

FACULTY COLLOQUIUM

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Beer, Castles, and Nazis? In Search of the Authentic Germany in Postwar Bavaria

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Shortly after Hitler's rise to power, the German region of Bavaria became the center of an overtly nationalized tourist culture that revolved around sites associated with the *Führer* and the National Socialist movement. During the closing stages of World War II, Allied bombers reduced the region's major cities and tourist centers to rubble. Afterwards, the regional tourism industry turned to Bavaria's religious identity and dynastic legacy, and directed the tourist gaze to the countryside, which bore few reminders of the Nazi past. Official tourist propaganda now emphasized the pastoral and the provincial over the modern and the national. This was a practical economic decision, but it also allowed Germans to divert international attention from the transgressions of the Third Reich. Such selective memory facilitated reconciliation between the defeated civilians and the foreign occupiers, especially once West Germany became an American Cold War ally and integral NATO member. But what version of Germany did American visitors, both soldiers and tourists, encounter? In the Bavarian context, American tourist propaganda tended to echo many of the messages of the regional tourism industry, focusing on the pastoral and the

provincial. At the same time, Americans also headed for sites of "dark tourism" like the former concentration camp at Dachau or the "Eagle's Nest" outside of Berchtesgaden. Utilizing tourist publications and travelogues, this paper will argue that American tourists sought both the inauthentic and the authentic in postwar Bavaria. They overindulged at the increasingly commercialized Oktoberfest and toured "medieval" castles less than 100 years old, but they also visited sites that represented the greatest triumphs and transgressions of the Third Reich. This hybrid tourist culture reveals much about West Germany's complicated relationship with its recent past, the multiplicity of the tourist gaze in the postwar era, and the relationship between mass tourism and the postmodern content.



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