germany has paid out approximately 73.1 billion euros in reparations to the survivors of the Holocaust (and their spouses) (US Department of State 2021).

Lastly, the legal narrative of the federal government is supported by the states inclusion and reliance on Paragraph 130 of its Criminal Code, which criminalizes and punishes hate speech and violence targeted at people because of their national, ethnic, racial and/or religious background. This also includes the trivializing, denying, and/or supporting of the acts and ideologies espoused by the NS regime and other national-socialist organizations/individuals (DeJure 2021). Interestingly, though, especially considering the continuous rise of antisemitism and anti-semitic acts of violence in Germany, critics argue that the language used in this criminal code lacks any clear definitions of antisemitism and provides, therefore, little tools for the German government and law enforcement to curb or limit these acts (Krause-Hinrichs 2020).

The United States - An Abbreviated Timeline

The history of America's relationship to slavery reparations discourse is one that goes a great deal deeper than the absence of any codified compensation standard. The histories of racism, of slavery, of slavery-by-other-names (Blackmon, 2008), and of modern racial inequities in every arena (Alexander, 2010; Kendi, 2016) indelibly mark all of American history. However, American history has not seen concerted, top-down efforts to reckon with that shameful past. Reckoning is a

term used in its broadest possible sense here; we are referring to any level of acknowledgement that the past is, indeed, shameful. Largely, government-level steps in the direction of reckoning thus defined have been met by confusion and resistance, while isolated instances have occurred at the grassroots level. Indeed, we'll present examples we believe are indicative of the disparity between the government level and the grassroots level. It should also be noted that the history of grassroots campaigns for reparations is much longer than the examples listed here; in fact, the immediate post-bellum period saw organized efforts for reparations, led by individuals such as Callie House.

H.R. 40, or the "Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act," has been introduced and reintroduced over the last several decades in the U.S. House of Representatives. It has been introduced into the 117th Congress as it has been in Congressional sessions for over 30 years ([congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov)). It is not yet known whether the legislation will make its way through Congress, but if it does it will meet a President Biden who endorsed the concept of studying reparations during his 2020 campaign (King, 2021). While it is possible that H.R. 40 charts a path through Congress that leads to the sought-after commission, it is notable that non-governmental entities are having discussions about reparations as well. Students at Georgetown University voted in 2019 to impose a fee on themselves to enable a reparations fund in honor of the enslaved people sold by the school early in its history (Jaschik, 2019). In early 2021, Evanston, Illinois' City Council voted to disperse reparations to victims of housing discrimination in the 20th century. Evanston's decision, which would be made effective at least in part by taxes on marijuana products, exposes the multifaceted nature of the shameful American past. The era being reckoned with by Evanston was that of Jim Crow, the continuation of racist actions and policies post-Emancipation. Additionally, the program that was agreed to was very small in scale and scope,

only proposing to provide money specifically for home ownership-related expenses to 16 families (BBC News, 2021).

2. Public Acknowledgements

Germany - Historical Snapshots

Public acknowledgements are found abundant in Germany's federal leadership history. Aside from the unique and quite public Nuremberg Trials, led by the International Military Tribunal, which indicted initially the civilian and military leadership of the NS-regime in 1945, and which trialed and held an additional 100 defendants from all parts of German society accountable for their culpability until 1949, the German Federal Government has not just been given its guilt from the outside by the international community, but it has also actively embraced its guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust through public acknowledgements by the government since shortly after the end of World War II and continues to do so through direct and indirect participation in Jewish life in Germany (Library of Congress 2014).

The first prominent example of a public display of guilt can be identified through Konrad Adenauer's parliamentary speech in September of 1951. Hailed as an important stepping stone in the making of amends towards the victims and the world, Adenauer addresses in this speech his country's shameful past and its need to repent. He states that "Unspeakable crimes have been committed in the name of the German people, which now demand moral and material reparations towards the individual damages, suffered by Jews, as well as towards Jewish property, for which no rightful owner exists anymore" (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung 2021). There are not many examples in human history depicting a government leader recognizing the need for reparations "in

order to alleviate the path towards the spiritual cleansing of endless suffering” (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung 2021).

