

3. *Germany in the 1920s*

The shadowy figures that look out at us from the tarnished mirror of history are – in the final analysis – ourselves.

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OVERVIEW

Few events in history are inevitable. Most are determined by real people making real decisions. At the time, those choices may not seem important. Yet together, little by little, they shape a period in history and define an age. Those decisions also have consequences that may affect generations to come. Chapter 2 looked at the way three nations – the United States, France, and Germany – decided who belonged in the nineteenth century and who did not. It also considered the outcomes of those choices. This chapter marks the beginning of a case study that examines the choices people made after World War I. It highlights Germany's efforts to build a democracy after the humiliation of defeat and explores the values, myths, and fears that threatened those efforts. It focuses in particular on the choices that led to the destruction of the republic and the rise of the Nazis.

The 1920s were a time of change everywhere in the world. Many of those changes began much earlier and were speeded up by the war. Others were linked to innovations in science that altered the way people saw the world. In 1905, Albert Einstein, a German physicist, published his theory of relativity. By 1920, other scientists had proved that time and space are indeed relative and not absolute. The theory quickly became a part of the way ordinary people viewed the world. As one historian explained, "At the beginning of the 1920s the belief began to circulate, for the first time at a popular level, that there were no longer any absolutes: of time and space, of good and evil, of knowledge, above all of value. Mistakenly, but perhaps inevitably, relativity became confused with relativism."¹ No one was more disturbed by that confusion than Einstein. In a letter to a colleague, he wrote, "You believe in a God who plays dice, and I in complete law and order in a world which objectively exists."²

Even as Einstein's theory was changing people's views of time and space, an Austrian physician named Sigmund Freud was altering their ideas about human behavior. His work conveyed the sense that the world was not what it seemed to be. Many came to believe the "senses, whose empirical perceptions shaped our ideas of time and distance, right and wrong, law and justice, and the nature of man's behavior in society were not to be trusted."³ In such uncertain times, people often look for simple solutions to complex problems.

Although Germany was a unique place in the 1920s, the questions the German people faced then are similar to those confronting people today: Should all citizens be equal? How can a democracy maintain order without destroying freedom? Their decisions affected nations around the world, including our own.

READING 1

The Impact of Total War

When the war began in the summer of 1914, crowds gathered to cheer the news in each of the great capitals of Europe. Young men, in particular, responded with great enthusiasm. The war gave them a sense of purpose, a focus many had never known before. The same was often true of young women. Historian Claudia Koonz's account of the way the war affected many young German women is also true of women in the other warring nations.

War was a powerful engine for the enforcement of conformity...
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War pulled women out of their families and into public life, giving them a stake in the nation that most had not previously felt. In 1914, women organized across political and religious divisions to knit, nurse, collect scrap material, and donate to charity. After 1916, as German generals realized the war would not end soon, the government recruited women to take the soldiers' places at strategically vital jobs. Overnight, it seemed, women were not only permitted but begged to mine coal, deliver the mail, drive trucks and trams, keep account books, and work in heavy industry – as well as continuing to roll bandages, nurse veterans, and perform charitable work. Suddenly a system that, until 1908, had made it illegal for women even to attend gatherings at which politics might be discussed and barred women from earning university degrees, told women the nation's very survival depended upon their taking up jobs previously done by men.⁴

But as the fighting dragged on, enthusiasm waned. This was no glorious war but a slaughter. The death toll was staggering. In all, the war claimed the lives of about thirteen million soldiers – over twice the number

killed in all of the major wars fought between 1790 and 1914. In one battle in July, 1916 at Somme in France, Britain had over 60,000 casualties. That same year, Germany lost about 400,000 soldiers and France nearly half its army in the battle of Verdun. By the end of the war, France alone had lost 1.2 million soldiers. Winston Churchill, who later served as Britain's prime minister, said of the casualties:

All the horrors of all the ages were brought together, and not only armies but whole populations were thrust into the midst of them. The mighty educated States involved conceived – not without reason – that their very existence was at stake. Neither peoples nor rulers drew the line at any deed which they thought could help them win. Germany, having let Hell loose, kept well in the van of terror; but she was followed step by step by the desperate and ultimately avenging nations she had assailed. Every outrage against humanity or international law was repaid by reprisals – often of a greater scale and of longer duration. No truce or parley mitigated the strife of the armies. The wounded died between the lines: the dead mouldered into the soil. Merchant ships and neutral ships and hospital ships were sunk on the seas and all on board left to their fate, or killed as they swam. Every effort was made to starve whole nations into submission without regard to age or sex. Cities and monuments were smashed by artillery. Bombs from the air were cast down indiscriminately. Poison gas in many forms stifled or seared the soldiers. Liquid fire was projected upon their bodies. Men fell from the air in flames, or were smothered often slowly in the dark recesses of the sea. The fighting strength of armies was limited only by the manhood of their countries. Europe and large parts of Asia and Africa became one vast battlefield on which after years of struggle not armies but nations broke and ran. When all was over, Torture and Cannibalism were the only expedients that the civilized, scientific, Christian States had been able to deny themselves: and they were of doubtful utility.⁵

Historian George Mosse reflected on the hatred the war unleashed:

Hatred of the enemy had been expressed in poetry and prose ever since the beginning of modern warfare in the age of the French Revolution... But as a rule such questions as “Why do we hate the French?” – asked, for example, by Prussians during the German Wars of Liberation in 1813 – were answered in a manner which focused upon the present war and did not cast aspersions upon French history or traditions, or indeed upon the entire French nation... During the First World War, in contrast, inspired by a sense of universal mission, each side dehumanized the enemy and called for his unconditional surrender...

The enemy was transformed into the anti-type, symbolizing the reversal of all the values which society held dear. The stereotyping was

identical to that of those who differed from the norms of society and seemed to menace its very existence: Jews, Gypsies, and sexual deviants... War was a powerful engine for the enforcement of conformity, a fact which strengthened the stereotype not only of the foreign enemy, but also of those within the borders who were regarded as a threat to the stability of the nation and who disturbed the image society liked to have of itself...

At the beginning of the war Emperor William II had proclaimed that all differences between classes and religions had vanished, that he knew only Germans. But already by 1915 there were fewer Jewish officers in the army than at the beginning of the war. More sensational action followed when on October 11, 1916, the Imperial War Minister ordered statistics to be compiled to find out how many Jews served at the front, how many served behind the front, and how many did not serve at all. What this meant for young Jews fighting side by side with their comrades in the trenches may well be imagined. This so-called Jew count was the result of anti-Semitic agitation which had begun in earnest a year earlier, and as the results of the count were never published, the suspicion that Jews were shirkers remained.⁶

Germany was not alone in turning against the “other.” Other nations did the same. The most extreme example was the Armenian Genocide (Chapter 2, Reading 14). But there were incidents in every nation, including the United States, Britain, and Russia.

CONNECTIONS

How do nations unite in time of war? How was that task different during World War I? What role do women play? What are the risks in uniting people against a common enemy?

Churchill argues that there were no limits to what the “civilized states” did during World War I. Define the word *reprisal*. How are reprisals used to put down resistance? Are there limits to what soldiers may do to the enemy in time of war? Why were they not observed in this war?

It has been said that “hatred begins in the heart and not in the head. In so many instances we do not hate people because of a particular deed, but rather do we find that deed ugly because we hate them.” How does the quotation apply to times of war?

Just before the United States entered the war, Woodrow Wilson warned, “Once lead this people into war and they’ll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance... A nation cannot put its strength into a war and keep its head level; it has never been done.” How do Churchill’s comments support that view? How do Mosse’s?

Mosse writes that “war was a powerful engine for the enforcement of conformity.” How does war promote conformity? How does it strengthen stereotypes?

Every nation limited freedom during the war. Some suspended elections. Others curbed freedom of speech and the press. Why do you think that democracy is often one of the first casualties of war?

In Germany, many young Jews joined the army as a way of showing their patriotism. Yet no matter how many medals they won or acts of courage they performed, they continued to be regarded as “shirkers” and “traitors.” Why was the myth stronger than the truth? Research the military experiences of African Americans in the United States during World War I. How were their experiences similar to those of German Jews? What differences seem most striking?

→In his documentary, *The Arming of the Earth*, Bill Moyers discusses the ways World War I revolutionized modern warfare. The American effort in the war is portrayed in the film *Goodbye Billy*. Both films are available from the Facing History Resource Center.

READING 2

War and Revolution in Russia

In a world weary of war and no longer certain of right and wrong, revolutions shook one nation after another. The first took place in Russia in 1917. Within months, a group known as the Bolsheviks had taken over the country. Their leader was Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov, better known as V. I. Lenin. His slogan of “Peace, Bread, and Land” had great appeal for a tired, hungry people.

In many ways, Russia was an old-fashioned country fighting a modern war. In battle after battle, Russian soldiers faced a well-equipped German army with little more than courage. They lacked guns, ammunition, and, by 1917, even warm clothes and food. Life on the homefront was not much better. A revolution began one morning in February, when the women of St. Petersburg went out to buy food and found the shops empty. As the angry shoppers gathered in the street, more and more people joined them. Suddenly, rioting began. When Czar Nicholas II sent troops to restore order, his soldiers mutinied. That is, they joined the rioters instead of obeying their commanders. Within days, the demonstrators had toppled the czar.

The years immediately after the war were marked by political and economic turmoil almost everywhere in the world. Many people were quick to look for someone to blame for the violence. Increasingly they labeled anyone who called for change a *Communist* or a *Bolshevik*.

Russia was now ruled by a temporary government committed to fighting the war, keeping order, and organizing a new, democratic political system for the nation. The government did not last long. By November the Bolsheviks were in control. They gave Russia a new name – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) – and a new kind of government. That government was based on the ideas of Karl Marx, a German thinker who lived from 1818 to 1883.

Marx saw all of history as a struggle between workers and property owners. That struggle, he believed, would end only when the public owned all land and other property. The people would hold that property – not as individuals but as members of a group. Only then would everyone be equal. Because of his belief in common, or shared, ownership of land and other resources, the system Marx envisioned was known as *communism*. Lenin agreed with most of Marx's ideas. But unlike Marx, Lenin was convinced that the workers could not bring about a revolution on their own. He maintained that a few strong leaders were needed to guide events. Those leaders would establish a dictatorship of the proletariat – the workers – because they alone knew what was best for the people. A dictatorship is a government led by a few individuals with absolute control over a nation.

