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## **The Sounds of World War I: American and British Music on the Battle Front, the Home Fronts, and in the Aftermath of War**

Jill E. Monroe

*Jill Monroe graduated from the EIU master's program in 2018. She is from Decatur, Illinois, and she wrote this paper for Dr. Elder's HIS 5700: World War One seminar. She plans to continue her work in the publishing and editing field.*

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“If peace...only had the music and pageantry of wars,” writer Sophie Kerr once declared, “there'd be no wars.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, war has inspired great music throughout history. Perhaps peacetime deserves a bit more credit than Kerr affords, but her point is well-taken: in times of war, we have seen the creation of classic symphonies and beloved popular songs. But why? Why in times of great destruction come also these great creations? Music, of course, is powerful. It is emotive and can encourage any number of responses from listeners, depending on the artist's or user's intent. That is why music is so interwoven with war—it can be used in many ways to elicit many reactions. On the home front, it can either promote or protest a nation's involvement in war, and when the battle is done, it helps survivors grieve the fallen and memorialize their experiences.

Music played a particularly significant role for British and American soldiers and citizens in World War I. With the music industry rapidly growing in the early twentieth century, the mass production of sheet music and, to a lesser extent, sound recordings ensured that music became a prevalent part of military and civilian life. On the battle front, music helped shape soldiers' perceptions of their wartime mission by stirring visions of military success and by promoting the idea that troops were spreading democracy, especially over a tyrannical Germany. Music also inspired a negative, dehumanized view of the German enemy by depicting them as barbarians and animals who either needed to be reformed or killed. On the British and American home fronts, music was critical in shaping public opinion of the war. Songs aimed to garner support for the war effort by glorifying service, sacrifice, and patriotism. Songs against the war, on the other hand, focused on peace, the futility of war, and even poked fun at certain government policies. At the end of the war, music became a powerful tool, especially for classical composers, to mourn the dead and give outward expression to the grief caused by such a bloody, devastating war. Studying the music of World War I may not provide body counts or shed any light on military battle plans. By and large, it does little to reveal much about any one specific person, except perhaps the big personalities like songwriters George Cohan or Irving Berlin. But it does reveal the attitudes and values to which people, both in and out of the military, were exposed and how those attitudes and values evolved over the course of the war. Additionally, it reveals the cultural weight that Britain and America put on song as a means of coping with the experience of war in the 1910s.

### **Historiography and Methodology**

The topic of music in World War I has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. Given the current dominance of cultural history (for instance, much has been written about the literature that came out of the war), it is all the more puzzling that music has largely been ignored,

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<sup>1</sup> James Charlton, *The Military Quotation Book, Revised for the 21st Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 160.

especially given its power in shaping public opinion of the war. There have been, however, a few notable historians who have tackled the issue. In the 1980s, J. E. Vacha looked at Americans' reactions to German classical music in "When Wagner was Verboten," arguing that tolerance was an immediate casualty of America's entrance into the war, evidenced by cruel treatment of German-American singers and composers, and the dismissal of classical German works for French and Italian ones.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until the 2010's, likely because of the war's centenary, that historians like Kate Kennedy, John Mullen, and Don Tyler began more fully to address the role of music in the war.

Kennedy, like Vacha, was most interested in the role of classical music. In her 2014 article, "A Music of Grief," Kennedy showed how classical music transformed over the course of the war from works of patriotic spirit to works that mourned loss and destruction. She focused on such English composers as Edward Elgar, Ivor Gurney, Patrick Hadley, and Arthur Bliss, whose symphony *Morning Heroes* grappled with trench warfare.

John Mullen departed from the fascination with classical music and instead looked to popular music and live performance in *The Show Must Go On! Popular Song in Britain during the First World War* (2015). He was less concerned with the creators of music and more interested in the "ordinary people"<sup>3</sup> who flocked to music halls, minstrel shows, and pantomime musical comedy shows in an effort "to maintain some continuity with life before the war."<sup>4</sup> He finds that live shows provided opportunities for working class British citizens to escape the pressures of wartime living, but also to engage in a dialogue about the war, as it was the subject of many popular songs.

Don Tyler also focuses on popular music, though he does briefly consider classical music and the emerging jazz scene that would come to dominate the post-war years of the 1920s. While he has a short section on British musical contributions to the war, Tyler primarily writes from an American perspective and, thus, focuses on American music. He presents hundreds of songs, analyzing some more deeply than others. The real strength of Tyler's book is his incorporation of background information, explaining the songs' origins and providing links (when available) to audio sources.

In my contribution, in addition to consulting works by the above historians, I look at music journals and news articles from 1914 to 1918 to examine what people were saying about music, its purpose, and its future as they were living through the upheaval of war. British and American sheet music from the war years, however, have taken up the bulk of my research. I have tried, when possible, to listen to audio recordings of popular songs and classical compositions, but much of my analysis is based on lyrics, which are much more easily accessible.

To situate this argument about the importance of music in World War I, this study begins with a brief discussion of the growing music industry during the war years, which saw an explosion of sheet music and audio recordings. From there, it moves to the role of music on the war front, looking at how soldiers used it to boost morale and encourage them to battle their enemies. The paper will then move to a discussion of the home front and music's ability to stir up feelings of patriotism, nationalism, and hatred of the enemy on one hand, and how it was used in protest and anti-war movements, on the other. This study concludes with a section on music's continued importance after the war, as it helped civilians and ex-combatants memorialize their experiences and honor the fallen.

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<sup>2</sup> J.E. Vacha, "When Wagner Was Verboten: The Campaign Against German Music in World War I," *New York History*, 64, no. 2 (April 1983): 171-188.

<sup>3</sup> John Mullen, *The Show Must Go On! Popular Song in Britain during the First World War* (Dorchester, UK: Henry Ling Limited, 2015), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Mullen, *The Show Must Go On*, 4.