Two aspects stand out in this speech, which we find are often overlooked in the retelling of this unusual speech. First, Adenauer not only discusses an external form of reparations but he specifically highlights the need to couple the external financial payments with internal re-education. Schools and churches, so Adenauer, were at the forefront of educating the younger generations about their history, the responsibilities taken on, and also a re-embracing of human rights values as laid out by the UN Human Rights Convention onto which West Germany had signed on to. He urged his parliament to safeguard this educational process through the criminalization of hate speech and racist propaganda. Second, his public acknowledgement of the German guilt paired with the planned reparations is couched in between some statements, which white-wash to a degree his speech’s content. He proclaims that the majority of Germans did not participate in the Holocaust and rejected those ideas. Many, he claims, offered their Jewish neighbors assistance - even in light of potential persecution (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung 2021). While there is evidence of resistance movements (albeit small) and individuals resisting the NS leadership, to claim that a vast majority rejected and resisted the NS regime is flatout historical revisions. We have this point enough knowledge and facts about the Holocaust in and outside of Germany to know that the scale of persecution and eradication of the people would have not been possible without many, many bystanders. Adenauer’s speech, though, shapes the way the German nation would want to be seen and how it wants to understand these ‘unspeakable’ crimes within their own territory.

A second notable moment in German leadership remembering and acknowledging is Willy Brandt’s “knee fall of Warsaw”. The German Chancellor, who led the Federal Republic from 1969

to 1974, travelled in 1970 to Poland, as the first German dignitary to do so in the post-War era in order to sign an agreement recognizing the Oder/Neisse border as the official border separating Germany and Poland. Prior administrations had refused to do so, but Brandt had been intent on de-escalating and smoothing out tensions with the East. When touring Warsaw, which included a laying of a wreath in front of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Memorial, Brandt spontaneously fell to his knees, clasping his hands, and remained silent for approximately 30 seconds. Surrounded by many journalists, the image of him kneeling down and paying tribute to history this monument represented made its way around the globe. Witnesses at the time, including members of his entourage and his cabinet, remark on the spontaneity of the moment. Their surprise is visible in the existing pictures of that day (Sontheimer 2020). Famously, Brandt stated in his memoirs that “at the abyss of history and under the weight of millions of murdered people, I did, what humans do, when language fails one” (Brandt 1989: 214).

It is interesting how this moment of an apology was perceived by different audiences. Whereas in the United States, Time Magazine called him “Man of the Year” the following year in their annual recognition (Time Magazine 2019), and Brandt was even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1971 "for paving the way for a meaningful dialogue between East and West" (The Nobel Prize 2021), German discourse centered on the idea of whether Brandt was even ‘allowed’ to take the knee on behalf of the German people (Sontheimer 2020, Tagesschau 2020). A survey conducted at the time showed that only roughly 41% agreed that the ‘knee fall’ was appropriate, while 48% thought it was over the top. In Poland, even with such a large media entourage, the only newspaper reporting on the issue at the time was small, Jiddish paper (Sontheimer 2020, Urzykowski). The rest of the Polish media and the Polish government did not know what to do with this gesture at the time. For the Polish government it was not clear whether the gesture had

been directed at Poles or ‘just’ Jews, which is a problematic conversation on its own. In order to avoid the narrative of ‘the good German’ and thus feeding into the developing narrative in Germany and around the world, the Polish news and the government abstained from addressing the issue at all. In 2000, though, a small placard - in a meta moment of remembrance - was placed next to the Warsaw Uprising Monument to honor Brandt’s gesture all these years ago (Urzykowski 2020).

At the 50th anniversary of Brandt’s ‘knee fall’, the German federal government acknowledged the moment in various initiatives. This includes in a traditional manner a speech by German President Frank Walter Steinmeier on the day of the occasion, ensuring that this German gesture is remembered, and going so far to call it the ‘reconciliation’ between Poland and Germany (Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt Stiftung 2020). But it also includes in maybe a smaller but possibly more effective way the decision by the German Bundesbank to introduce a commemorative 2 Euro coin in December 2020, depicting Brandt and his knee fall (Bundesbank 2020).

While there are not many more notable or even ‘famous’ examples of German apologies, this anniversary celebration is indicative of smaller, continuous work and commitment to the federal narrative German federal leadership has propagated. This includes the participation of Chancellors, ministers, and presidents on days of remembrance (within in Germany and abroad), the continuing legislative commitment of financial reparations, but also their persisting presence at speaking engagements and important occasions for the Jewish community within Germany (see for example: Zentralrat der Juden 2012; Offman 2017; Bundeskanzlerin 2020).