As head of the new USSR, Lenin signed a treaty with Germany at Brest-Litovsk in the spring of 1918. That treaty not only ended Russia's involvement in the war but also turned over to Germany a third of Russia's farmland, most of its coal mines, and about half of its industries. Many Russians opposed the treaty, but with the Russian army in disarray, Lenin was in no position to bargain. Still, he considered the agreement a temporary setback. He insisted that a revolution, similar to Russia's, would soon sweep Europe and end all treaties, including the one with Germany. Such beliefs convinced Russia's former allies that Lenin was a dangerous man. He confirmed their fears, when he called on workers everywhere to end the war. To the dismay of many leaders, there were signs that a number of people were taking his suggestion seriously. In 1918, the war-weary German Reichstag supported a peace resolution. War weariness also affected Britain and France and it reached almost epidemic proportions in the trenches. There were serious mutinies on both sides.

Yet the fighting did not end immediately. Germany, now victorious in the east, transferred thousands of soldiers from its eastern front to battlefields in the west. There they faced a new opponent, the United States. In April 1917, President Woodrow Wilson had announced that his country was entering the war "to make the world safe for democracy." By June, American troops were arriving in France at the rate of 250,000 a month. By the fall of 1918, the Americans were helping the French and the British push the Germans farther and farther back. By November 1, they had broken through the center of the German line. It was now only a matter of days until the war was over.

CONNECTIONS

The word *communist* has different meanings in different countries. Since 1918, however, it has most often been used to describe those who favor the kind of political and economic system that existed in Russia until 1991. Those who want both economic equality and a democratic political system are usually known as *social democrats* or *democratic socialists*. Communists and social democrats have often had difficulty getting along. Why do you think this was so?

The years immediately after the war were marked by political and economic turmoil almost everywhere in the world. Many people were quick to look for someone to blame for the violence. Increasingly they labeled anyone who called for change a *Communist* or a *Bolshevik*. To stop the threat of a “worldwide Communist revolution,” Russia’s former allies helped Lenin’s enemies in the bloody civil war that divided Russia in 1919. Why do you think people were so fearful of communism and the Communists? How was this fear used to unite people against a common enemy?

What might lead a soldier to refuse to obey orders? Why do you think mutinies are rare? Write a working definition of the word *mutiny*. Add to your definition after you complete the next reading.

Write a working definition of the word *dictatorship*. Is a dictatorship of the proletariat an authoritarian government?

READING 3

War and Revolution in Germany

Russia was not the only country threatened by revolution during the war. By the fall of 1918, Germany was also in danger. But, unlike Russia’s rulers, Germany’s leaders were not caught by surprise. They knew that there would be upheaval unless they found a way to maintain control of the nation. As a result, events there followed a different course.

By early September, the nation’s top military leaders were aware that Germany would soon be defeated. The generals therefore reluctantly asked the kaiser to seek a peace agreement and Wilhelm II reluctantly agreed. His chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, secretly informed the Americans that Germany wanted to end the war. The generals, the kaiser, and the prince all worked behind closed doors. Not a word of the approaching defeat appeared in print. The German people had no idea that they were about to

lose the war. They believed what they were told and official announcements remained optimistic. By November, that faith was beginning to shatter. German sailors stationed in Kiel mutinied rather than carry out what they considered a “suicidal” attack on the British navy. At the same time, Communists in Berlin and a number of other large cities began to openly plot a revolution.

In the belief that the Americans would be more sympathetic to a democratic government than a monarchy, the generals asked the Social Democrats to form a republic. Friedrich Ebert, the party’s leader, shared the generals’ feelings about the need for order. A saddlemaker by trade with little formal education, Ebert considered himself a reformer not a rabble-rouser. He and other Social Democrats respected authority and tried to avoid drastic changes. They were more than willing to promise that the new government would preserve German traditions and allow the nation’s army officers, bureaucrats, judges, and teachers to keep their jobs. Like other discussions, these took place in secret.

The German people knew nothing until November 9 – the day the kaiser fled to the Netherlands and the Social Democrats declared Germany a republic. That same day, the nation’s new leaders learned that the Allies expected Germany to give up its armaments, including its navy, and evacuate all troops west of the Rhine River. If the Germans did not accept those terms within seventy-two hours, the Allies threatened to invade the nation.

Germany’s new leaders turned to the military for advice. When Matthias Erzberger of the Catholic Center party met with Paul von Hindenburg, the commander of the German Armed Forces, the general tearfully urged him to do his patriotic duty. He and the other military leaders convinced the civilians that they had to accept the truce. German soldiers could not hold out much longer. So early on the morning of November 11, 1918, three representatives of the new republic traveled to France to sign an armistice agreement. They made the trip alone. The generals chose not to attend the ceremony.

As soon as the agreement was signed, people in many countries rejoiced, but there were no celebrations in Germany. People there were in a state of shock. How could they *possibly* have lost the war? Many were convinced that the loss had to be the work of traitors and cowards. Erzberger, who had long opposed the war, was an early target for their anger. He and the other signers were later characterized as the “November criminals” who had “stabbed Germany in the back.” The charge was unfair, but the generals who knew the truth did not set the record straight. Indeed, they encouraged the belief that civilians had double-crossed the army.

Within just forty-eight hours, Germany was turned upside down. The stunned nation lost its monarch, its empire, and the war itself. To make matters worse, there was now fighting in the streets of many German cities, as the Communists tried to bring about a revolution. Berlin was so unsettled that the nation’s new leaders met in the city of Weimar – which is why the new government became known as the Weimar Republic.

Despite the upheavals, work began on a constitution within days of the armistice. It was completed that winter. The document created a democracy with power divided among three branches of government. Of the three, only the judicial branch was appointed. The other two were elected by the people. In choosing a president, German voters selected among several candidates. But in electing members of the Reichstag, they cast their ballots for a particular party rather than a particular candidate. As long as a party got 1 percent of the vote, it was entitled to one deputy in parliament. The more votes a party received, the more deputies it was entitled to. For example, if the Social Democrats received 36 percent of the vote, they would be allowed 36 percent of the seats in the Reichstag. But party officials, rather than the voters, decided exactly who those representatives would be.

The party with a majority in the Reichstag chose the nation's chancellor, or prime minister. If no single party held a majority, two or more could band together to form a government. Almost any controversy could break up such a coalition. Whenever that happened, the government fell and a new election was held. In less than fourteen years, the Weimar Republic had twenty different governments.

The new constitution carefully protected individual freedom – including the rights of minorities. A total of fifty-six articles spelled out the “basic rights and obligations” of the German people. For the first time, they were guaranteed freedom of speech and press, although some censorship was permitted to combat “obscene and indecent literature, as well as for the protection of youth at public plays and spectacles.” The constitution also guarded religious freedom. And, it gave women the right to vote and hold office. Indeed Germany was the first industrialized nation to allow women an equal say in government.

Yet there were signs that the people who framed the constitution were uneasy about democracy. Lawmakers did not replace old statutes, even though some limited freedoms promised in the constitution. For example, laws that discriminated against gays and “Gypsies” (the name Germans gave to two ethnic groups known as the Sinti and Roma) remained. And Article 48 of the document allowed the president to suspend the Reichstag in times of national emergency. Still, the Reichstag could regain power simply by calling for a new election.

Germany's new constitution, like all constitutions, was based on a series of compromises. No group got everything it wanted, but everyone got something – even those with no faith in democracy. One German later recalled his father's response to the new government: “Well, at least it should make the Americans happy; I understand they do that kind of thing all the time. The French also change their governments regularly... but the kings always come back and bring order. This nonsense won't last long... but perhaps we'll get a more advantageous peace. After all, our generals will see to it that Ebert and his fellow proletarians don't sign any dishonorable treaty, and things can't get much worse than they are now.”⁷

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In January of 1919, almost every eligible voter went to the polls and most voted for parties that supported the republic. After that election – and once the results of the Treaty of Versailles became known – parties that favored democracy did not do nearly as well. They won less than half of the vote in every other election.

CONNECTIONS

Kaiser Wilhelm, Prince Max of Baden, the generals, and the Social Democrats all worked behind closed doors. How significant was their decision to keep the news of the approaching defeat from the public? Did the people have a right to know?

Why do you think the generals chose to remain silent when republican leaders were accused of “stabbing Germany in the back”? How did their silence threaten the traditions and values they were trying to preserve? How did it turn a lie into something that generations of German students learned as an “historical fact”?

Add to your working definition of the word *revolution*. Did Germany experience a revolution in 1918?

Starting a new government in a nation that has just lost a war is not an easy task. Compare the difficulties faced by the Weimar Republic in 1919 with those faced by the United States in 1787. What advantages did the United States have? What disadvantages? What advantages and disadvantages did Germany have?

Suppose you were asked to develop a government for a new nation. What kind of government would you establish? Would it be democratic? Rather than spell out every detail of your plan, explain the principles upon which it would be based. How would you educate people to support that government?

Who could be a citizen of Germany in 1919? What rights did German citizens have? What responsibilities? Find out how citizenship was defined in the United States in 1919. Who belonged and who did not? What parallels do you see? What differences seem most striking?

How important was the decision of Ebert and other Social Democrats to allow army officers, bureaucrats, judges, and teachers to keep their jobs? All had served the nation faithfully under the kaiser. Were they likely to be as loyal to a republic?

Review the identity chart you made in Chapter 1. Suppose you had lived through this period in history, not as an American but as a German. Record in your journal, how someone with your identity might have responded to the chaos in Germany at the end of the war, to the surrender, and to the new constitution.

READING 4

The Treaty of Versailles

When the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, President Woodrow Wilson vowed that this would truly be “the war to end all wars.” He argued that the war would have been fought in vain if the world returned to the way it was in 1914. The President revealed his goals in a 1918 speech. In it, he listed fourteen points essential to achieving lasting peace. In his view, the most important was the final one. It called for a “league of nations,” where nations would resolve differences around a table rather than on a battlefield.

Wilson based his proposals on a single principle: “It is the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities, and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another, whether they be strong or weak. Unless this principle be made its foundation, no part of the structure of international justice can stand.”