## A Growing Music Industry

As earlier mentioned, music has long been a part of war. In America especially, wartime brought popularity to many songs, from “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “Dixie Land” during the Civil War, all the way up to the explosion of folk music protesting the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s. But music first became truly ubiquitous during World War I, when the commercial music industry started mass producing songs. The circulation of sheet music for piano and vocals reached people all over the United States and Great Britain. In the United States alone, 35,000 songs were registered for copyright during World War I.<sup>5</sup> One could easily purchase sheet music to add to their collection at home. Most homes at the time of the war, particularly middle and upper-class homes, had a piano (usually a grand piano in upper-class homes, whereas the upright model was a more affordable option for most people). As radio was still in its infancy, people would gather around the piano to listen to music or sing along.<sup>6</sup>

Access to acoustically recorded music was growing, as well. At least 200 songs were recorded and distributed commercially in the United States by the “big three” firms of Edison, Victor, and Columbia, as well as smaller companies, and in Great Britain by Decca and Gramophone.<sup>7</sup> These recordings could be bought and taken home to be played on a mechanical playback device, such as a gramophone, Victrola, or phonograph (all playback devices that differed only slightly in design).<sup>8</sup> With this incredible growth in availability and popularity, music became one of the most prominent features in British and American life.

## Music on the Battle Front

Given music's popularity and its increasingly accessible nature, it is not surprising that music followed soldiers to war and played a major role in military life. In a 1916 edition of London's *The Musical Herald*, Captain T. R. Mayne of the 15<sup>th</sup> Hampshire Regiment wrote about the army's incorporation of music into its activities and, in fact, into its very makeup. “Each battalion,” he informs his readers, “is now equipped with one or more bands, and although more-or-less self-trained, they are nevertheless a credit to their comrades and to the great cause in which they are enlisted.”<sup>9</sup> While at least one band was standard, the average was three, according to Mayne: a drum and fife, a bugle band, and a brass band. Despite the attention and organization devoted to instrumental music, however, less attention was given to vocal music. Still though, according to Mayne, dedicated individuals formed choirs with fellow soldiers and devotedly spent their leisure time practicing vocal music, which he accredits with “enlivening the spirits of the soldiers.”<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, morale-boosting is arguably music's most important contribution on the battle front. A lively inspiring tune could lift the spirits of weary, tired, and homesick troops. Amidst the chaos and destruction of war, singing had strong therapeutic value, releasing soldiers' energies into music, while reminding them why they were fighting and promoting visions of success. For instance, Harry Castling and Harry Carlton's “The Tanks that Broke the Ranks out in Picardy” drew on Allied victories to uplift and encourage British troops. The lyrics imagine British tanks doing the

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<sup>5</sup> John Roger Paas, *America Sings of War: American Sheet Music from World War I* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), ix.

<sup>6</sup> John Druessedow, “Popular Songs of the Great War: Background and Audio Resources,” *Notes* 65, no. 2 (2008): 366.

<sup>7</sup> Druessedow, “Popular Songs of the Great War,” 365.

<sup>8</sup> Druessedow, “Popular Songs of the Great War,” 366-367.

<sup>9</sup> T. R. Mayne, “War Music in the New Armies,” *The Musical Herald*, 814 (1916), 16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

“Caterpillar Crawl” and terrorizing German troops. One verse even sees a tank's claw reach out for a ginger-haired colonel and “[take] him for a joyride ’round Picardy.”<sup>11</sup>

American troops, too, emphasized victory against the Germans in their songs. Billy Gaston's “I'm All Dressed Up to Kill” celebrates American soldiers' efforts to defeat the “Huns”:

When we're in the thickest of the fray,  
Mister Hun will take the count that day.  
With the wallop we'll be sending  
He'll see stars and stripes unending...

...I'm all dressed up to kill  
A *boche* named Kaiser Bill.  
Oh! The things I'm dressed in will be felt,  
Especially my cartridge belt.  
I'm all dressed up to kill.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, many American popular war songs tell how the American troops will be the ones to “make the Kaiser pay for what he's planned,”<sup>13</sup> to “smash that Hindenburg line / And cross the River Rhine,”<sup>14</sup> or to “Drop bombs on Germany / Just for the sake of democracy.”<sup>15</sup> In “The Kaiser's Dinner,” American soldiers even threaten to “forcibly feed” Kaiser Wilhelm with “shrapnel salad and cannon seed.”<sup>16</sup> The explicitly violent nature of many of the era's popular songs reflect the brutality of war, which may seem ironic, since their purpose was to boost morale. But the coupling of violence against the German army with the glorification of the homeland, whether Great Britain or the United States, was critical to keeping the troops motivated. These songs, which were often sung in a group, encouraged comradeship among fellow soldiers and helped in the unfortunate, but arguably necessary task of desensitizing the men at war. They encouraged an us versus them mentality, in which the Allied powers would destroy the German military and replace tyranny with liberty.

The war's successful outcome, the music suggested to the soldiers, was in their ability to defeat and conquer the brutish, animalistic Germans. Just as this encouraged soldiers' active participation—reminding them to put in their all when at battle—it also made it easier to fight against an enemy who was less than human. In his 1918 “The Beast of Berlin,” for instance, John Clayton Calhoun repeatedly refers to the German troops as swine, as beasts that need to be hunted, even claiming that, “Of all the animals I ever knew / Of all the beasts within the zoo,” the “Beast of Berlin” is the worst and most dangerous.<sup>17</sup> In singing about these supposedly wild Germans whose own nature, and certainly whose government, could not be trusted, American and British troops felt their own superiority and the desire to showcase it. Music, then, had the power to excite the soldiers—to rile them up, give them a mission, and bring purpose to the horrific violence they witnessed and perpetuated—and it helped feed their desire to defeat Germany.

## Music on the Home Front

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<sup>11</sup> Harry Castling and Harry Carlton, “The Tanks that Broke the Ranks out in Picardy” (Melbourne: Dinsdale's, 1916), accessed October 15, 2017, [nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an5445360](http://nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an5445360).

<sup>12</sup> Billy Gaston, “I'm All Dressed Up to Kill,” in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 202.

<sup>13</sup> Walt J. Jansen and Will P. Jansen, “We'll All Make Billy Pay the Bill He Owes,” in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 240.

<sup>14</sup> E. Clinton Keithley, “On the Sidewalks of Berlin,” in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 236.

<sup>15</sup> George C. Cohn and Walter Smith, “Keep Them Dropping,” in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 229.

<sup>16</sup> C. Guy Wakefield and H. B. Murtagh, “The Kaiser's Dinner,” in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 234.

