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Book Review/Evaluation

Austria is a beautiful country in Europe, with abundant history and rich cultural aspects—a country that values tradition and embraces uniqueness. Austria is part of the German speaking world, yet while the inhabitants of Austria speak the German language, they find it quite insulting to be called ‘German’. Austrians appreciate a foreigner’s knowledge of their culture, including things such as art, music, film, and technology. The book, The German Way, attempts to explain cultural differences of the three largest German speaking countries: Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The author’s main goal can be summarized as making readers aware of stereotypes while looking at the German world through an Anglo-Saxon perspective. Or more simply, it is aimed to make the reader understand and accept the German culture while embracing the concept “Andere Lander, andere Sitten”—meaning “Different lands, different customs.”

The book, The German Way: Aspects of Behavior, Attitudes, and Customs in the German-Speaking World, is intended to introduce people to specific cultural aspects and explain the differences between English speakers and German speakers. It is also intended to be used as a guide to help one avoid the unpleasant and uncomfortable situations that unavoidably arise from culture shock. The German Way was written by Hyde Flippo. It was published for the first time in 1997 in Chicago, Illinois by Passport Books, a division of NTC/Contemporary Publishing Group, Inc. This book was reprinted with revisions in 1999 by the same publishers.

Hyde Flippo wrote The German Way in quite an interesting fashion. The first thing one will find when opening the book is a table of contents. Listed in the table of contents are seventy-seven topics of discussion, all in alphabetical order. Flippo felt as though each topic could be adequately covered in four pages or less, as no chapter is longer than four pages and the entire book totals only 138 pages, the index included. The fact that Flippo alphabetized the topics puts emphasis not on the importance of the subject being discussed, but on accessibility, orderliness and ease in finding a specific topic. This makes it fairly simple for a reader to find information in a matter of seconds.

While Flippo's book does not fully encompass everything that an individual might want to know about the German-speaking world, it does provide some of the major aspects and insights concerning this culture. In chapter one, Flippo makes it very clear to the reader that the German language makes extensive use of abbreviations and acronyms. This chapter gives a list of some of the most common abbreviations, reveals their meaning and tells when they might be useful. Following the abbreviations is the full German word in bold print, then the English equivalent, and finally the pronunciation in parentheses.

The German Way addresses two important concepts in chapters eleven and twelve—Business in the German-Speaking World and Business Style, respectively. Chapter 11 mainly talks about German firms and companies such as Bayrische Motoren Werke (BMW) and Siemens, Swiss companies including Swissair and Rolex, and Austrian companies such as Austrian Airlines. This chapter talks about the influence of such companies on the economy and also reveals that most firms are only small to medium sized. Chapter 12 deals with business style, which is essentially a strong desire

for privacy. Germans are much more collective and geared towards success. They want information, but unlike Americans who want to get directly to the point, the Germans go through the proper chain of command to gather their information.

After reading this book, one will find that fashion and design are not one of Germany's strongest industries. Rather, chapter 28 explains that German designers are actually complaining about their culture's lack of fashion sense. It explains that fashion is much more international and German fashion designers are disappointed in the lack of appreciation towards them. While it may seem trivial, the fashion concept is actually completely relevant, as Americans in more recent years are trying to help revolutionize this industry in Germany.

When traveling to a foreign country, it is always important to be knowledgeable of the proper way to greet people and address friends and acquaintances as is custom to the host country. Chapter 31 in The German Way deals with friends and acquaintances (sie and du). Germans tend to address people in a more formal way than Americans and are more reserved. The term "sie" is used to address strangers or business partners. The term "du" is associated with friends and close relatives; it is a very informal way of addressing someone. If a person is addressed as "du" or called by their first name, it signifies that it is acceptable to talk to that person in the same way.

Any individual traveling to the German-speaking world, and particularly Germany, should be very informed of the contents in chapter 32—the German Past. Author Hyde Flippo gives a brief explanation of significant events that occurred in Germany over the past several years. Among these is Germany's involvement in both World Wars. If nothing else is to be taken from this chapter, one should know that World

War II and Nazi Germany are a very sensitive subject to Germans and should not be brought up in conversation by a foreigner.

Aside from things that should or should not be mentioned in conversation with Germans, Flippo's The German Way also addresses the attempt of inhabitants in the German-speaking world to live more beautifully. Like Americans, the Germans dream of having exquisite homes and work hard to fulfill this dream. However, one major difference is that houses and apartments in Germany are much more expensive than in America, therefore their dream of 'living large' is not as easily satisfied. Most of the wealthier families find it more affordable to build multilevel homes that are very narrow and connected to one another—comparable to row homes in the United States.

This book makes it very clear that Germans are quite satisfied with their cultural procedures. German speakers are sometimes viewed as abrupt and unfriendly, even when they do not mean to be. They sometimes are seen as ignorant to their language, as everything is translated into German—Hollywood features and television shows alike. Only on special days are movies shown in English at a theater; otherwise these features are always dubbed in German.

With Europe being such a history conscious continent, it comes as no surprise that chapter 27 in The German Way would discuss famous Austrians, Germans and Swiss. This chapter mentions a name, such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and gives a brief description of each person. Other important information discussed by Hyde Flippo in the book includes topics of family, education, crime, women in society, etc.

The book, The German Way: Aspects of Behavior, Attitudes, and Customs in the German-Speaking World, by Hyde Flippo is wonderful for providing a reader/traveler

with basic information about the three predominately speaking German countries. It is broken down in a form that a reader of any age can comprehend. Flippo simplified the navigation process by putting the chapters in alphabetical order and not the order of importance. The book does a good job of briefing a reader on Germany, Austria and Switzerland—giving very basic information and history on each country. Germany clearly appeared to be the main focus of this book, and seeing as how I personally was looking for information on Austria, I did not find it to be quite as helpful.

The book was published in 1997 and again in 1999, and after reading it anyone should notice that it is very outdated. The book talks about currency as the Austrian schilling and the German marks, yet both countries have converted to the Euro over five years ago. It presents information in a manner that is too brief for one to actually benefit from or sustain a substantial amount of knowledge after reading. The book is written very factually, and consequently has little or no enthusiasm present. Additionally, it is difficult to read from start to finish. However, it would serve as a good guide and is a quick and easy reference to virtually anything one could want to know about the German-speaking world. Therefore, I would only recommend this book to anyone who may be traveling to Germany in the near future.

I, myself, was hoping to find more information on Austria in this book than I actually came across. I do not feel like the book adequately met my needs or expectations. In fact, I was initially disappointed in the quality and the capacity of The German Way. I was not looking to learn about the German autobahn, or German names, or even the history of Germany, but rather to learn more about the culture of Austria and more Austrian customs. Seeing as though Austrians do not like to be associated with

Germany, I do not think they should even be compared in the same book. I feel as though I would have received much better information on the cultural setting and the business processes of Austria in a book that was strictly referring to that specific country. The book did not discuss business in Austria to any extent. While some of the topics in the book were indeed interesting, I honestly do not feel as though The German Way, by Hyde Flippo, was in any way beneficial to my learning process.