Wilson also believed that frustrated nationalism had caused the war. Thus he reasoned that if each ethnic group in Europe had its own land and government, there would be less chance of another war. He called the idea *self-determination*. As a result, the Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman, and Russian empires all disappeared. In Europe, each was divided into independent nations. The victors did not even consider applying that principle to the rest of the world. When the Japanese asked that a statement opposing racial discrimination be written into the treaty, the idea was rejected. When a young Vietnamese nationalist known as Ho Chi Minh asked to address the allies, the victors refused to let him speak. Europe’s map might be redrawn but not the maps of Asia or Africa. Both continents would continue to be ruled by Europeans.

Many Europeans were more interested in punishing the Germans than in preventing another world war. After all, the United States had been at war for just one year. Its European allies had been fighting for over four years. David Lloyd George of Britain demanded that Germany pay for the trouble it had caused; Vittorio Orlando of Italy insisted on a share of Germany’s colonial empire. And France’s Georges Clemenceau required not only the return of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine but also assurances that his nation would be safe from future German aggression. Therefore the treaty contained the following articles:

- 80. Germany will respect the independence of Austria.
- 81. Germany recognizes the complete independence of Czechoslovakia.
- 87. Germany recognizes the complete independence of Poland.
- 119. Germany surrenders all her rights and titles over her overseas countries.

I am convinced that if this peace is not made on the highest principles of justice, it will be swept away by the peoples of the world in less than a generation.

159. The German military forces shall be demobilized and reduced not to exceed 100,000 men.
181. The German navy must not exceed 6 battleships, 6 light cruisers, 12 destroyers, and 12 torpedo boats. No submarines are to be included.
198. The Armed Forces of Germany must not include any military or naval air forces.
231. Germany and her Allies accept the responsibility for causing all the loss and damage to the Allied Powers.
233. Germany will pay for all damages done to the civilian population and property of the Allied Governments. [The figure was later set at \$33 billion].
428. To guarantee the execution of the Treaty, the German territory situated to the west of the Rhine River will be occupied by Allied troops for fifteen years.
431. The occupation forces will be withdrawn as soon as Germany complies with the Treaty.

Not surprisingly, Germans felt betrayed by the treaty. One German newspaper, *Deutsche Zeitung*, denounced it with these words. “In the place where, in the glorious year of 1871, the German Empire in all its glory had its origin, today German honor is being carried to its grave. Do not forget it! The German people will, with unceasing labor, press forward to reconquer the place among the nations to which it is entitled. Then will come vengeance for the shame of 1919.”⁸ That view was widely shared. Even German Communists opposed the agreement. A number of non-German observers and some historians also considered the treaty too harsh. Others noted that it was not nearly as vindictive as the one Germany forced on Russia just a year earlier.

When Wilson arrived in Paris, he was cheered. By the time the Treaty of Versailles was completed in May of 1919, his popularity had dimmed not only abroad but also at home. Many Americans felt that Europe’s problems were not their concern. They preferred isolation to a continuing involvement in world affairs. So, despite Wilson’s pleas, the United States did not join the League of Nations. The League also began its work without Germany and the USSR. Both were viewed as “outlaw” nations. As a result, the League was an international peacekeeper that failed to include three key nations.

CONNECTIONS

What does the word *vindictive* mean? Was the Treaty of Versailles vindictive? The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk?

Before the war ended, Woodrow Wilson said, “I am convinced that if this peace is not made on the highest principles of justice, it will be swept away

by the peoples of the world in less than a generation.” What is a “just peace”? Why is it difficult to hold on to? What aspects of society work against peace? Why was it so hard to make peace in 1919? To keep the peace? What would it take to achieve a lasting peace today?

In small groups, evaluate the Treaty of Versailles. What criteria did your group use to make its evaluation? What criteria did the victors use? The Germans? What similarities do you notice? What differences seem most striking?

Reading 3 described how Erzberger and the other signers of the armistice agreement came to be characterized as the “November criminals” who “stabbed Germany in the back.” How do you think the terms of the treaty affected that view? How does a nation experience shame?

A democratic leader once said that it is impossible to lead if no one is following. What do you think he was saying about leadership in a democracy? Suppose leaders had put aside their political differences and worked out a treaty based on Wilson’s Fourteen Points. Would their people have accepted such a treaty?

Woodrow Wilson believed that the war was caused by “frustrated nationalism.” He maintained that the best way to reduce the chances of another war was through “self-determination.” Wilson’s Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, feared “self-determination” would have the opposite effect. In a letter to Wilson, he asked, “Will it not breed discontent, disorder and rebellion? The phrase is simply loaded with dynamite. It will raise hopes which can never be realized. It will, I fear, cost thousands of lives. What a calamity that the phrase was ever uttered! What misery it will cause!” What is *frustrated nationalism*? *Self-determination*? Was the former the cause of the World War I? Was the latter a way to prevent another war? Support your opinion with evidence from current events.

Study a map of Europe before and after World War I. List the differences between the two maps. How do you account for differences? To what extent is *self-determination* reflected in your list of differences?

The fighting in the Balkans in 1992 prompted columnist A. M. Rosenthal to write, “Bosnians, Serbs, Croats, Albanians, Macedonians, Muslim or Christian, come out of a world where for centuries loyalties were built on the importance of separateness. The separate clan, tribe, family and village gave protection. The histories and fantasies of the individual group gave meaning and texture to life. The separateness created fear of others, which was intensified when the outsider was too close, a neighbor. Leaders used the fears to build their own power – feudal dukes once, now onetime Communist bosses like President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia are building new power on old separations.”⁹ Are his comments true of world leaders after World War I? Are they true of other leaders in today’s world? What is he suggesting is the proper role of a leader? Do you agree?

→Professor Henry Friedlander argues that the Germans were more disturbed about losing the war than they were about the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. This argument is developed in his videotaped lecture, “The Rise of Nazism,” available from the Facing History Resource Center and summarized in *Elements of Time*, page 341.

READING 5

Anger and Humiliation

Ten years after the war, Erich Maria Remarque wrote a novel about his experiences as a soldier in the Germany army. The book, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, became an international best-seller. Soldiers all over the world identified with the hero’s experiences and feelings. One of the most quoted parts of the novel takes place as Paul, the hero of the book, anticipates the end of the war. “All that meets me, all that floods over me are but feelings – greed of life, love of home, yearning of the blood, intoxication of deliverance. But no aims. Had we returned home in 1916, out of the suffering and the strength of our experiences we might have unleashed a storm. Now if we go back we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless, and without hope. We will not be able to find our way any more.”

Hitler wanted to create a “movement.” He had no intention of being “one of the nameless millions who live and die by the whim of chance.”

Soon after writing those words, Paul is killed, “on a day that was so quiet and still on the whole front, the army report confined itself to the single sentence: ‘All quiet on the Western Front.’” Although Paul never returned home, Remarque and other German soldiers did. Some were indeed burned out. Others returned home angry and bitter – not with the war itself but with the surrender and the treaty that followed it. Johann Herbert was among them. His son later said of him:

He had lost a leg on the battlefield, and he refused to try to use a wooden leg. Instead he rolled around the house in his wheelchair and stormed at the “bureaucrats and bloodsuckers” who had brought Germany into disgrace. He described the leaders of the civilian government as traitors, to whom we owed no loyalty or allegiance. When I brought home the black, red, and gold flag of the new republic (the old flag had been black, white, and red), he ripped it up, spit on it, slapped me in the face and told me never to bring that rag into the house again.¹⁰

Other veterans shared Herbert’s anger. Some joined paramilitary groups like the Freikorps (Free Corps). These groups attempted not only to crush revolution at home but also to protect the nation’s borders from the

Poles and the Bolsheviks. Members were recruited by former army officers who ran ads that read, “What’s the use of studies, and what’s the good of business or a profession? Enemies within and beyond are burning down our house. Help us, in the spirit of comradeship and loyalty, to restore our power of national defense.”

Adolf Hitler was among those veterans who struggled to find a place for themselves in 1919. When the fighting began, Hitler was as enthusiastic about the war as most of the men of his generation. In *Mein Kampf*, his autobiography, he wrote that when he and the others in his unit returned from their first battle “even our step had changed. Seventeen-year-old boys now looked like men.” The war gave those young men a sense of purpose and a way of distinguishing themselves.

Hitler, in particular, wanted to distinguish himself. Born in 1889 in a small Austrian town, he was one of six children, four of whom died in childhood. His father died when he was fourteen and he lost his mother a few years later. By then Hitler had left school with little more than an eighth-grade education and dreams of becoming an artist.

In 1907, Hitler moved to Vienna in hopes of winning a place at the Academy of Fine Arts. His failure to do so shattered his early views of the world. So did his mother’s death. He was also bewildered by life in a large sophisticated city that was home to people of many nationalities. In 1913, he moved to Munich, Germany, probably to escape a military service that would have required that he fight in a multinational army. In *Mein Kampf*, he noted that the longer he lived in Vienna “the more my hatred grew for the foreign mixture of peoples which had begun to corrode the old site of Germany culture.” Munich was, in his view, a more “German” city.

When the war began, Hitler was a drifter struggling to find his place in the world. When the war was over, that struggle continued but now it had a focus. In his autobiography, he recalls, “In the days that followed [the surrender] my own fate became known to me... I resolved to go into politics.” He was not alone. In the 1920s, many angry veterans joined political parties and clubs that plotted the takeover of the government. In fact, the army hired Hitler to spy on one of those groups, the German Workers’ party. Instead, he became a member.

What attracted him to that particular party? His autobiography explains, “This ridiculous little makeshift [band] with its handful of members, seemed to offer one distinct advantage: it had not yet frozen into organization. Thus there were unlimited opportunities for individual activity.” He set out to transform the group into something more than a political party in the ordinary sense. He wanted to create a “movement.” He had no intention of being “one of the nameless millions who live and die by the whim of chance.” He vowed to control his own destiny and the destiny of Germany.