<sup>17</sup> John Clayton Calhoun, “The Beast of Berlin (We're Going to Get Him),” in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 225.

Music was every bit as, if not more, important on the home front than it was on the battle front. British and American civilians engaged with the war effort in many ways, not the least of which was through singing and listening to music. Popular songs were used in both protest and support of the war. For Britain, support came early, but anti-war sentiment came almost as quickly. In America, on the other hand, popular music mostly followed President Wilson's evolving stance on American involvement, from encouraging neutrality to active engagement on the side of the Allies. In either case, whether pro-war or anti-war, music had the potential in both nations to significantly influence public opinion.

When Great Britain joined the war in August 1914, government and military officials found it necessary not only to garner public approval of the war, but to begin recruiting the nation's men into the fight. Consequently, British songs from the early stages of the war glorify military service and the sacrifices made by those at home. Paul Rubens' "Your King and Country Want You," for instance, calls men to service with promises of love and devotion from their countrymen, by appealing to a sense of tradition and history. "Come and join the forces/as your fathers did before."<sup>18</sup> Charles Collins and Fred Leigh's "Now You've Got Yer Khaki On," certainly bawdier than Rubens' tune, tempts men to join the army by associating military service with sexual appeal. Sung from the perspective of a once-allusive young woman, she is no longer able to resist the new army recruit. "Now, I do feel so proud of you, I do honor bright/I'm going to give you an extra cuddle tonight,"<sup>19</sup> she assures him when he shows up in his khaki uniform.

The promise of girls and glory could not keep spirits up on the British home front, however, and they quickly faded as the war's body count grew. The First Battle of Ypres in the late autumn of 1914 left 7,960 soldiers dead and 29,562 wounded, and British civilians were already becoming disillusioned with the war.<sup>20</sup> The rapid decline of wartime fervor affected popular music. John Mullen notes that the Francies & Day publication of 1915's greatest hits featured not one single recruitment song, a drastic change from 1914. Songs started to take on a more critical perspective, if not always of the war itself, then certainly of wartime policies. As Parliament debated the conscription bill in 1916, "Conscription on the Brain" became a favorite song among music-hall audiences.

Asquith take back your bill  
It really makes us ill  
For we are all real volunteers today, sir  
We are our good king's own  
In flesh and blood and bone  
And we're going to wipe out the blessed Kaiser<sup>21</sup>

Though this song is relatively tame and clearly demonstrates a still-present dedication to defeating Germany, another music hall favorite, Ernest Hastings "The Military Representative," is harsher. Using comedy to criticize conscription, the song tells of a 91-year-old, dead man who is refused exemption from being conscripted. A tribunal talking to the man's widow tells her:

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<sup>18</sup> Paul Rubens, "Your King and Country Want You," (London: Chappell Music, 1914), accessed October 23, 2017, <http://firstworldwar.com/audio/yourkingandcountrywantyou.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Collins and Fred Leigh, "Now You've Got Yer Khaki On," (1915), accessed October 24, 2017, <https://monologues.co.uk/musichall/Songs-N/Now-Youve-Got-Khaki.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, 167.

What say, ma'am, he's in heaven now?  
Well you just let him know  
I'm sending a Sergeant to fetch him back  
For of course he's got to go!<sup>22</sup>

As Britons went from using music to praise the war effort and promote recruitment to using it to criticize the government and show their disillusionment, Americans went through an opposite trajectory. Popular American music from 1914-1918 reveals that attitudes toward the war moved largely from condescension to enthusiasm. When Europe went to war in 1914, Americans held firm on their decision not to get involved. Peace and self-control became common themes in popular songs, and lyricists often contrasted a civilized United States with a brutal, excitable Europe. W. R. Williams, for example, was inspired to write "We Stand for Peace While Others War" after President Wilson appealed to the nation "to remain neutral in thought and deed."<sup>23</sup> In his call for nonviolent arbitration, Williams admonishes Europe for setting progress back a thousand years before warning that:

There's nothing worth the toll of life,  
Before or since the flood:  
Is so-called "honor" worth the price,  
When rivers flow with blood?<sup>24</sup>

Questioning the civility, even the humanity, of the European aggressors is typical of these early songs. Famed composer Irving Berlin paints the belligerents as worse than the devil in 1914's "Stay Down Here Where You Belong." In that song, the devil's son complains that hell is too hot, and he wants to go up on earth to "have a little fun."<sup>25</sup> But the devil advises him to

Stay down here where you belong  
The folks who live above don't know right from wrong  
To please their kings, they've all gone out to war  
And not a one of them knows what he's fighting for...

Kings up there, they don't care  
For the mothers who must stay home,  
Their sorrows to bear.  
Stay at home, don't you roam.  
Although it's warm down below; you'll find it's warmer up there.<sup>26</sup>

Berlin clearly aimed for humor, but the message was clear: the war in Europe is hell on earth. It is a scene of chaos and confusion, where leaders lack compassion, and the people must suffer for reasons they do not even understand. America, like the devil's son, must stay out of the conflict.

Motherhood, as demonstrated in Berlin's song, is a recurring feature of anti-war and protest music. Indeed, what could be more powerful than the image of a heartbroken, war-weary mother? Songs like Will Dillon's "Don't Take My Darling Boy Away," and Louise Small's "Lay Down Your

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<sup>22</sup> Mullen, *The Show Must Go On!*, 168.

<sup>23</sup> Paas, *America Sings of War*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> W. R. Williams, "We Stand for Peace While Others War," in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Irving Berlin, "Stay Down Here Where You Belong," in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Arms” very explicitly play on maternal emotions, featuring weeping mothers who have been forced to give their sons to the war. Another favorite, Alfred Bryan and Al Piantadosi’s “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to be a Soldier” (see Figure 1), was in the top 20 of American favorites during most of 1915, even reaching the number one spot in March and April of that year.<sup>27</sup> The mother featured in this song mourns a son she has lost in battle, but she thinks not only of her dead child, but also of other grieving mothers, even in the enemy nations. She asks, “Who dares to place a musket on his shoulder/To shoot some other mother’s darling boy?”<sup>28</sup> As a mourning mother, she is depicted as being able to see the common humanity, even among supposed enemies. Bryan, the song’s lyricist, uses this notion of maternal compassion to draw attention to the hollowness of any perceived success that victory might bring:

What victory can cheer a mother’s heart,  
 When she looks at her blighted home?  
 What victory can bring her back  
 All she cared to call her own?  
 Let each mother answer  
 In the years to be,  
 “Remember that my boy belongs to me!”<sup>29</sup>

In addition to portraying the futility of war, the song’s lyrics offered a powerful message to mothers that their voice could help prevent future wars. Women, such lyrics affirmed, could use their status as mothers to speak out against the violence and destruction of war.