The United States - A Varied Approach

Formal apologies related to slavery have been issued by some states and not others. As of this writing, nine American states have issued such apologies, in addition to numerous municipalities. In H.R. 194 of 2008, the House of Representatives passed a resolution apologizing for not just slavery but also the harmful Jim Crow era that followed Emancipation (Govtrack). The Senate in 2009 issued a similar apology, including the caveat that “[...] nothing in this resolution authorizes, supports, or serves as settlement of any claim against the United States,” (congress.gov). As was previously noted, H.R. 40, which would create a commission to study such issues as apologies and reparations, has been introduced into the current Congress. It also should be noted that joint resolutions were introduced in 2020 that proposed an amendment to close the loophole in the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery except as punishment for a crime (Govtrack). It is this loophole, which is still technically the law of the land in the United States, that enabled the practice of convict leasing to begin in the post-bellum period (Blackmon, 2008).

Over a century and a half after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, the US still lacks cohesive discourse about what caused the bloodiest conflict in its history. Indeed, the scholarly consensus holds that the war was fought over slavery. McNutt (2017: 144) makes this point succinctly: the cause of the war was “the continuation of slavery as a means of maintaining an agrarian economy.” We do not wish to challenge this. However, we do find it absolutely critical to our discussion of how mythologies weigh into accepted discourse to note that the myth of the “lost cause” is a very real component therein. While the complete genesis of this mythology is outside the scope of this conversation, some details should be laid out. As Neiman (2019) describes, the myth of the lost cause within the American context was constructed in the decades following the war, often by the children or grandchildren of the Confederacy as an attempt to make meaning out of the pain of the

loss. One tactic used to do so was the post-hoc designation of “states’ rights” as the cause of the war; as Loewen and Sebesta (2010) explain, such rationale was not included in secession conventions prior to the war, while references to slavery were. When cast this way, the Civil War can be mythologized as a conflict in which an overbearing federalized North imposed its will upon a militarily inferior but heroic South (McNutt, 2017: 144).

This mythic reconstruction is an accepted narrative in the United States. One needs look no further than the U.S.’ citizenship test, in which national hopefuls are asked about different facets of American history and governance. As an answer to the question about what caused the Civil War, the government accepts three answers as correct: slavery, economic reasons, and states’ rights (USCIS). And, of course, this is critical to our analysis in that it implies a shaky basis for reckoning; without consensus that the Civil War was fought over the oppressive institution of slavery, honest conversations about reparations discourse are harder to come by. This is especially true as the “states’ rights” narrative is accepted in the context of education in certain parts of the country. And, as our argument privileges the power of education to propagate nationalist mythologies, a brief examination of American educational guidelines is in order.

The United States largely lacks consistent frameworks for primary and secondary education. Standardized testing tends to vary and requirements are thought of differently state to state. State education departments have considerable flexibility in choice of textbooks, for instance, which significantly shapes the learning outcome of students and pedagogy of educators. The federal government’s role is quite minimal, targeting funding and providing a support system for the state and local governments (US Department of Education). Nationalism scholarship emphasizes the importance of education systems in transmitting the dominant national narrative.

The U.S. education system complicates this simple logic by providing states, counties, and municipalities influence over that narrative.

In terms of teaching difficult history specifically, the U.S. lacks a consistent social studies curricular standard. What is taught in the broadest terms is decided on a state by state basis, while the more specific pedagogical aspects are often decided on at the local level. The inconsistency inherent to this process was exposed by a CBS news investigation (Duncan et. al, 2020) in what we argue is a very convincing manner:

“During the state standards analysis, CBS News found that seven states do not directly mention slavery in their state standards and eight states do not mention the civil rights movement. Only two states mention white supremacy, while 16 states list states' rights as a cause of the Civil War.”