By February 1920, the tiny party had a new name and a 25-point program. The new name was the National Socialist German Workers’ Party

(Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei – NSDAP or Nazi, for short). And the party's new program called for the following:

1. A union of all Germans to form a great Germany on the basis of the right to self-determination of peoples.
2. Abolition of the Treaty of Versailles.
3. Land and territory (colonies) for our surplus population.
4. German blood as a requirement for German citizenship. No Jew can be a member of the nation.
5. Non-citizens can live in Germany only as foreigners, subject to the law of aliens.
6. Only citizen can vote or hold public office.
7. The state insures that every citizen live decently and earn his livelihood. If it is impossible to provide food for the whole population, then aliens must be expelled.
8. No further immigration of non-Germans. Any non-German who entered Germany after August 2, 1914, shall leave immediately.
9. A thorough reconstruction of our national system of education. The science of citizenship shall be taught from the beginning.
10. All newspapers must be published in the German language by German citizens and owners.

The program did not make headlines. The party was just one of many small political groups. Yet by 1921, Hitler was attracting thousands of new members. One early member of the Nazi party and the S.A., its private army, recalled the effect Hitler had on him.

We, oldtime National Socialists, did not join the S.A. for reasons of self-interest. Our feelings led us to Hitler. There was a tremendous surge in our hearts, a something that said: "Hitler, you are our man. You speak as a soldier of the front and as a man; you know the grind, you have yourself been a working man. You have lain in the mud, even as we – no big shot, but an unknown soldier. You have given your whole being, all your warm heart, to German manhood, for the well-being of Germany rather than your personal advancement or self-seeking. For your innermost being will not let you do otherwise." No one who has ever looked Hitler in the eye and heard him speak can ever break away from him.¹¹

CONNECTIONS

Make an identity chart for a member of the Freikorps. For Paul, the hero of Remarque's book. For Hitler. How are the three alike? What differences are most striking? How would Paul respond to the Nazi party?

American film makers created a movie based on *All Quiet on the Western Front*. German historian Golo Mann, then a student, recalled the way the

Nazis responded to the opening of the film in Berlin: “A few minutes after the showing began, grenades exploded against the screen, stink bombs were tossed, sneezing powder was spread around, and white mice were released. The film had to be stopped.” Why do you think the Nazis attacked the film? What didn’t they want people to see?

Some documents have to be studied carefully. The Nazi program is one of those documents. Divide into groups and focus on two or three points. As you study them, consider these questions:

- What is the aim of this particular point? What key phrases provide clues to its meaning?
- To whom will this particular point appeal? Why?
- If the word *American* were substituted for the term *German*, would your opinion of any point change? Which point or points?
- Do you think that any of these ideas would be acceptable to people today? If so, which one or ones?

To many people in the 1920s, the Nazi platform did not seem to be the work of an extremist group. What parts of the document may have seemed most reasonable?

Notice the first two points in the Nazi platform. If the Nazis were so critical of the Treaty of Versailles and Wilson, why did they invoke Wilson’s “self determination of peoples”?

Is it possible to accept the good parts of the Nazi program and overlook the bad parts? What are the advantages of doing so? The risks?

Germans were not the only ones to join extremist groups in the early twentieth century. In 1915, the Ku Klux Klan was revived in the United States. It boasted that its purpose was to “uphold Americanism, advance Protestant Christianity, and eternally maintain white supremacy.” Members were inspired by a movie called *The Birth of a Nation*. The movie glorified the Klan’s activities during Reconstruction. Unlike the original Klan, however, the new group was not just anti-black but also anti-immigrant, antisemitic, and anti-Catholic. By the early 1920s, the Klan had nearly five million members



and controlled a number of state governments. How were the Klan's goals similar to those of the Nazis? To those of extremist groups today? What differences seem most striking?

Research the platforms of American political parties in the 1920s. What parallels do you see between those platforms and the one the Nazis created? How do you account for those similarities?

Hitler wanted to create a "movement." He did not want be "one of the nameless millions who live and die by the whim of chance." What does this suggest about the man? Was he a *visionary*? If so, what was his vision and how do you think he would get others to accept it? Was he *dogmatic*? That is, did he believe that he alone had the truth? If so, what was the dogma he preached?

See *Elements of Time*, pages 39-40, for a summary of Sol Gittleman's videotaped talk, "The Weimar Era, 1919-1933." He discusses the ideas that influenced Nazi attitudes toward gender roles, politics, and art.

READING 6

Voices in the Dark

George Mosse writes, "To many all over Europe it seemed as if the First World War had never ended but was being continued during the interwar years. The vocabulary of political battle, the desire to utterly destroy the political enemy, and the way in which adversaries were pictured, all seemed to continue the First World War against a set of different, internal foes."¹² On a train ride just after the war, Henry Buxbaum, a veteran from Friedburg – a small town in the German state of Hesse – discovered that he had become the "enemy":

The vocabulary of political battle, the desire to utterly destroy the political enemy, and the way in which adversaries were pictured, all seemed to continue the First World War against a set of different, internal foes.

The train was pitch-dark. The lights were out, nothing uncommon after the war when the German railroads were in utter disrepair and very few things functioned orderly... That night, we were seven or eight people in the dark, fourth-class compartment, sitting in utter silence till one of the men started the usual refrain: "Those God-damned Jews, they are at the root of all our troubles." Quickly, some of the others joined in. I couldn't see them and had no idea who they were, but from their voices they sounded like younger men. They sang the same litany over and over again, blaming the Jews for everything that had gone wrong with Germany and for anything else wrong in this world. It went on and on, a cacophony of obscenities, becoming

more and more vicious and at the same time more unbearable with each new sentence echoing in my ears. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer. I knew very well that to start up with them would get me into trouble, and that to answer them wasn't exactly the height of wisdom, but I couldn't help it... I was burning with rage and told them exactly what I thought of them and their vicious talk. I began naturally with the announcement: "Well, I am a Jew and etc., etc." That was the signal they needed. Now they really went after me, threatening me physically. I didn't hold my tongue as the argument went back and forth. They began jostling me till one of them next to me and near the door, probably more encouraged by the darkness than by his own valor, suggested: "Let's throw the Jew out of the train." Now, I didn't dare ignore this signal, and from then on kept quiet. I knew that silence for the moment was better than falling under the wheels of a moving train. One of the men in our compartment, more vicious in his attacks than the others, got off the train with me in Friedburg. When I saw him under the dim light of the platform, I recognized in him a fellow I knew well from our soccer club... I would never have suspected this man of harboring such rabid, antisemitic feelings.¹³

CONNECTIONS

Suppose the lights had not gone out. Would the conversation in the compartment have been the same?

If you had been on the train, do you think you would have said or done anything? Have you or someone you know ever had a similar experience? How did you feel? How did you respond?

In times of economic upheaval, political unrest, or social stress, people often feel powerless and angry. How do some leaders turn those feelings against "outsiders" or "strangers"?

In Chapter 1, a number of individuals said that what they learned as children stayed with them all of their lives. How do negative feelings about "others" turn into acts of hatred and violence in times of crisis? What is the relationship between tolerance and fear? Between humiliation and hatred?

READING 7

What Did You Learn at School Today?

The war did not alter every part of German life. The nation's schools changed very little, if at all. Albert Einstein, a student in Germany before the war, claimed that his teachers were more interested in producing "mental machines" than in educating human beings. The experiences of Albert Speer, who later became a high-ranking Nazi official, suggest that the leaders of the republic held similar views. Speer recalled that "In spite of the Revolution, which had brought us the Weimar Republic, it was still impressed upon us that the distribution of power in society and the traditional authorities were part of the God-given order of things. We remained largely untouched by the currents stirring everywhere in the early twenties. In school, there would be no criticism of courses or subject matter, let alone the ruling powers of the state... It never occurred to us to doubt the order of things."¹⁴ A German named Klaus, who was a little younger than Speer, had a similar experience:

His teachers were more interested in producing "mental machines" than in educating human beings.

We were taught history as a series of facts. We had to learn dates, names, places of battles. Periods during which Germany won wars were emphasized. Periods during which Germany lost wars were sloughed over. We heard very little about World War I, except that the Versailles peace treaty was a disgrace, which someday, in some vague way, would be rectified. In my school, one of the best in Berlin, there were three courses in Greek and Roman history, four in medieval history, and not one in government. If we tried to relate ideas we got from literature or history to current events, our teachers changed the subject.

I really don't believe that anyone was deliberately trying to evade politics. Those teachers really seemed to think that what went on in the Greek and Roman Empire was more important than what was happening on the streets of Berlin and Munich. They considered any attempt to bring up current political questions a distraction... because we hadn't done our homework.

And there was always a great deal of homework in a school like mine, which prepared students for the university. At the end of our senior year, we were expected to take a detailed and exceedingly tough exam called the Abitur. How we did on the exam could determine our whole future. Again, the Abitur concentrated on our knowledge of facts, not on interpretation or on the expression of personal ideas. Looking back on it now, it also didn't seem to measure our ability to reason clearly... to draw conclusions, to interpret ideas.¹⁵

As Klaus reflected on his adolescence, he noted the emphasis on group activities rather than individual action.

I liked to wander in the woods around Berlin. So my mother enrolled me in a hiking club. I pointed out tactfully that this was not what I had in mind. Marching around the countryside, singing sentimental German folk songs with twenty other boys, was not my idea of fun. I liked to stroll around by myself... enjoying the quiet and the scenery. My mother somehow gave me to understand that this was unmasculine... and what's more, un-German.

There was a great deal of control over my life and that of my friends... from the school and from parents. But somehow we all felt that this was necessary, so that we could get through that Abitur, get into a good university... and be free. We lived for the future. We had to think very little, take almost no initiative, our days were charted out for us. It seems strange that with bloody street fights almost every weekend, groups of brown-shirted men singing aggressive songs on Saturday mornings as they marched to their training grounds, political assassinations on the front pages of the papers regularly, we never felt threatened, never afraid of anything but failure in school.¹⁶

Even when the “currents stirring everywhere” could not be ignored, teachers tried to do so. For example, in 1923, France occupied the Rhineland to force Germany to make reparations payments. Among the soldiers sent to enforce the Treaty of Versailles were men from French colonies in Africa. A teacher said of them:

Day after day I had to suffer the sight of French black troops marching from the one-time garrison city of Diez to their training place at Altendiez... I taught the children under my care never so much as to look at these black fighters. If, by chance, they happened to pass by the school during recess, teachers and pupil would turn their backs and remain standing like pillars of salt. The German-speaking [French] officers and non-coms well understood this mute protest of German youth and its teachers, and not infrequently gave vent to their anger in the foulest language.¹⁷

CONNECTIONS

Speer speaks of learning the “God-given order of things.” What does the phrase mean? How important is it to learn? Have you learned it?