Tragically, they could not prevent America from entering the war. By 1917, lyricists had begun writing songs with noticeably different perceptions of the ongoing conflict in Europe. Rather than speaking generally of Europeans as uncivilized for resorting to combat instead of diplomatic negotiations, newer songs abandoned Wilson’s call for neutrality in thought and deed and more clearly demonstrated Americans’ Allied bias. For instance, Daisy Theresa Meyer’s “We Hail from the U.S.A.” imagines:

When the Hohenzollerns meet the fate  
 Of Romanoff of Russia  
 We’ll shout “Hurrah” and say “Amen”  
 To the government of Prussia.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, America’s revolutionary spirit guided growing acceptance of the war, as seen in Herbert Moore and W. R. Williams’ “America To-Day,” which applauds past heroes like

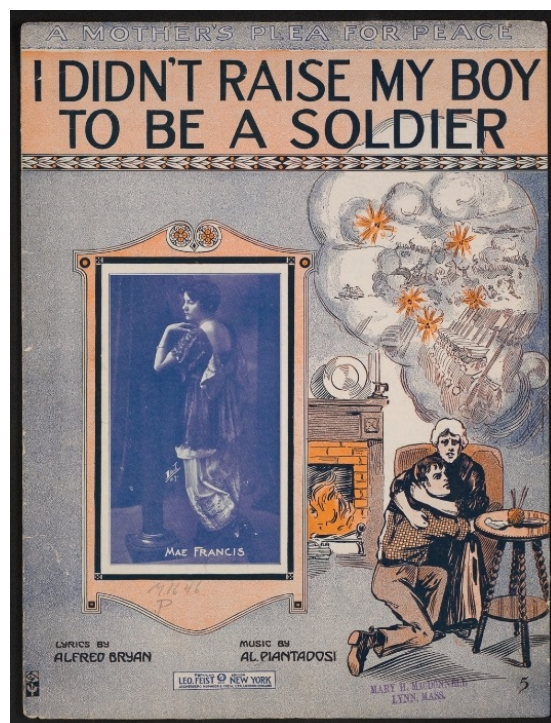


Figure 1 – The sheet music for Bryan and Piantadosi’s hit song “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” describes the song as “a mother’s plea for peace” and features the image of a mother cradling her grown son as visions of warfare loom overhead. Image taken from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002600251>.

<sup>27</sup> Paas, *American Sings of War*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Alfred Bryan and Al Piantadosi, “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to be a Soldier.” in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred Bryan and Al Piantadosi, “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to be a Soldier.”

<sup>30</sup> Daisy Theresa Meyer, “We Hail from the U.S.A.,” in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 95.



Washington and assures the world that the “mem’ry of the Revolution”<sup>31</sup> remains a strong force in American life. Mary Earl’s “We Hear You Calling” (shown in Figure 2) celebrates the Marquis de Lafayette and makes the following promise:

Lafayette, we hear you calling,  
 Lafayette, ‘tis not in vain  
 That the tears of France are falling.  
 We will help her to smile again,

For a friend in need is a friend indeed.  
 Do not think we shall ever forget.  
 Lafayette, we hear you calling  
 And we’re coming, Lafayette.<sup>32</sup>

Evoking the French hero of the American Revolution, Earl’s song drummed up support for the war by creating images of a glorious past. But her song also reminded the country of its unpaid debt to France. Americans could justify their changed attitude toward the war by claiming that providing aid to France in the Great War was America’s first step in honoring French aid during the American Revolution.



Mary Earl’s “Lafayette (We Hear You Calling)” pays tribute to the Revolutionary hero and promises to repay America’s debt to France. Images taken from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2013562255>.

Americans and Britons both used popular music to demonstrate patriotism, but they did so with classical music as well. Germany has had a long history of accomplished classical composers,

<sup>31</sup> Herbert Moore and W. R. Williams, “America To-Day,” in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 92.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Earl, “Lafayette (We Hear You Calling),” in *America Sings of War*, ed. Paas, 160.



which became problematic for the Allies in the war, since classical music remained a common genre to listen to and enjoy. Extreme anti-German sentiment often overrode appreciation of the music, though. In November 1917, the New York Metropolitan Opera Company, under instruction from its Board of Directors, canceled almost one-third of its upcoming season's repertoire.<sup>33</sup> All German-language productions were removed from the schedule, including Beethoven's *Fidelio* and nine works by Wagner. Italian and French operas replaced the German compositions for the Met to continue its fall season. Reaction to the Met's decision was at first mixed, notes J. E. Vacha. But ultimately, "emotion was in ascendant over reason,"<sup>34</sup> as American opera-goers cemented their hatred of the enemy and his culture.

Throughout the war, American and British musicians took to music reviews and journals to ponder what such vitriol toward German culture would mean for the future of music. Again, they had mixed feelings. Some, like Walter Spalding, felt that abandoning such a heavy reliance on German compositions could only benefit America, a nation whose music had suffered from the "dwarfing influence" of Europe.<sup>35</sup> At last American composers, he felt, would have the opportunity to cultivate their own style of music that would express the ideas and characteristics of the United States. Others, like English music critic Ernest Newman, worried about the anti-German attitude. He explained that, politics aside, Germany had given much of their genius to humanity. "How," he asked, "can we contemplate without alarm and regret a possible set-back to the culture that, be its faults what it may, has given us Wagner and Brahms, and Strauss, and Hugo Wolf?"<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately for Newman and those who hoped music could transcend the politics of war, music, as has been shown, remained instrumental in promoting patriotism, nationalism, and explicitly anti-German feelings.

