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DOI

[10.1093/ehr/cet159](https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cet159)

Publication date

2013

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

English Historical Review

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Föllmer, M. (2013). [Review of: U. Saekel (2011) Der US-Film in der Weimarer Republik - ein Medium der 'Amerikanisierung'? Deutsche Filmwirtschaft, Kulturpolitik und mediale Globalisierung im Fokus transatlantischer Interessen]. *English Historical Review*, 128(533), 1007-1008. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cet159>

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Der US-Film in der Weimarer Republik—ein Medium der ‘Amerikanisierung’? Deutsche Filmwirtschaft, Kulturpolitik und mediale Globalisierung im Fokus transatlantischer Interessen, by Ursula Saekel (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2011; pp. 369. €49.90).

American film was a hotly debated feature of Weimar Germany’s vibrant and diverse cultural landscape. In the 1920s, the cinema-going public received numerous movies produced in Hollywood with enthusiasm. This popularity triggered much unease. According to conservative voices, American film led to both uniformity and disintegration, at the expense of national distinctiveness and traditional social cohesion. Left-wing observers such as Siegfried Kracauer accused Hollywood of supplying the dreams and plots that made white-collar workers and sales-women oblivious to their position in capitalist society. In reality, however, the German film industry withstood the American onslaught. Supported by protectionist government measures, it managed to retain roughly half of the domestic market, far more than its French, Italian or British counterparts. At the time, Hollywood’s global predominance was not universally recognised as a foregone conclusion. Indeed, the advent of the sound movie even gave a boost to German film, since dubbing or subtitling were as yet little developed. What one might call the national turn in late Weimar cinema laid important groundwork for Nazi film policy, a development that was happily accepted by conservatives while inspiring new left-wing reflections in exile, most prominently Kracauer’s *From Caligari to Hitler*.

Ursula Saekel has thus written a book on an important topic, which she divides into five main sections. These discuss the ‘imagination’ and ‘projection’ of the United States and its supposedly ‘soulless’ film against a backdrop of drastic change within Germany itself; the evolution from the turn of the century of a concentrated and efficient American film ‘system’ with standardised genres; the rapid penetration of the European market by American film; the dynamic development of the cinema and the film industry in Germany, profiting from the large and differentiated market the country offered; and the United States’ ‘transatlantic film politics’, which led to a dominant position

compared with all other film-exporting nations but not to market domination in Germany. The sections all contain a good deal of useful information. Some points are very interesting—for instance, regarding Hollywood's brazen lobbying for government pressure to open foreign markets, the argument was that film functioned as a vehicle of the American lifestyle and its associated consumer products. At other times, the observations are not as precise as they could have been. For instance, the passages on the social history of cinema in Germany would have benefited from the inclusion of the important work of Karl Christian Führer and Corey Ross, who have both emphasised the lasting significance of class differences for the access to, and reception of, film.

However, the real problem with the sections is that they orbit, rather than tackle, the topic which, given the title of the book, should have been at its centre. In the end, the reader learns quite a bit about various aspects of German and American film history from 1900 to the 1930s, whereas the penetration, or lack thereof, of the German market by American film is only addressed in parts of Section Five. An overarching argument does not emerge. This structural flaw is already evident in the preface and introduction, which give an overview of the topic, supported by a first round of contemporary quotations as well as extensive footnotes, but never explain clearly the contribution Saekel believes she is making to the existing historiography. In particular, Thomas J. Saunders's *Hollywood in Berlin* (1994) is not discussed, leaving it unclear why there should be a need to cover much the same ground again. Saekel pays greater attention to the economic and political dimensions of film, but, in other respects, she offers little not already covered by Saunders. On balance, while Saekel's book provides some useful additions to the literature, *Hollywood in Berlin* remains the best account and analysis of the initially shocking, but ultimately limited, penetration of Weimar Germany's society and culture by American film.

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