The emphasis in German education was on the wars that Germany won rather than on the ones it lost. The failure to discuss World War I was an important omission. What schools choose *not* to teach is often as important as what they do teach. How did the failure to teach World War I distort German history? Betray German students?

Every school teaches attitudes and values as well as facts and skills. What attitudes and values were Klaus's teachers conveying when they tried to

control what students learned? When they refused to discuss current events? What values are reflected in the emphasis on the *Abitur*, the exam that controlled so much of Klaus's life? What values did the children learn the day they were instructed to turn their backs on African soldiers?

Compare education in the United States today with education in the Weimar Republic. What values did German children learn in the 1920s? How well did their schools prepare them for life in a democracy? What values are stressed in American schools, including your own? How well prepared are you and your classmates for life in a democracy? (To find out more about education in your community, interview your parents, teachers, and principal. You may also wish to review the goals and objectives for the various courses that make up the curriculum at your school.) As an alternative project, review social studies textbooks used in American schools in the 1920s. What were American students learning? Compare their education to that of German students.

When Albert Einstein became a teacher, he encouraged his students to reflect, ask questions, and criticize ideas. Why is thinking essential to a scientist? How important is it to a citizen? For what reasons? Record your ideas so that you can refer to them later.

READING 8

Order and Law

In German classrooms, teachers encouraged their students to value obedience and respect authority. Judges played a similar role in the nation's courtrooms. Unlike judges in the United States, German judges did not consider themselves responsible for upholding the nation's constitution. Instead they placed the need for order above the law. As one judge explained, just as the army protects Germany from enemies beyond the nation's borders, the courts must protect the nation within those borders.

That spirit was reflected in the way the judges handled two political upheavals. The first took place in the German state of Bavaria in April, 1919 when the Communists took over the state government. The revolution lasted about two weeks. Even before the army arrived to restore order, the emergency was over. Nevertheless, the troops, operating under martial – or military – law, executed over one thousand workers. And the national government charged the leaders of the revolt with high treason. One man was sentenced to death and over twenty-two hundred others received long prison terms.

On March 12, 1920, a second uprising occurred. This time a group of conservatives led by Wolfgang Kapp overthrew the national government and executed over two hundred people. The leaders of the Weimar Republic managed to regain control of the country only by appealing to people to “strike, stop working, strangle this military dictatorship, fight... for the preservation of the republic, forget all dissension! There is only one way to block the return of Wilhelm II: to cripple the country’s economic life! Not a hand must move, not a single person must help the military dictatorship. General strike all along the line! Workers unite!”

To the surprise of many, Germans did unite and the strike was a stunning success. Within days, the putsch, or coup, was over and the republic restored. Most nations would have rounded up the leaders of the coup and tried them for treason. Yet the vast majority of those involved in this coup were never punished. Only a handful, including Kapp, were even arrested. He died in prison while awaiting trial. The court dropped charges against all but one of the others. Berlin’s former chief of police was tried and found guilty but received the minimum sentence possible under the law. And he lost none of the privileges of citizenship, including the right to hold office.

Unlike judges in the United States, German judges did not consider themselves responsible for upholding the nation’s constitution. Instead they placed the need for order above the law.

The courts clearly did not consider all uprisings equal. The courts had other biases as well. In 1923, the German Supreme Court allowed the use of the term *Jew Republic* to describe the Weimar government on the grounds that “it can denote the new legal and social order in Germany which was brought about in significant measure by German and foreign Jews.” At the same time, a worker who carried a sign saying “Workers, burst your chains!” was arrested for inciting class warfare. All speech was not equal either. Neither were all murders. Between 1919 and 1922, conservative groups were responsible for 354 political assassinations. Although 50 killers confessed to their crimes, over half were acquitted. The 24 found guilty spent an average of just four months in jail. Communist groups were responsible for 22 political assassinations during the same period. All of those cases went to trial and ten of the murderers were executed. The other 12 received an average prison term of fifteen years.

The judges had come to believe that “defense of the state” justified breaking the law. A German legal scholar was horrified at the idea that murder could be justified by a “national emergency.” He wrote, “Such a decision does more than merely damage the legal order which judges are called upon to protect. This decision destroys it.”¹⁸ The Social Democrats agreed. In 1924, they warned that “administration of justice in this manner presents a danger to the republic, insofar as it enables subversive and monarchist organizations to amass weapons without giving that part of the population which supports democracy the possibility to defend itself or to insist on respect for the law.”¹⁹ The judges and the German people chose to ignore these warnings.

CONNECTIONS

What did the scholar mean when he wrote that the decision to permit “defense of state” as justification for murder “destroys” the legal order that judges are called upon to protect? Do you agree? If judges in Weimar Germany were not responsible for upholding the Constitution, who was? People look to the courts to right wrongs. Where can they find justice if the courts refuse to protect their rights?

In *Elements of Time*, page 30, Henry Friedlander points out that there was minimal support for democracy in Weimar Germany. “Germans created a republic with a democratic constitution but no constituency.” What evidence can you find in this reading to refute Friedlander’s assessment? To affirm it?

Reread Abraham Lincoln’s warnings about the real danger to democracies in Chapter 2, Reading 4. How do his remarks apply to the Weimar Republic? How do you think he would have responded to the two uprisings? To the trials of the men who led those uprisings?

Review the conversation between Carl Schurz and Otto von Bismarck in Chapter 2, Reading 6. Which man’s view of democracy did German judges share in the 1920s? What do you think may be the consequences of that view?

German judges did not claim to be impartial. American judges, on the other hand, pride themselves on being impartial. But are they? Martha Minow, a legal scholar, argues that “impartiality is the guise that partiality takes to seal bias against exposure. It looks impartial to apply a rule denying unemployment benefits to anyone who cannot fulfill the work schedule, but it is not impartial if the work schedule was devised with one religious Sabbath, and not another in mind. The rule does not seem impartial to the employee who belongs to a minority religion. Until we try to imagine the point of view of someone unlike ourselves, we will not depart from our own partiality.”²⁰ How difficult is it to view the world from someone else’s perspective? Why does Minow believe it is the best way to be truly impartial?

In 1919, many Americans were also fearful that Communists or “Reds” would take over their country. They saw signs of the coming revolution in the more than three thousand strikes that took place in just one year’s time. Although most were caused by postwar layoffs and wage cuts, many people were convinced that they were the work of Communist agents. When several bombings occurred – including one at the home of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer – they saw proof that a revolution had begun.

In fact, the bombings were the work of anarchists (people who want to destroy all government) rather than Communists. But many Americans were in no mood to see differences among anarchists, Communists, and

other radicals. A number of communities and states passed laws limiting the right of radicals to express their ideas. The federal government also took action. Palmer organized raids on various labor unions and radical organizations. In December, he shipped to Russia 249 immigrants, of whom no more than a handful were Communists. In January 1920, his agents arrested over six thousand other immigrants suspected of radical activity. The arrests led many to conclude that all newcomers were dangerous and encouraged the passage of laws that restricted immigration. But a few Americans, including Assistant Secretary of State Louis Post, fought for the rights of the radicals. As a result of their efforts, most of those arrested were tried and acquitted. What does the “Red Scare” suggest about the way Americans regarded order and respect for authority? The way they regarded freedom?

What motivates censors? Molly Ivins, an American newspaper columnist and author, believes it is fear. To explain, she recounts the story of two boys so frightened by a chicken snake in the henhouse, they lit out simultaneously “doing considerable damage to themselves and the henhouse door.” When one of the boys was reminded that chicken snakes are harmless, he replied, “Yes, Ma’am, but some things can scare you so much that you’ll hurt yourself.” Ivins writes, “In this country we get so scared of something terrible – of communists or illegal aliens or pornography or crime – that we decide the only way to protect ourselves is to cut back on our freedom... Well now, isn’t that the funniest idea – that if we were less free we would be safer?”²¹ How do her comments apply to judges in Weimar Germany? To the United States today?

READING 9

Criticizing Society

Despite efforts to silence criticism, many individuals spoke out. Others voiced their discontent through their art. Every work of art reflects the artist’s values and beliefs. In the 1920s, a number of German artists created pictures that challenged authority or forced viewers to see their world as it really was – not as they wanted it to be. Among them was George Grosz. In 1924, the year he created the Berlin street scene shown on page 134, a German judge considered his work so disturbing that he found the artist guilty of “attacks on public morality” and fined him six thousand marks. It was not the first time Grosz was brought to court for criticizing German society nor would it be the last.

Every work of art reflects the artist’s values and beliefs. In the 1920s, a number of German artists created pictures that challenged authority or forced viewers to see their world as it really was – not as they wanted it to be.



Three artists view the streets of Berlin: Bruno Voigt (top left), George Grosz (top right), and Albert Birkle (bottom).

CONNECTIONS

Freedom of expression is critical to a democratic society. People express ideas in pictures as well as words. In what other ways do individuals criticize their society? Research the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. How does it protect the rights of individuals to express their views? When have those rights been threatened?

Study Albert Birkle's *Street Scene, Berlin*. What is he saying about life in the city? About the people who make up that city? A critic has said of the people in Birkle's painting, "They grasp at emptiness, and reach out in the surrounding space, with eyes bereft of hope."²² How do you see the Berliners in his painting?

Look carefully at Grosz's *Street Scene, Berlin*. What is he saying about life in the city? About the people who make up that city? How is his view similar to Birkle's? What difference seems most striking?

Both Grosz and Birkle created their street scenes in the 1920s. Bruno Voigt created his in 1932 when such paintings were no longer popular. Voigt deliberately invoked the past in his work to make a point about the present. Why do you think he drew heavy lines around the man seated in the foreground? Why do you think Voigt saw his work as a weapon in the fight against the Nazis?

READING 10

Inflation Batters the Weimar Republic

Overshadowing the violence and discontent in the early days of the Weimar Republic was a period of incredible inflation. Inflation is a time when the value of money decreases and/or general prices increase sharply. During the war, the German government printed money freely to pay for soldiers, guns, and ammunition. After the fighting ended, there was more money in circulation than there were things to buy. The result was inflation. To make matters worse, the French occupied the Ruhr in 1923, when Germany failed to make reparation payments. The Germans, in turn, responded to the occupation with a general strike. During that strike, they produced nothing. So the few goods available became even more valuable. Prices skyrocketed and the German mark purchased less and less.