## The Aftermath of War: Music and Mourning

When an armistice was declared in November 1918, military operations ended and the war officially drew to a close. But the world was only beginning to face the high death tolls and the terrible devastation left in its wake. Those who saw battle or lost loved ones to the war sought solace in music. Song became a tool for making sense of and expressing the war's horrors and grieving the dead. In "A Music of Grief," historian Kate Kennedy points out that post-war classical music "emerged contemporaneously with the far more widely known war testimonies and novels of the 1920s and 1930s."<sup>37</sup> As she indicates, much of this classical music did not reach as wide an audience as the literature that came out of the war and, consequently, has been largely obscured in the historiography of World War I. Yet, compositions by musicians like Ralph Vaughn Williams, Arthur Bliss, and John Foulds are important records of the war experience.

British composer Ralph Vaughn Williams, who had served in the Royal Army Medical Corps, wrote his *Pastoral Symphony* in response to the sights and sounds he had experienced while in service. Of the composition, Vaughn Williams explained, "It's really wartime music—a great deal of it incubated when I used to go up night after night in the ambulance wagon at Ecoivres."<sup>38</sup> Indeed, it was not uncommon for composers to incorporate sounds into their music that attempted to reflect the sound of bombs, aircraft, and general chaos. As Tyler rightly notes, "Music about the war was

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<sup>33</sup> Vacha, "When Wagner was Verboten," 175.

<sup>34</sup> Vacha, "When Wagner was Verboten," 175.

<sup>35</sup> Walter R. Spalding, "The War in Its Relation to American Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1918): 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Newman, "The War and the Future of Music," *The Musical Times, 1904-1995*, 55 (2014): 571.

<sup>37</sup> Kate Kennedy, "A Music of Grief: Classical Music and the First World War," *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (2014): 380.

<sup>38</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams quoted in Tyler, *Music of the First World War*, 225.

disturbing, unstructured, and sometimes frightening.”<sup>39</sup> No one can know for certain what battle is like unless they have gone through it. But in sharing their experiences through song, musicians could at least give civilians a sense of what it was like.

Other composers used their talent to mourn. John Foulds wrote his *World Requiem* for the Royal Albert Hall’s 1923 armistice celebrations.<sup>40</sup> In its effort to honor the dead, Foulds’ composition utilized 20 texts, religious and philosophical, from all around the world and required an astonishing 1,200 performers. Arthur Bliss’s *Morning Heroes* was much less cumbersome, but no less emotional. Bliss dedicated his symphony to his brother, who had died in the war. The work’s impactful final movement, Kennedy mentions, is meant to symbolize dawn.<sup>41</sup> The notion, of course, is that after the blackness—the night—of the war years, morning had finally come, but at the expense of the hundreds of thousands of young men who gave their lives in service to their countries.

## Conclusion

Given the scope of World War I, perhaps it should not be entirely surprising that music has been largely sidelined for more immediately obvious approaches to analyzing the war. And yet, it *is* surprising. As Kennedy noted, war-themed novels and poetry from the years of and immediately following the war have been extensively studied and their popularity well documented. Music—classical and especially popular—offers insights as rich into the cultural and social dynamics of nations at war as literature. Fortunately, this is becoming more evident as historians like Don Tyler, John Mullen, and Kate Kennedy have worked to shed light on the significance of wartime music.

This brief study contributes to the discussion by focusing on battlefield and home front music of Great Britain and the United States, as well as post-war classical compositions. On the battle front, British and American soldiers used popular music to keep their spirits up, cement their dedication to democratic ideals and the spreading of liberty, and to demonize and dehumanize their German enemies. Music was also used to shape perceptions of the enemy on the home fronts through lyrics that portrayed them as uncivilized aggressors. Additionally, on the home fronts, music encouraged enlistment into the army and sacrifice by family and loved ones for the greater good of the nation. However, music was also a tool with which to express criticism and grievances, particularly in the U.S. before 1916 and in Great Britain after 1914. Popular music from 1914-1918 reveals the different values and attitudes people were exposed to regarding the war and is, therefore, valuable source material. Classical music, too, must have its place in the historiography, as many compositions were written by men who had experienced the war firsthand and used their music to express what they had seen and the loss they had felt. Their music became tools of mourning for the war’s survivors and should not be ignored.

There is still much to be said about the place of music in World War I. The field is expanding in this area, but there is plenty of room to fill before we get a complete and fully comprehensive understanding of how music shaped the war and how the war shaped music. Hopefully the increased interest due to the centenary has not completely passed, and historians will continue to study this important topic.

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<sup>39</sup> Tyler, *Music of the First World War*, 224.

<sup>40</sup> Kennedy, “A Music of Grief,” 383.

<sup>41</sup> Kennedy, “A Music of Grief,” 383.

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# How Foolish Decisions by the United States Led to the Berlin Airlift and How Prudent Ones Turned the Situation to Their Advantage

Magnus Münzinger

*Magnus Münzinger is an exchange student from Nördlingen, Germany. He wrote this paper for Professor Edmund Wehrle's HIS 3800: American Diplomatic History. After spring semester 2018, Mr. Münzinger will return to Germany to continue his education at Julius-Maximilians Universität Würzburg.*

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## Introduction

“Today is the day when the people of Berlin raise their voices. [...] You people of the world! You people in America and England, France and Italy! Look at this city and realize that you mustn’t abandon this people, can’t abandon them!”<sup>1</sup> West Berlin Mayor Ernst Reuter was concerned. When he gave that speech on September 9, 1948, the roads from the western territories of Germany to Berlin had been blocked for almost three months by the Soviet Union. No truck could supply the inhabitants of the Western part of the old capitol of Germany with food and coal.<sup>2</sup> How could it come that far? The Soviet Union took a drastic step when it cut off access to the city, but in any conflict usually more than one party is responsible: this situation was no exception. After 1945 the Americans made some foolish decisions that led directly to the Berlin crisis, which otherwise maybe could have been prevented. Later they prudently were able to turn the situation around with the Berlin Airlift. The Berlin people survived and the western sectors did not fall into the hands of the Soviets, because of smart strategy. During 1948 and 1949 the United States managed to change a bad initial situation, which it partially caused, to their advantage and thereby win the first “battle” in the Cold War.