3. The Memorial Landscape

Remembering through memorials in Germany

The memorial landscape in Germany dedicated to the crimes and victims of the Holocaust has changed over time. Whereas early on in the 1950s and 1960s little was done to reckon with one's own history, the 1970s brought about a new wave of memorials, which was only accelerated after the reunification of West and East Germany (Jaeger 2017). According to the Federal institution for political education data base, there are currently (April 2021) 456 remembrance sites in Germany for locations of perpetration and for victims of the Holocaust. These sites represent places in which ‘the Holocaust took place’, such as concentration camps, the Wannsee Conference House, the Nuremberg Rally grounds, SA and Gestapo prisons, etc. Some of these places offer opportunities for schools or interested individuals/groups to engage in extra-curricular education

activities, which include tours of the sites but also pedagogical reflections on the matter of the Holocaust and remembrance (BpB 2021).

The database records 130 official monuments/statues/placards, which remind those who visit these places or stumble upon them about victim groups and the Holocaust in general. They vary in their 'artistic' depiction. Some like the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe are hard to miss due to their size and placement within the context of the city. Others are more subtle due to their size and placement. The Invisible Memorial in Saarbruecken, for instance, is located in front of the square of a castle, which was used by the NS-regime as a Gestapo prison and office space. In the early 1990s under the guidance of a university professor (initially) and then later on by the city, students removed bricks from the square, inscribing the names of Jewish cemeteries on the brick's bottom side and placing them back into the square bottom down. If one does not pay attention to the placards on the building's wall, one - so the intention - is walking on the memory of Jewish citizens. The memorial is reminiscent of the Stumbling Stone project, which is a privately funded initiative across Europe reminding those, who pay attention, of the lives lived and lost during the Holocaust throughout cities in Europe.

Additionally, as part of the remembrance site landscape, a vast amount of Dokumentation Centers and museums exist within Germany, archiving and documenting the events of the NS regime. These include topic specific archives, such as the Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma in Heidelberg or the Gedenkstätte für die Opfer der Euthanasie Morde in Brandenburg an der Havel; or they depict more geographically relevant issues within the context of their city, such as the Topographie des Terrors in Berlin or the NS Dokumentationszentrum in Munich with its focus on the role of Munich in the rise of the NS regime. All of these also include an educational component, in which tours, lectures, and activities can be requested and conducted

by the pedagogical staff of these sites. While some of them exist outside of a specific ‘Holocaust’ site, many are placed and located in a meaningful context regarding the cities connection and history to the Holocaust and its machinery.

Germany’s remembrance culture is federally structured in its administration and its finances. Based on its principle of ‘Kulturhoheit’ the Federal Republic does not have a ‘culture’ ministry at the federal level, rather this competency is left to the devices of the individual states. At the same time, the federal government has a ministry for culture and media, which largely operates as an information and research hub, highlighting strengths and weaknesses in the cultural and media landscape of Germany. During the Covid-19 pandemic it has also been a lifeline for artists in Germany, providing information on relief packages as well as information on the return of the cultural scene in Germany. One of the department’s key projects is the reconditioning and remembering of NS-regime victims. This includes providing information and resources for education purposes but also the publication of frequently conducted analysis of the state of remembrance in Germany and its government.

While the federal government does provide funds and aid for the maintenance of sites or special projects, the funding for these sites, memorials, statues, and placards, which make up the German memorial landscape, is largely left to the municipalities and the states and their respective cultural and educational ministries. With an annual increase in tourists and visitors to these sites from within Germany and abroad, representatives have been continuously urging and complaining to their local political entities that more funds were needed not just for the up keep but the educational responsibility these places are increasingly burdened with. Especially larger and more ‘popular’ are pointing out that they are sometimes the only contact with the material some of their

visitors will have. Adequate funding, therefore, was absolutely necessary and is still lacking (see for example: Deutschlandfunk 2006; FAZ 2020).

Memorial Landscape and Funding in the US

The United States features a patchwork of memorials with a wide range of benefactors. However, Americans are left with a confused (at best) ideological heritage by the focus of the memorials. As the Washington Post (Dvorak, 2017) noted, there are roughly 1500 monuments to the leaders, ideology, and war waged by the Confederacy. There is, of course, also a renewed reckoning with the prominence of lost cause mythology in American public memory, especially as it's compared to the memory of slavery. This renewed dichotomy may be best exemplified by Black poet Caroline Randall Williams' 2020 New York Times op-ed, titled "You Want a Confederate Monument? My Body is a Confederate Monument" which reads in part:

“What is a monument but a standing memory? An artifact to make tangible the truth of the past. My body and blood are a tangible truth of the South and its past. The black people I come from were owned by the white people I come from...”