In times of trouble, people often look for easy answers. Their fears and suspicions of those they regard as *the other* also increase.

Date	Marks	US Dollars
1918	4.2	1
1921	75	1
1922	400	1
Jan. 1923	7,000	1
Jul. 1923	160,000	1
Aug. 1923	1,000,000	1
Nov. 1, 1923	1,300,000,000	1
Nov. 15, 1923	1,300,000,000,000	1
Nov. 16, 1923	4,200,000,000,000	1

People who had saved their money in banks or were living on pensions or disability checks found themselves bankrupt. Those with jobs found that their salary increases could not possibly keep up with the almost instantaneous rise in prices. Artist George Grosz described what shopping was like in those days.

Lingering at the [shop] window was a luxury because shopping had to be done immediately. Even an additional minute meant an increase in price. One had to buy quickly because a rabbit, for example, might cost two million marks more by the time it took to walk into the store. A few million marks meant nothing, really. It was just that it meant more lugging. The packages of money needed to buy the smallest item had long since become too heavy for trouser pockets. They weighed many pounds... People had to start carting their money around in wagons and knapsacks. I used a knapsack.²³

Under the leadership of Gustav Stresemann, a conservative politician who supported the republic, the government eventually brought inflation under control. But it took time and many people could not forget that the government had allowed it to happen. One German expressed their feelings when he wrote:

Of course all the little people who had small savings were wiped out. But the big factories and banking houses and multimillionaires didn't seem to be affected at all. They went right on piling up their millions. Those big holdings were protected somehow from loss. But the mass of the people were completely broke. And we asked ourselves, "How can that happen? How is it that the government can't control an inflation which wipes out the life savings of the mass of people but the big capitalists can come through the whole thing unscathed." We who lived through it never got an answer that meant anything. But after that, even those people who used to save didn't trust money anymore, or the government. We decided to have a high-ho time whenever we had any spare money, which wasn't often.²⁴

CONNECTIONS

In times of trouble, people often look for easy answers. Their fears and suspicions of those they regard as “the other” also increase. In the United States, during periods of high unemployment, there is often a corresponding rise in anti-immigrant legislation, hate crimes, and discrimination. The same has been true of nations in Europe both long ago and today. How do you account for such attitudes? How do they threaten minorities? Democracy itself?

Numbers can tell a story. What story do the numbers provided in this reading tell? Do they lead you to any conclusions? Numbers do not tell the whole story. What do the eyewitness accounts suggest about how inflation affected the way people saw themselves and their government? Who was hurt most by this kind of inflation?

It has been said that “any system can stand in fair weather; it is tested when the wind blows.” How do economic crises test democracy? How do such crises encourage people to place their faith in leaders who offer simple solutions to complex problems? Find out how people in Russia and other former Communists nations are responding to similar crises today. How are their responses similar to those of Germans in the 1920s? What are the key differences?

READING 11

A Revolt in a Beer Hall

On the night of November 8, 1923, at the height of the inflation, Adolf Hitler and a band of armed supporters dramatically burst into a Munich beer hall. Hitler fired a shot at the ceiling and then declared that President Ebert and the national government had been deposed. The local police quickly put down the uprising. Two days later, Hitler was arrested and brought to trial.

Throughout the court proceedings, Hitler and his followers openly showed their contempt for the Weimar Republic by calling it a “Jew government.” Yet the judge ruled that the defendants were “guided in their actions by a purely patriotic spirit and the noblest of selfless intentions.” Therefore he refused to deprive them of their privileges as citizens. Instead, he gave them the minimum sentence possible under the law – five years in prison.

Hitler was not a German citizen. As an alien convicted of plotting against the government, he should have been deported. Indeed, the law required his deportation, but the judge chose not to follow the law. He explained, “In the case of a man whose thoughts and feelings are as

German as Hitler's, the court is of the opinion that the intent and purpose of the law have no application." Hitler and his comrades served just nine months of their prison term. The rest was suspended.

During his time in prison, Hitler and an associate, Rudolf Hess, worked on a book describing Hitler's life, his beliefs, and his plans for the future. Most of his ideas were based on antisemitic literature he read before the war, lessons he learned in the trenches, and observations made in the years that followed. British historian A. J. P. Taylor once called those ideas "a distorting mirror" of European thought. He saw Hitler as someone who took ideas that were widely held and carried them to an extreme.

The book entitled *Mein Kampf* or "My Struggle" was published in 1925. It maintained that a struggle among the races is the catalyst of history. A *catalyst* makes things happen. In Hitler's view, different races have different roles to play in society. Because he believed that the "Aryan" race was superior to all others, he insisted that "Aryan" Germany had the right to incorporate all of Eastern Europe into a new empire that would provide the nation with needed *Lebensraum*, or living space. The conquest of Eastern Europe was desirable because it would also be a victory over those who then controlled much of the region – the Communists. Hitler regarded the Communists as enemies of the German people. He repeatedly connected them to the Jews, yet another enemy, by claiming that the Jews were behind the teachings of the Communist party. "Jewish Bolshevism" became the phrase he used to link the two groups.

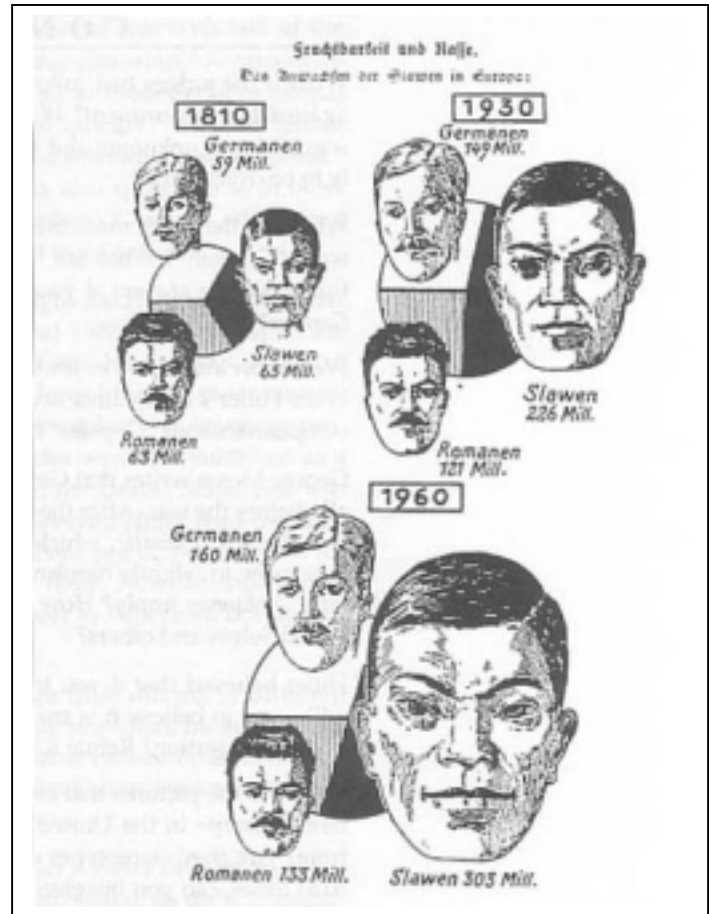
The Jews, according to Hitler, were everywhere, controlled everything, and acted so secretly that few could detect their influence. As proof of his claims, he often referred to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The document was supposedly a plan to take over the world that had been prepared by an international body of Jewish "elders." It was in fact a known forgery prepared by the Russian secret police in the 1890s to incite hatred against Jews. But Hitler was not interested in facts. In the 1920s, no more than half million Jews lived in a nation of about sixty million people. Yet Hitler's comments made it seem as if Germany were home to millions of Jews who controlled the entire nation. The charge was absurd; but repeating it again and again had an impact on those who heard it.

The idea that Germans of the Jewish faith were different from and inferior to German of the Christian faith was central to Hitler's charges. He often emphasized physical differences between Jews and non-Jews to strengthen his arguments. The blond haired, blue-eyed "Aryans," concluded Hitler, were superior to the dark-haired, swarthy Jews. These claims were false, but Hitler believed that if a lie was told often enough, people would come to believe it.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler offered a hierarchy of groups. At the bottom were not only Jews but also "Gypsies" and Africans. He claimed, for example, that those who thought that blacks were equal had been tricked: "From time to time illustrated papers bring it to the attention of the German

people that some place or other a Negro has for the first time become a lawyer, teacher, even a pastor, in fact a heroic tenor, or something of the sort... It doesn't dawn on this brainless world that this is positively a sin against all reason; that it is criminal lunacy to keep on drilling a [subhuman] until people think they have made a lawyer out of him, while millions of members of the highest race must remain in entirely unworthy positions. The fox is always a fox, the goose a goose, the tiger a tiger, etc."

Hitler often referred to the "good old days" in his speeches. The days he referred to were a mythical time when a community of "Aryans" lived peacefully together. He called upon the German *Volk* to restore that community by removing inferior races and eliminating the class hatred preached by the Communists. A supporter named Anna described the effects such a speech had on an audience in 1923.



You cannot imagine how silent it becomes as soon as this man speaks; it is as if all of the thousand listeners are no longer able to breathe. When he angrily condemns the deeds of those who have ruled our people since the revolution and those who now prevent him and his followers from settling accounts with those November bigwigs, cheers ring through the hall for minutes on end. There is no silence until he waves his hands repeatedly to indicate that he wants to continue speaking... Adolf Hitler is so firmly convinced of the correctness of his nationalistic views that he automatically communicates this conviction to his listeners. God grant that, as trailbreaker to better times, he will be able to gather many more racial comrades under the Swastika. After all, every class is represented. Workers and lower-ranking civil servants, officers and storm troopers, students and old pensioners – all sit together, and all are in agreement with the great concept embodied in the person of Adolf Hitler. It is often said that where eleven Germans come together, ten political parties are represented. Here, however, I have never heard anyone say that Hitler should do this, or that he should have done that. Sometimes it almost seems to me as if Hitler used a magic charm in order to win the unconditional confidence of old and young alike.²⁵

The Nazis played on fears that Germans would one day be outnumbered by "inferior peoples."