## Rising Tensions

Shortly after World War II, tensions between the victorious nations grew. After its capitulation, Germany had been divided into four occupation zones, each held by one of the “Siegermächte.” The western territories were occupied by the British and the United States, while the Soviet Union was responsible for eastern Germany. Eventually, France would also get a zone in the West. Those agreements had been made in a series of conferences, most importantly the ones in Yalta, which had been held between Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin; then later at Potsdam, between Harry S. Truman, Stalin, Churchill, and Clement Atlee (who succeeded Churchill). Directly after the war, Berlin was controlled by the Russians, but the Allies agreed on splitting up the capitol among themselves, even though the city was over 100 miles deep in Soviet occupied territory. In July and August 1945, the western Allies started occupying their sectors. An agreement the Soviets pushed through was that each part of Berlin should be supplied by its respective allied occupant. The agreement caused problems for the Americans, British and French, as they had to transport food and other essential goods into their zones, a problem the Soviets did not have. They could provide their sector with the products from the surrounding agricultural Brandenburg, which they had effectively cut off from the other Allies.<sup>3</sup> After the Yalta

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<sup>1</sup> Christain Härtel, *Berlin: A Short History* (Berlin: Be.Bra Verlag, 2016), 56.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Roger G. Miller, *To Save a City: The Berlin Airlift 1948-1949* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 1-3.

conference, the relationship between the Soviet and the western states deteriorated. The United States tried to contain the communist expansion and the USSR boycotted the Marshall Plan. In 1947 the eastern powers claimed that the Allies were violating the Potsdam agreement, while the Westerners built up a separate, more and more independent capitalist West-Germany (or bizonia, a combination of the British and U.S. zones, later joined by the French zone). The permanent splitting of Germany became apparent, which caused the Soviets to claim that Berlin could no longer be the capitol of the entire country.<sup>4</sup>

## Start of the Blockade

The looming crisis manifested itself in 1948. Negotiations concerning a joint currency between the western Allies and the USSR had failed, and the Soviet representatives walked out of the Allied Control Council.<sup>5</sup> The Westerners decided to create a new currency and announced it on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1948.<sup>6</sup> Two days later, the Deutsche Mark was introduced in West-Germany, but not in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> Especially, economic advisor (and later chancellor) Ludwig Erhard advocated the abolition of the Reichsmark and the switch to the Deutsche Mark, which should help the struggling German economy and counter inflation. The introduction of a new currency without having made an agreement with the Soviets before, was one of the foolish decisions made by the Americans, as the reform played a huge role in the emergence of the Berlin Blockade. The consequences of that move could and should have been predicted. The old Reichsmark became worthless in the western zones, if not traded for new Deutsche Mark, which could have caused a flood of the depreciating currency into the eastern zone.<sup>8</sup> As a counter, the Soviets then announced its own currency, the Ostmark, on June 22.<sup>9</sup> To stop Reichsmark from flooding into their territories, the Soviets halted all traffic from West-Germany into the whole of Berlin.<sup>10</sup> On that exact day, the blockade of the city by the Soviets began.<sup>11</sup> For experts in national economics, this effect could not have been completely surprising, therefore it was either a foolish decision or a high risk. To be fair though, even if the circumstances suggested it, financial reasons were secondary for the forced segregation of the city. It was rather a struggle for the upper hand in Berlin and consequently, Germany. Ernst Reuter, former mayor of West Berlin, summed up the situation by saying that the one who controls the currency gains power over the territory. Even though Berlin was not of strategic importance, the symbolism it conveyed was not to be underestimated.<sup>12</sup> The currency reform may not have been the most important reason for the blockade, but it certainly was the flash point.

After the Soviets had made their move by stopping every ground traffic from the west to the city, the United States had to decide how to handle the situation. Berlin was cut off from supplies—the situation was critical. The decision lay with U.S. President Harry Truman and his administration. In the end, they were thinking of the bigger picture, which encouraged prudence. They knew that

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<sup>4</sup> History.com Staff, “Berlin Blockade,” <http://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/berlin-blockade>, accessed December 2, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Härtel, *Berlin*, 55f.

<sup>6</sup> Andrei Cherny, *The Candy Bombers: The Untold Story of the Berlin Airlift and America's Finest Hour* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2008), 235.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, *To Save A City*, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Bryan Taylor, “The Currency Reform that Created Two Germanies,” Global Financial Data, <http://www.globalfinancialdata.com/gfdblog/?p=3142>, accessed December 2, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, *To Save A City*, 18f.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, “The Currency Reform that Created Two Germanies.”

<sup>11</sup> Härtel, *Berlin*, 56.

<sup>12</sup> “Berlinblockade der Sowjetunion und der Luftbrücke der Westmächte,” Lernhelfer, (last modified 2010), <https://www.lernhelfer.de/schuelerlexikon/geschichte/artikel/berlinblockade-der-sowjetunion-und-luftbruecke-der-westmaechte>.

losing Berlin could mean losing Germany entirely.<sup>13</sup> In an article, Russian historians Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov evaluated Joseph Stalin's decisions during the time of the blockade. A reunified Germany under Western control was one of his biggest fears, therefore he wanted to increase his control over the country. With the blockade, he went one step too far and overestimated his position, even though the economic situation in the Soviet territories was better than in the western parts after the war. With their party SED and the boycott of the Marshall Plan, the Soviets tried to gain control over Berlin. Stalin distanced himself from a diplomatic solution for a united future of Germany. In 1947, East German communists acceded to Stalin's desire to create a satellite East German regime, which eventually led to the Berlin Blockade.<sup>14</sup>

## The Missing Agreement

One problem with the blockade was that it was not as illegitimate as it seems. Indeed, the postwar era proved chaotic, and dividing Germany into four parts created grave unforeseen problems. Parting Berlin was even more difficult as it was deep in the Soviet zone. There were a lot of issues that had to be dealt with, like the rebuilding of the city, which was in ruins, and the feeding of its population. There were neither gas nor electricity, and water supply was far from dependable. Bridges had been destroyed. There were not enough hospital beds. The population of Berlin struggled simply to survive in the aftermath of World War II.<sup>15</sup> What had foolishly been forgotten was to issue a formal agreement that assured the western Allies overland access to their territories. It had simply been assumed that the western forces would be given access, and no one in power expected a conflict with the Soviet Union that would make an explicit agreement necessary. This was naivety on a big scale. The fact that a formal treaty was missing gave power to the Soviets, who could now claim that access to the city was not the right of the western parties, but more granted out of Soviet courtesy. It also meant the occupiers of East Germany could withdraw that favor, which they eventually did.<sup>16</sup> What seemed like a matter of course, turned out to be essential.