She writes, of course, in response to claims that those who advocate for a reckoning with slavery that may dismantle its physical, Confederate footprint in the South. Her words make tangible the disparity between what is and is not thought of as a memorial, and also begs the question of why the Southern memory that is supposedly under siege is so one-sided. As of this writing, the U.S. lacks official monuments to slavery and the often violent racism that endured after slavery's end. The Equal Justice Initiative has established a National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Alabama, the first memorial in the U.S. to victims of the racial terrorism that occurred post-Reconstruction. This in itself is telling: the myth of the lost cause that led to copious monuments to the Confederacy

was a widespread phenomenon that still endures; its memorials mark the U.S. landscape in numerous and varied ways.

4. Educational Guidelines Germany

Due to its federal structure, the German education system is legislated to be a competence of the individual states. The Cultural and Educational ministries at the state level oversee the process, including education guidelines for teachers as well as providing educational frameworks (broad syllabi) in the different schooling levels and subjects. These subject and school type/grade type specific frameworks provide in each state a general overview of material that ought to be covered. Yet, the framework is relatively broad and focuses more on pedagogical milestones and personal competencies students should achieve - rather than line-by-line dictations of material that should be focused on. These guidelines also allow for the individualization of the syllabi at the school level, meaning that teachers can make independent choices on what types of book should be read, the lengths it should be covered in, and the nature of how it will be taught. A general comparison is possible but relatively difficult, given the various levels of decision-making in each state.

When it comes to teaching the history of the Holocaust to students at the secondary level, it varies from state to state. The latest two comparative data sets on how history in general and in particular the NS time is taught are from 2006 and 2014, illustrating the lack of focused engagement with the topic of the Holocaust and the NS regime. An analysis shows that the Holocaust is taught as part of a longitudinal engagement with German history, essentially as a historic snapshot in a long line of events, instead of introducing it to students in a closed, focused session.

Generally, the trends among the various states point to an aim of personal growth and learning skills as opposed to confidence with the material/facts. While guilt and responsibility are somehow interwoven in all of the educational frameworks, the explanation as to ‘why’ those feelings might be an appropriate response are missing. Similarly, while all 16 states use the word ‘Holocaust’ only about half of the states engage with the NS regime’s key ideology of antisemitism. Jews are identified as the main victim group, while other victim groups are largely omitted, thus creating large gaps in the understanding. This lack of historical facts pertains also to the way perpetrators are discussed. While individuals are named, rarely does it go beyond that in any of the states (only six states identify the German public as part of the perpetrator pool), thus creating an image of a ‘criminal state’ without any actual agents behind these crimes. At the same time, the comparison shows that discussing the resistance takes up, proportionally to the time spent on this matter, a lot of space, solidifying the illusion that everybody was part of the resistance. Lastly, only a handful of states include a regional component in their history lessons, which means that for a majority of students the subject matter remains abstract and far removed (Geike 2014).

A 2018 status quo report by the research center of the German Parliament on the education system and its handling of the Holocaust reiterates that largely all German students engage at some point in their education career with the topic of the Holocaust (usually grades 8, 9, 10). The report admits that this education, which it describes as historical-political learning, varies due to the federal nature of the education system. It reiterates recommendations made in 2014 at a conference of the states’ cultural ministers, which largely revolve around the concretizing facts and focusing less on general student competencies of critical thinking. Additionally, the conference also encourages its educational systems to incorporate more site visits to places ‘where the Holocaust took place’ (Wissenschaftliche Dienste Deutscher Bundestag 2018). Only half of the states include

a mandatory site visit in their syllabi. Yet, Geike (2014) criticizes the lack of reflection and engagement with the site visit itself amongst the various German states. Students do not get an opportunity to critically reflect and incorporate the visit into what has been learned. Learning, therefore, does not necessarily take place in a meaningful way (Geike 2014).

Findings/Discussion

Each country has its own winding path through the issues of race, law, and shameful pasts. While the details are indeed different, the discourse on reckoning operates in what is effectively two different directions. In the German example, reparations are federal policy.. Germany's discourse is and has long been top down and state sponsored. In the US, every piece of reparations discourse is marked by lingering and widespread inconsistencies about how the past is remembered. We have discussed and portrayed several of their critical differences, but before we elaborate on the discussion of whether a blueprint for reparations exists in Germany, it is useful to lay out some of the arguments as to why reparations are a strategy worthy of centuries of debate.