CONNECTIONS

What if the judges had followed the law and deported Hitler for plotting against the government? Would people have protested the decision? Or was Hitler so unknown and unimportant at the time that his case was likely to be overlooked?

What did the judge mean when he said that Hitler's thoughts and feelings were "German"? What are "German thoughts and feelings"? Is the question easier to answer if you substitute the word *American* for the word *German*?

Were individual Jews or Jews as a group the subject of Hitler's complaints? Were Hitler's complaints about Africans specific or general? What of his complaints about "Gypsies"? Could any of these complaints be proven?

George Mosse writes that Germans used the word *subhuman* only occasionally before the war. After the war, they used it far more often. He also notes that the word *fanatic*, which had a negative connotation before the war now came to "signify heroism and the willingness to fight." What does the term *subhuman* imply? How does the language we use affect the way we see ourselves and others?

Hitler believed that if you tell a lie big enough and often enough, people will come to believe it is true. What instances from your experiences support that assertion? Refute it?

What are the pictures that come into your mind when you hear about different groups in the United States today? Where do these images come from? Are they stereotypes or generalizations? What is the difference? In hard times, can you imagine neighbor turning against neighbor because of their physical characteristics?

The word *charisma* is defined as a quality attributed to those who have an exceptional ability to win the devotion of large numbers of people. What qualities made Hitler a charismatic leader? Anna speaks of the clarity of Hitler's viewpoint. How did that clarity contribute to his ability to attract followers? How did the fact that he seemed so sure of himself affect his audiences? Did Hitler's ideas on "race" contribute to his charisma? What leaders today do people consider charismatic? Do these leaders express their ideas clearly? Are they self-confident?

Anna offers one view of Hitler. Another German, Erika Mann, offers a very different view. She saw Hitler as uneducated, unathletic, weak, and uncourageous. In his analysis of *Mein Kampf*, George Sabine describes the man as "neither a scholar nor a theorist but a practical psychologist and an organizer." Compare and contrast the three descriptions. What do they say about the man? About each observer?

In the early 1990s, Serbia's leaders justified a brutal war with talk of the need to build a "Greater Serbia" through "ethnic cleansing." A prize-winning Yugoslavian novelist, Ivo Andric, referred to those Serbs as people "who easily make up fables and spread them quickly." In those fables, "reality is strangely and inextricably mixed and interwoven with legend." To what other groups today might his remarks also apply? To what other leaders? To what extent do his comments apply to Germans who joined extremist groups in the 1920s? To the leaders of those groups?

Henry Ford of the Ford Motor Company brought the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to the United States. Between 1920 and 1927, his newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, translated the document into English and printed it along with a series of articles accusing the Jews of using communism, banking, unions, gambling, even jazz music to weaken the American people and their culture. The entire series of articles was later published as a book, which sold over a half million copies in the United States and was translated into sixteen languages, including German. Hitler read the book and quoted it often. As a result of a lawsuit, Ford publicly apologized for spreading a lie. But the damage was already done. How difficult is it to "undo" a lie? Why do some people find it easier to believe an outrageous lie than a simple truth?

→The documentary *Mein Kampf* uses footage from dozens of different sources to portray Hitler's life and consider the ideas he advocated. Portions of the documentary will be quite useful at various times in a study of the Nazi era. It is available from the Facing History Resource Center.

Professor Paul Bookbinder maintains that Hitler's views of Jews were not uncommon in the 1920s. Therefore his antisemitic outbursts drew considerable support to the movement. See *Elements of Time*, page 42.

READING 12

Creating the Enemy

In times of stress and uncertainty, it is all too easy to blame *them* for society's problems. People respond favorably because such attacks tap old prejudices and offer easy answers to complex problems. But was there any truth to the claims Hitler and other antisemites made? Did the Jews control Germany? Historian Donald L. Niewyk studied German census data in search of answers to those questions. He found that that Jews

The very intensity with which the Jews were attacked in times of political uncertainty revealed how deep and irrational anti-Semitism was.

accounted for no more than 3.5 percent of all positions in trade, commerce, banking, law, and medicine, hardly enough to control a nation. He learned that although a few were very wealthy, the vast majority was not. He notes:

In the twelve years between 1912 and 1924, the proportion of Berlin Jews with taxable incomes of more than 5,000 marks fell from 10.6 percent to 5.8 percent, while during the same period the number of Jews with annual taxable incomes under 1,200 marks rose from 73.3 percent to 83.6 percent of the city's Jewish population. Jews who lived on fixed incomes from savings or investments were ruined during the inflation. By the end of 1923, the Berlin Jewish Community had established nineteen soup kitchens, seven shelters, and an employment information and placement office for the destitute Jews of the city. Other big-city communities did the same.²⁶

Niewyk points out that even during the “good years” of 1924-1929, the rate of unemployment in the Jewish community was high. The people who suffered most were Jews from Eastern Europe who settled in Germany before and just after the war to escape persecution and upheavals in the countries of their birth. They were subject to “chronic unemployment, sporadic official harassment, and the resentment of both Jewish and non-Jewish Germans.” They had little opportunity to improve their conditions or protect their rights by becoming citizens. Conservative state governments made it almost impossible for them to become German citizens.

Historian Victoria Barnett places the number of Jews in Germany slightly higher – at 1 1/2 percent, mainly because she includes Christians of Jewish descent. But she, too, finds that Jews were far less influential than most people assumed. “Although many Germans blamed the uncertainties of the Weimar years on too much Jewish influence in the government, for example, only 4 of the 250 government ministers during the entire Weimar Republic were Jewish. Yet, in April 1933, Berlin church leader Otto Dibelius wrote, ‘In the last 15 years in Germany, the influence of Judaism has strengthened extraordinarily. The number of Jewish judges, Jewish politicians, Jewish civil servants in influential positions has grown noticeably. The voice of the people is turning against this.’”²⁷

The growing antisemitism had a profound effect on the way German Jews saw themselves and others. They had taken pride in being German and saw their nationality as an integral part of their identity. Now antisemitism forced many Jews, including Sigmund Freud, to reassess their identity. In 1926, the Austrian native told an interviewer, “My language is German. My culture, my attainments are German. I considered myself German intellectually, until I noticed the growth of anti-Semitic prejudice in Germany and German Austria. Since that time, I prefer to call myself a Jew.” It was a particularly telling comment from a man who did not believe in God or organized religion.

Arnold Schoenberg, a world-famous composer, took an even stronger stand. In 1923, Wassily Kandinsky, a famous artist, invited him to join the faculty at the Bauhaus School of Design in Weimar. The composer was told that Jews were not normally welcome at the Bauhaus, but an exception would be made in his case. He angrily replied:

[When] I walk along the street and each person looks at me to see whether I'm a Jew or a Christian, I can't very well tell each of them that I'm the one that Kandinsky and some others make an exception of, although of course that man Hitler is not of their opinion. And then even this benevolent view of me wouldn't be much use to me even if I were, like blind beggars, to write it around my neck for everyone to read...

I ask: Why do people say that the Jews are like what their black-marketeers are like? Do people also say that the Aryans are like their worst elements? Why is an Aryan judged by Goethe, Schopenhauer and so forth? Why don't people say the Jews are like Mahler, Altenberg, Schoenberg and many others?

Schoenberg then asked Kandinsky how he dared to “‘reject me as a Jew.’ Did I ever offer myself to you? Do you think that someone like myself lets himself be rejected! Do you think that a man who knows his own value grants anyone the right to criticize even his most trivial qualities? Who might it be, anyway, who could have such a right?”

Schoenberg ended his letter by warning, “But what is antisemitism to lead to if not to acts of violence? Is it so difficult to imagine that? You are perhaps satisfied with depriving Jews of their civil rights. Then certainly Einstein, Mahler, I, and many others will have been got rid of. But one thing is certain: they will not be able to exterminate those much tougher elements thanks to whose endurance Jewry has maintained itself unaided against the whole of mankind for twenty centuries.”²⁸

CONNECTIONS

Review the journal entries you made while reading Chapter 1. What do they suggest about why people look for scapegoats?

Statistics reveal that less than 1 percent of Germany's population was of Jewish descent. In other parts of Europe the percentage ranged from 10-11 percent in Poland to less than 1/2 percent in such countries as Sweden, Denmark, Italy, and Yugoslavia. Although a few were rich, most barely eked out a living. Yet throughout Europe, people saw Jews as a powerful and dangerous people. What did Chapter 1 suggest about the power of myths and misinformation? How does this reading confirm that view? What does it suggest about the power of a lie that is told again and again? About the vulnerability of minorities in times of stress?

Victoria Barnett argues, “The very intensity with which the Jews were attacked in times of political uncertainty revealed how deep and irrational anti-Semitism was.”²⁹ What does she mean by that statement? Do you agree?

Draw an identity chart for Sigmund Freud. Why did he consider himself a Jew? Make a similar chart for Arnold Schoenberg. Does he believe that society has the right to define his identity?

Individuals today respond to racism much the way they did in the 1920s. An African American teenager recently wrote a poem called “Will They Ever Learn?” How would Schoenberg respond to the questions it raises? How would you respond?

As I look down, on this world of mine,
Several questions cross my mind.
Why do they stare when I walk through the hall?
Why do they think I can run with a ball?
Why do they think I swear all the time?
Why do they think I'll resort to crime?
Why do they think I like to fight?
Is it because I'm dark, not light?
I hear them talk behind my back
About my skin because it's black,
Too black to be friendly, too black to be smart.
Don't they know it breaks my heart
To hear them tease without my concern.
I wonder if they'll ever learn?³⁰

How does being an “outsider” affect one’s self-esteem? The way one sees himself or herself?

What does Schoenberg mean when he writes, “But what is antisemitism to lead to if not to acts of violence?” How would you answer the question? How are racism and violence linked? Record your answers in your journal so that you can refer to them later.