## What Now?

When the United States decided to counter the blockade, the option of a military intervention was on the table. The leadership made a prescient decision by not taking that step after analyzing the situation. The commander of the American military forces in Germany understood that the blockade did not only put the people in Berlin into a bad situation materially, but also forced the inhabitants into accepting Soviet authority over the city. A military solution was a possibility, but finally President Truman decided prudently, that the risk was too high.<sup>17</sup> He and his administration had to keep in mind that any action might cause retaliation and could start a war. On April 2, 1948, the CIA published an investigation about the situation in which it concluded that the USSR would probably not take military action during 1948, but the investigation also included a warning that if the Kremlin saw any move by the United States as an indication or intention to attack the USSR or

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<sup>13</sup> History.com Staff, "Berlin Blockade."

<sup>14</sup> Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, "Stalin's Inexorable Aggression," in *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations, Volume II: Since 1914*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., eds. Thomas G. Paterson and Dennis Merrill (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1995), 285 - 295.

<sup>15</sup> Härtel, *Berlin*, 54.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *To Save A City*, 1 - 3.

<sup>17</sup> Robert P. Gratwol and Donita M. Moorhus, *American Forces in Berlin: Cold War Outpost* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 1994), 31.

its satellites, it would probably respond militarily.<sup>18</sup> The same conclusion was drawn later in another investigation about the same topic.<sup>19</sup> If Truman really had decided to fight for Berlin, the USSR would have defended it, according to the investigation, and therefore would have started a war. Another way had to be found.

## The Airlift

Supporting Berlin over the roads or the ground in general was hardly possible without breaking the blockade violently. The Soviets did not even break a formal agreement, so, in a sense, military action would have made an attack more legitimate, due to the fact that no agreement had been made regulating the overland way to the city. Luckily, another treaty had been signed three years before. There were three air corridors from West-Germany to West-Berlin that had been warranted by the Soviets in 1945 and 1946. The fact that airways had been secured shows prudence on the one hand, but proves foolishness on the other, because it meant that routes of transportation had been an issue and had been discussed. Surprisingly, the importance of the roads had just been completely underestimated. The air corridors were Frankfurt-Berlin, Bückeburg-Berlin and Hamburg-Berlin, and they were 20 English miles wide. Additionally, the Berlin Control Zone had been established, which was a free flight zone in a radius of 20 miles around the Allied Control Authority Building in the capitol.<sup>20</sup> The existence of the corridors opened a legal path to Berlin, which did not require military engagement.

To understand the thought process of the American representatives, the memoirs of President Truman give great insight. After the Russians recognized that the Marshall Plan worked, he wrote, they decided to capsule off their territories completely from the western ones. As a response, the western forces started building up and restoring their assigned territories on their own, without the involvement of the Soviets. At that point, it became obvious that the reunification of Germany was unlikely. During 1947, Truman received reports that the German economy was nearing collapse, and that the Americans had to put more effort into its restoration. A healthy Germany was essential for the European economy and so measures to encourage this development had been included in the Marshall Plan. Concerning the Russians, Truman claims their walkout of the Allied Control Council was nothing that came as a surprise. For Germany it meant that the “four-power control machinery had become unworkable.” What would cause a problem for Germany would cause a major crisis in Berlin. Truman of course has the American view on the issue: the president complained that the currency the Soviets introduced only increased inflation and that the Russians purposely tried to manipulate the German economy. For the president, the currency reform was pivotal for the beginning of the blockade. Yet, to Truman, the real intentions of the Soviets were to get the western forces out of Berlin. The blockade was actually a fight for power over Germany and Europe.<sup>21</sup> A written agreement over access to the city, Truman reasoned, would have made only little difference, because the symbolic importance of Berlin was too high and the whole struggle was not about legal agreements:

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<sup>18</sup> “Possibility of Direct Soviet Military Action During 1948,” April 2, 1948, in *On the Front Lines of the Cold War: Documents on the Intelligence, War in Berlin, 1946-1961*, ed. Donald P. Steury (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999), 142 - 146.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 149 - 152.

<sup>20</sup> “Flight Rules by Allied Control Authority Air Directorate for Aircraft Flying in Air Corridors in Germany and Berlin Control Zone,” October 22, 1946, in *Notes on Berlin 1943-1963*, eds. Wolfgang Heidemeyer and Günther Hindrichs. (München: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 1963), 39f.

<sup>21</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs by Harry S. Truman, Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), 120 - 123.

The Kremlin had chosen perhaps the most sensitive objective in Europe - Berlin, the old capital of Germany, which was and is a symbol to the Germans. If we fail to maintain our position there, Communism would gain great strength among the Germans. [...] If we wished to remain there, we would have to make a show of strength. [...] Russia might deliberately choose to make Berlin the pretext for war[.]<sup>22</sup>

The blockade created a huge threat for the future of Europe, he concluded. Even though Truman's memoirs in some ways sound like excuses for not trying to establish a better relationship with the Russians and justify why the United States accepted the portioning of Germany, his argument is comprehensible and also accords with the evaluation of Stalin's aggression by Zubok and Pleshakov.