As Darity Jr. (2008: 656) explains, reparations generally have three aims: “acknowledgement, redress, and closure.” Acknowledgement often entails a formal apology, which the United States, for example, has never issued (state-based apologies are a different matter and will be discussed in more detail in a later section). Redress is a category more closely tied to financial compensation (ibid) and will comprise the heart of our argument. Closure is, of course, more difficult to pin down conceptually, and to attempt to do so is not our prerogative here. However, we show that even within discussions of financial compensation live grey areas that massively complicate national attempts at reckoning.

Germany's reckoning with its shameful past, the Holocaust and its victims, is a top-down, federal initiative covering its bases in its financial, verbal, and memorial reparation tracks. The financial and verbal pillars have been advocated for and implemented since shortly after the liberation of the last concentration camps in Europe and the end of World War II. Initially demanded from the Allied forces, the financial reparations and public acknowledgements have found their way into Germany's legal and normative landscape in the federal government. The German government's decision to pay out millions of euros to the survivors of the Holocaust in light of the Covid-19 pandemic speaks to and illustrates the continuous financial efforts to 'make right' with the victims of the Holocaust. The memorial landscape of Germany, initially slow in the creation of monuments, statues, and plaques after the war, accelerates in the 1980s and finds its pace in the early 2000s. More than 450 official sites of remembrance dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust as well as important locations exist across Germany today. Many of those are enjoying increasingly larger numbers of visitors from Germany and abroad each year.

In light of Germany's extensive attempts and actions of acknowledgment and redress, the increasing numbers of antisemitic violence in Germany coupled with a decreasing level of knowledge of and about the Holocaust amongst Germans is confusing and staggering. In 2020 German police registered 2275 antisemitic acts of violence, which is the highest number since a system was put in place to collect data on these types of crimes. Most of them are connected to right-extreme groups; many of those spewing hate and antisemitism verbally at the many anti-Covid-demonstrations in Germany (Zeit 2021).

We can also identify several recent surveys depicting a decreasing awareness amongst citizens of what the Holocaust is across Europe, including Germany (see for example: Schoen Consulting 2018; Greene 2018). A most recent survey, conducted by the German public

broadcasting channel ZDF, shows and reiterates not just that Germans are not as familiar with the Holocaust or in tune with its remembrance culture as this persistent federal reparations system would imply. While 26 % admit to not knowing much or anything about the Holocaust, 28% of those surveyed actually stated that Germany and Germans should stop their remembrance behavior and instead look forward to the future rather than deal with the NS regime. When it comes to those, who do know something (or anything), many (47%) reiterate a story that had been employed by Adenauer in his apology many year back, namely that most Germans do not have much or any responsibility for the eradication of the Jews during the Holocaust. Further, 81% of those surveyed actually claim that most Germans did not know much or did not know anything about the Holocaust in general back then. Numbers and statements like these put severely into question if and how this federal reparation system is (*not*) reaching its people (Schaeffler 2020).

The United States maintains a much different relationship than does Germany to its shameful pasts. The use of the plural here is deliberate: while a full reckoning with the crimes of America's past is beyond our scope here, it is worth noting that the country has admitted wrongdoing for high profile shameful past actions. Perhaps the most notable example came in 1988. President Reagan signed into law the Civil Liberties Act formally apologizing to every Japanese-American who had been interned during World War II, as well as paying \$20,000 in financial reparations to each of them. This recognition did take over 40 years, but it was finalized. As Henry (2003: 135) argues, that this recognition could occur under a conservative president during a time of serious deficits inspired the continued efforts of Black activists.

Slavery-specific reparations discourse has been present in the US for hundreds of years. Callie House was a former enslaved person who devoted her post-bellum life to the reparations movement (Turner, 2006); she serves as a temporal marker proving that reparations discourse is

not a relatively new phenomena. However, such discourse has been uneven and unpopular (Araujo, 2017; Darity Jr., 2008) over the last 150 years. HR40, as detailed above, has been tabled as unfinished business for years. Henry (2003: 132) suggests that such resistance to any recognition of the role of slavery is the norm, because apologies and reparations would expose “the economic exploitation at the heart of White supremacy that now must be viewed as a part of the American creed...(the) negative response to an apology/reparation is to erase slavery from the national conscience.” We argue that the idea of a national conscience can be accessed more broadly through nationalist mythologies and narratives.

