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'A transatlantic buzz': flying saucers, extraterrestrials and America in postwar Germany

Greg Eghigian 

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Abstract

The years 1946–1960 saw a wave of reports of flying saucer sightings on both sides of the Atlantic. To date, however, few scholars have examined how the phenomenon moved across states and regions, what responses it garnered and what impact it had on contemporary thought and values. This article examines how the mainstream press and public intellectuals in postwar West and East Germany reported on and discussed flying saucer reports. The evidence shows that both cold war geopolitics and the occult were used to explain sightings, but that suspected American influences and anti-American sentiments figured heavily in how most reports were interpreted. Flying saucers thus functioned as cyphers for considering alien influences in postwar society.

Keywords:

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Notes on contributor

Greg Eghigian is an Associate Professor of Modern History and the former director of the Science, Technology, and Society Program at Penn State University (USA). A historian of the human sciences, he is the author and editor of a number of books on the history of social deviance, including *The Corrigible and the Incurable: Science, Medicine, and the Convict in Twentieth-Century Germany* (presently under review), *From Madness to Mental Health: Psychiatric Disorder and Its Treatment in Western Civilization* (Rutgers University Press, 2010) and the forthcoming *Routledge History of Madness* (Routledge Press, projected publication 2016).

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