The introduction of a new currency and the missing agreement on access to Berlin were still of foolish nature. But after the blockade had already started, American prudence took over. Truman's reaction on the crisis was as simple as it was brilliant and its impact was tremendous. Until a diplomatic solution had been found, an "airlift" would be installed. The installment was one of the most prudent moves the Americans made in all of the Cold War. All their available planes in Europe should use the air corridors to bring supplies to the isolated city. Advisors had convinced Truman that the people in Berlin were absolutely indignant regarding Soviet control, which gave the Americans the backing they needed for solving the crisis, even though the airlift supplied only up to 2,500 tons per day, when actually about 4,500 were needed. Still, the clever organization of the flights made it possible for the population of the city to survive until the blockade had been opened.<sup>23</sup> To be fair, although the United States started the airlift, they were not the only ones to participate in it. While the French built up infrastructure to make the landing and taking-off of so many planes possible, the British RAF also sent their planes with supplies to aid in the mission.<sup>24</sup>

## The German Perspective

"It tasted like barbwire, but we were happy to have it," recalls Ulrich Krischbaum, a habitant in Berlin, who was six years old when the airlift began. "Before the blockade we had nothing and when it began even less." Proof of the prudence of the decision for the U.S. airlift is how it was perceived in Germany, and how it led to a better relationship between the two peoples. The situation in Berlin was precarious, but the people survived and were thankful.<sup>25</sup> To this day, the events of that time are in the memory of the German people. Growing up in Bavaria, I remember learning about the "Rosinenbomber" in my history class in high school. When the blockade ended in May 1949, 2.3 million tons of supplies had been transported in over 277,000 flights. The effort of the pilots did not only help the population to survive, it also created a "new atmosphere of friendship between the defeated and the victors," as Christian Härtel describes it in his book, *Berlin, A Short History*.<sup>26</sup> What made the operation more than just the provision of essential goods, were the pilots' efforts to put smiles on the faces of German children. The first of them was Lieutenant Gail S. Halvorson, who became known as "Der Schokoladen-flieger" (German for "the chocolate pilot"). When he was on one of his trips to the city, he noticed children at the airport. He started speaking to them and promised to come back with candy. Soon parachutes started dropping from his airplane holding chocolate bars and other sweets. His supervisors heard about what Halvorson did, but

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 123f.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 123 - 126.

<sup>24</sup> Härtel, *Berlin*, 56f.

<sup>25</sup> Lydia Leipert, "Alle Wollten Schokolade - und Ich War Zu Klein," *Spiegel* Online, June 24, 2008, <http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/berliner-luftbruecke-a-949342.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Härtel, *Berlin*, 57.



instead of stopping him, they liked the effort and soon more planes started dropping candy over the joyfully waiting children. The “Rosinenbomber” were born. Kirschbaum, the six year old boy from Berlin, had also heard that a pilot named Halvorson was dropping nice things over the city. He was too small to fight for one of those little boxes against the other children, but later he was invited to a Christmas party on an American base. Until today he remembers that while he ate cookies and milk, he did not feel like a defeated enemy, but felt that the Americans wanted to help him. With their kindness and helpfulness the U.S. soldiers formed a strong bond with the West-Berlin population.<sup>27</sup> They thanked them by not accepting Soviet authority. When the Russians offered cheap food and oil in exchange for a pledge not to accept supplies from the Americans, only one out of a hundred accepted the bargain.<sup>28</sup>

### **Blockade Ends - Airlift Wins**

The Americans had helped the population of Berlin through their hardest period since the end of the war until today, but the love of the people was not everything they got from their help. For Joseph Stalin, the airlift was a huge propaganda defeat. He had no option to stop it, apart from shooting planes down and thereby starting World War III. In May 1949 Stalin gave up and lifted the blockade.<sup>29</sup> His plan to gain control over all of Germany or at least all of Berlin failed. He wanted to use the population of Berlin as hostages. They were his bargaining chips in negotiations with the Allies. If they did not want to let the West-Berlin people starve, they would have to meet his demands. Because of the airlift, the Allies could negotiate without pressure, as they knew the people were taken care of.<sup>30</sup> The most genius aspect of the airlift was probably that Stalin did not have any realistic options to stop it.

### **Evaluation**

The historian Melvyn Leffler elaborated in an article on how the American leaders showed prudence during the Berlin Blockade, because they understood that it was important to keep western Europe out of the Soviet’s grasp. Leffler claims that it was wise that Truman decided not to abandon Berlin and he called the steps they took to help keep the people in Berlin alive as a wise calculated risk.<sup>31</sup> I can only agree with that, although foolish decisions by the United States partially caused the blockade in the first place. The Americans showed fair and sophisticated behavior in victory, whereas the Soviet Union tried to exploit their power over the defeated nation.

Still, the outcome was not all positive. The blockade may have ended and the United States won the first “battle” of the Cold War, but the conflict between East and West had hardened. In the west, the Federal Republic of Germany had been founded, while the Soviet Union created a state on its own, the German Democratic Republic.<sup>32</sup> The division remained until many years later on October 3, 1990, when the country was finally reunited. The Berlin people were thankful for the help in their time of need, but in the next years the German population grew more and more independent. In 1963 John F. Kennedy may have been “ein Berliner,” which caused over 300,000

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<sup>27</sup> Leipert, “Alle Wollten Schokolade.”

<sup>28</sup> Gratwol and Moorhus, *American Forces in Berlin*, 48.

<sup>29</sup> John Preston, “How the ‘bonkers’ Berlin Airlift Beat Stalin: British and American Troops Defied the Odds and Came to the Rescue of the Desperate Berliners,” *DailyMail.com*, October 19, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/books/article-4998448/How-bonkers-Berlin-Airlift-beat-Stalin.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, *To Save A City*, 104.

<sup>31</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, “With a Preponderance of Power: America’s Wise, Prudent, and Foolish Leaders,” In *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations, Volume II: Since 1914*, 303.

<sup>32</sup> Gratwol and Moorhus, *American Forces in Berlin*, 54.

people to cheer him, but that did not mean that the German people would go along with every step the U.S. would take.<sup>33</sup> As soon as the United States engaged in the conflict in Vietnam, protesting voices got louder and louder in the aspiring European nation. Especially students took a stand against the war and condemned the policy of the U.S. administration, by going into the streets, expressing their protest. Still, the cultural influence of the Americans on the Germans was huge and is to this day.<sup>34</sup> The Berlin Airlift was a pivotal, prudent move by the U.S. government and prevented Berlin from falling into the hands of the communists. By not using any form of military violence in the conflict, President Truman and his advisors chose the ideal way to deal with a situation that could also have led to war. After having made mistakes, they managed to turn a bad situation to their advantage, into the first win in the Cold War.

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<sup>33</sup> Härtel, *Berlin*, 65.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Adam and Will Kaufmann, eds., *Germany and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2005), 1099.