

Gerhart Hauptmann on His Lecture Tour through the United States (1932)

Abstract

In this February 1932 newsreel segment, the renowned German playwright and author Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946) read aloud a statement before boarding a passenger liner in Bremerhaven for a lecture tour of the United States. Hauptmann, serving as an unofficial representative of the German literary world, planned to use his trip to commemorate the centennial of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's death and to solidify cultural ties with one of Germany's most important international partners. During his stay in the U.S., Hauptmann met with President Herbert Hoover and the author and disability-rights activist Helen Keller; received an honorary doctorate from Columbia University; and gave talks at Harvard, Johns Hopkins, and George Washington Universities. His statement's reference to Goethe's writings as a gift from Germany to the world highlighted the nation's reputation as one of poets and thinkers [*Dichter und Denker*], a peaceful and lofty image for a country that had worked hard to rebuild its international image after the war. Hauptmann made an apt ambassador for this task. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1912, in recognition of his realism, usage of German vernacular, and frank portrayal of those on the margins of society. Just one year after this trip, the Nazi Party seized power, and Hauptmann chose to remain in Germany, perhaps due to his old age and attachment to his native Silesia. He later joined the *Reichstheaterkammer*, a theater organization overseen by Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, which somewhat tarnished his post-1945 reputation.

Source

Reporter: Accompanied by his wife and son: Gerhard Hauptmann.

Hauptmann: I am serving an intellectual mission to the United States of North America, invited by President Butler of Columbia University in New York, welcomed at Harvard University in Boston, Cambridge, as well as in Baltimore and Washington. I will be speaking there about Johann Wolfgang Goethe, whose work is a universal legacy, but also a gift from Germany to the world. I will bear witness to this Germany and its undying intellectual creativity. I bid farewell to my homeland and say goodbye on board the *Europa*, a wonder of the world. Germany is young when it declares itself young and when it places its justified hopes above its fears. I believe in Germany's eternal youth.

Source: *Deuligtonwoche* No. 8 (clip), Deulig-Film AG, 1932. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 626474, <https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/626474/665603>

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