A 2011 Pew Research poll asked a national sample of over 1500 adults several questions, including one about the cause of the Civil War: 48% of respondents answered, “mainly about states’ rights,” while 38% answered “mainly about slavery,” (Heimlich). Over the past several Congresses, the question of whether reparations should be considered at even the most general level has been raised, with no results at the federal level. The opinions of U.S. citizens have also been polled in this regard. Gallup in 2019 found that the percentage of national adults believing the U.S. should make cash payments to descendants of slavery was 29%; still a minority, but higher than the previously polled number of 14% in 2002 (Younis). We would encourage further research and polling to ask this question in 2021, with America’s 2020 racial reckoning taken into consideration.

Our argument privileges education as the inception points for national narratives. As we see, there is a wide range of variation among states regarding how difficult history is approached in school settings – both in Germany and the United States. A very real consequence of varied approaches to their respective pasts has resulted in multiple official national narratives; recall, of course, that cohesive national identity relies on a shared historical mythology.

Whereas financial, verbal, and memorial reparations are privy to the federal government, the German education system is decentralized. The 16 individual states, while in conversation with each other, operate separately, deciding on their syllabi and pedagogical frameworks as the education ministers see fit. Our findings on the German education system illustrate that the Holocaust, World War 2, and remembrance culture in general have become less and less prevalent in German schools. Instead of focusing on this specific time period, this particular unit is largely taught in linear succession, meaning that it is ‘just’ part of a long line of German events. Similarly, the focus on perpetrators and victims is diminishing, whereas the highlighting of resistance fighters is embellished, which ultimately imply large scale anti-NS sentiments, which is factually not correct, but then transpires into a general understanding (see survey results discussed above). The understanding and knowledge of Germans about the Holocaust at the time is also not discussed or addressed, which hinders the development of understanding one’s historic responsibility (and guilt) in this process, meaning that the ‘redress’ aspect of reparations falls behind.

In the US, one of the most troubling points of contention involves different beliefs about the causes of the Civil War, even as academic historians have long agreed that slavery was the cause. Textbooks provide a good proxy for information imparted, and we will show that textbooks vary heavily by region on this point. And the rhetorical distinctions between “slavery” and “states’ rights,” for instance, are critically important. Divergent narratives of the Civil War have complicated the rest of American history in ways not strictly limited to race relations. The legacy of slavery itself and of Jim Crow-and perhaps more importantly, of entrenched narratives that do not recognize their destruction across generations and centuries-play out in areas as diverse as museum exhibits, literature, redlining, and income inequality.

This varied approach has put the United States at a distinct disadvantage in dealing with its shameful past as compared to Germany. While Germany features a top-down approach to reckoning, with albeit a detached and inconsistent dissemination of Holocaust education to its youngest generations, thus ensuring some sort of knowledge transmitted, the U.S. features a variety of different bottom-up, grassroots initiatives aimed at tackling specific parts of the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, but there is no widespread national cohesion.

On the surface, especially when looking specifically at the financial, verbal, and memorial landscape of Germany, it would suit itself quite well for emulation in the United States. Granted minute issues, such as how to, when does the clock start, and how much, are probably the biggest technical obstacles in the long-overdue endeavour. Yet, little attention is paid to the people and the narrative that is created within them - both in Germany and the United States. Redress does not just happen through bank statements and statues. It happens through a people as well. While passively these measures can be taken in by the people, there is little that Germany has to offer as an active state-to-people blueprint in terms of its narrative making about the Holocaust.

Where the state has the ability to shape its people and to disseminate its knowledge or its attempts at harmonization, to borrow from Gellner, is in the public school system. This is both accurate for Germany and the United States. Yet, Germany, due to its federal system, is bound by its limitations of federal vs. state competencies. And here, we observe a declining trend in knowledge, awareness, and guilt - in short, the people's awareness of the need for redress is missing. It is, thus, reshaping a carefully constructed federal narrative. Our work shows that the comparable education system between these two countries demands more attention, because it is the epicenter for the creation of a people and its understanding of itself.

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