READING 13

Beyond the Stereotypes

James Luther Adams, a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School, traveled to Germany in 1927 to study at the University of Heidelberg. While visiting Nuremberg, he attended a Nazi rally. He later recalled:

[Perhaps] I went there because I had read the Nazis were having a big rally and it was said that about 150,000 youth came for this

particular rally in Nuremberg and it was claimed that none of them rode for one step in order to show German vigor and show that they were genuine Germans – *echt Deutsch*. Each youth was to walk from whatever part of Germany he lived to Nuremberg for this conference and there was a rally and there was a parade that lasted about three or four hours. It was on a Sunday and singing Nazi songs and carrying banners and the crowds were very dense and here I was standing right in the front as these Nazis were marching by. These youth goose-stepping and I asked a couple of people standing with me, knowing what the answer should be. I asked, “Well what’s the meaning of the swastika?” And these fellows gave me a typical Nazi answer about superiority of the German race and the necessity to purify Germany of Jewish blood and [in] the course of the conversation I asked them where are they [the Jews] going to go? “Well, we will put them out. They can find out where they’re going to go.”

The conversation became a little more intense and we were beginning to raise our voices. At this moment I was seized from behind. I, being a callow theological student, was inadequate for the situation, I couldn’t get away. A fellow had seized me by both elbows from behind and pulled me out. I tried to get away and nobody paid any attention to me and I couldn’t get away from him. He pushed me through that dense crowd and down the street into a side street and from there up into a dead-end alley marching me all the way. Nobody was interested in stopping him or anything and we got up to the end of the dead-end alley... and I didn’t know, of course, what was going to happen to me. Was he going to beat me up because of what I had been saying and he wheeled me around and shouted at me in German, “You damn fool, don’t you know that in Germany today you keep your mouth shut or you’ll get your head bashed in.” Well, I thought that was the next item on the agenda from his point of view and then he changed mood and smiled and he said, “You know what I have done. I’ve saved you from getting beaten up. They were not going to continue arguing with you. You were going to be lying flat on the pavement and I saw that coming and I grabbed you.”

“Well,” I said, “thank you very much. Why did you do that?”

“Well,” he said, “I was in the General Merchant Marines and I’ve been in New York City several times and while the ship was there got acquainted with New Yorkers. I never, never in my life (I’m just an ordinary sailor) had such wonderful hospitality and you know what came to my mind – think of that – I watched you getting in trouble. I said look at all the hospitality I received from Americans and I never paid them back. I’m doing it today. I’m inviting you home to Sunday dinner and I want you to see what a typical Sunday dinner is.”

So I went with him to a tenement house where some of the banisters were out of repair and so on and he was an unemployed anti-Nazi worker, a member of a trade union which was anti-Nazi, and we

climbed four flights to get to his barren tenement... An unemployed worker in a dilapidated tenement house and there was his wife and three children and we had Sunday dinner together and he gave me the first bottom line description of Nazi philosophy.³¹

CONNECTIONS

Did Adams's story surprise you? What did you think was going to happen when he was picked up and carried away? Why do you think an anti-Nazi attended a Nazi rally? Did it take courage for him to go?

What does Adams's story tell you about the political climate in Germany in the late 1920s? How significant is this story?

→A videotaped interview with James Luther Adams is available from the Facing History Resource Center. In it, he recalls his experiences as a theology student in Germany during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Adams was amazed to learn that many theologians supported Hitler. What aspects of Hitler's philosophy might appeal to a religious leader?

READING 14

Hard Times Return

By 1928, Germany had recovered from the war and business was booming, partly because German leaders had persuaded the Allies to lower reparations payments. Furthermore, Germany was no longer considered an "outlaw" nation. It was now a welcomed member of the League of Nations. As a result, fewer Germans seemed interested in Hitler's ideas. In the 1928 elections, the Nazis received only about 2 percent of the vote. Other conservative parties, like the People's Party, did far better. So did the Communists (KPD).

Historians note a decrease in tolerance and an increase in the number of hate groups during periods of depression and other forms of economic instability.

Then in 1929, a worldwide depression began. A *depression* is a time when economic activity slows as more and more businesses decrease production and lay off workers. Germany felt the effects of the depression almost immediately. Until 1929, loans from the United States helped fuel German recovery, but now hard-hit American banks began to call in those loans. As a result, many large German companies were forced to close their doors. Like leaders everywhere, those in Germany looked for ways to end the depression. And like other leaders in 1929, they failed. The chancellor of the Weimar Republic in 1929 was Hermann Mueller, a Social Democrat. By 1930, he and his party (SPD) were in trouble.

**Number of Seats Political Parties
Held in the Reichstag**

Party	1928	1930
SPD	153	143
Center	62	68
KPD	54	77
Nazi	12	107
People's	45	30

Heinrich Bruening of the Catholic Center Party replaced Muller as chancellor, but he, too, failed to solve the economic problems. Even though he suspended the Constitution by invoking Article 48, Bruening could not end the depression. Only the most extreme political parties seemed to have clear solutions to the crisis. The Communists won votes by blaming everything on wealthy industrialists. To end the depression, they argued, Germany had to replace the present system with a government like the one in Russia. The Nazis, on the other hand, blamed the Jews, Communists, liberals, and pacifists. And they, too, won support. Many saw the Nazis as an attractive alternative to democracy and communism. Among them were wealthy industrialists alarmed by the growth of the Communist party. They liked the Nazis' message; it was patriotic, upbeat, and energetic.

In 1932, Hitler ran for president against a Communist candidate and Hindenburg, the incumbent president. In order to do so, Hitler finally became a German citizen. The election was a spirited one, in which 84 percent of all eligible voters cast ballots. Those voters had to decide which party offered the best solution to the nation's problems. The decision was not an easy one. An observer noted that as voters went to the polls, each saw the war behind him, "in front of him social ruin, to his left he is being pulled by the Communists, to his right by the Nationalists, and all around him there is not a trace of honesty and rationality, and all his good instincts are being distorted into hatred." To appreciate those choices, compare the platforms of the Social Democratic party (SPD) and the Communist Party (KPD) with that of the Nazis (Reading 5).

Social Democratic Party Platform

We are committed to maintaining the Republic and a policy that will allow Germany to take its rightful place among the free governments of Europe.

1. We will support the present German Republic so that freedom, democracy, and justice will live in the hearts of our German countrymen.
2. We will honor all of Germany's obligations, political and financial, in order that Germany's honor and respect will not be decreased in the eyes of the world.
3. We plan to create more jobs by undertaking an extensive program of public works.

4. We will provide unemployment compensation for up to six months.
5. We will cut government expenditures to lower taxes.
6. We believe in the right of those who disagree with the party to speak and write on those issues without interference.

Communist Party Platform

We are committed to the overthrow of the presently existing, oppressive Republic and all of its economic and social institutions. We favor:

1. The abolition of private property.
2. The establishment of land reform programs, so that the government can take over the land and distribute it for the common good.
3. Government ownership of all industrial productive forces, so that they can be run for the benefit of the people rather than the capitalists.
4. A foreign policy that regards the Soviet Union as an ally against capitalism.

To the German people: The cause of your misery is the fact that French, British, and American capitalists are exploiting German workers to get rich themselves. Germans, unite to get rid of this terrible burden.

Which of these parties – SPD, KPD, or Nazi – would be most likely appeal to the following German citizens?³²

Hermann Struts

Hermann Struts, a lieutenant in the German army, fought bravely during the war. He comes from a long line of army officers and is himself a graduate of the German military academy. Struts has always taken pride in the army's able defense of the nation and its strong leadership.

Yet Struts is bitter about the fact that he has not had a promotion in over ten years. Few soldiers have, mainly because the German army was so drastically reduced by the Treaty of Versailles. In the old army, Struts would have been at least a captain by now and possibly a major. The treaty, he argues, has done irreparable harm not only to Germany's honor but also to his own honor as a soldier. He feels that if the civilian government had refused to sign the treaty and allowed the army to fight, both he and Germany would be better off.

Otto Hauptmann

Otto Hauptmann works in a factory in Berlin. Although his trade union has actively worked for better conditions and higher wages, it has not made many gains. Hauptmann blames their lack of success on the 1923

inflation and the current depression. He believes that the union would be more successful if the economy were more stable. Still, it is the union that has kept him employed. At a time when many of his friends have been laid off, his union persuaded the owners of his factory to keep men with seniority. In factories with weaker unions, managers kept only the young, claiming they are more productive.

Hauptmann worries about some of the ideas his fellow workers have expressed recently. They argue that when the owners are forced to cut back production, they take it out on the workers. So the only way to end the depression is to let the workers control the factories and the government. Hauptmann disagrees. He thinks that the workers do get fair treatment as long as they have a strong union. Moreover, he believes that managing the factories and government should be left to those who understand these complicated jobs.

Eric von Ronheim

Eric von Ronheim, the head of a Frankfurt textile factory, is very concerned about the depression. Sales are down and so are profits. If only Germany had not been treated so ruthlessly at Versailles, he argues, the nation would be far better off. Instead the government has had to impose heavy taxes to pay reparations to its former enemies. As a result, Germans are overtaxed with little money to spend on textiles and other consumer goods. The worldwide depression has made matters worse by eliminating possible foreign markets for German products. Even if the depression were over, Ronheim does not think taxes would come down because of reparation payments.

Ronheim considers the Communists a serious threat to Germany. He fears that if they set up a government like the one in the Soviet Union, capitalists like him would receive no mercy from the workers. He also thinks that Germany would become subservient to its old enemy, Russia.

Karl Schmidt

Karl Schmidt is an employed worker who lives in the rich steel-producing Ruhr Valley. Like so many men in the Ruhr, he lost his job because of the depression. Yet Schmidt notes that the owners of the steel mills still live in big houses and drive expensive cars. Why are they protected from the depression while their former employees suffer? Although the government does provide unemployment compensation, the money is barely enough to support Schmidt, his wife, and their two children. Yet the government claims that it cannot afford to continue even these payments much longer.

Schmidt feels that the government would be in a stronger position to help people if it cut off all reparations. But he also knows that if the government did so, the French might occupy the Ruhr Valley just as they did in 1923. What is needed is a government that is responsive to the workers – perhaps even one that is run by the workers, as some of his friends maintain. And he is convinced that Germany needs a government strong enough to stop reparation payments.

Wilhelm Schultz

Wilhelm Schultz works with his father on the family farm in East Prussia. The treaty has had a profound effect on Schultz and his family. The treaty turned part of East Prussia over to Poland. So even though his uncle lives just a few miles away, his home is now in Poland rather than Germany. Schultz's grandfather lives in Danzig. Although it is still part of Germany, it cannot be reached without traveling through Poland. As a result, the family cannot visit him without a passport and other official documents. That does not seem right to Schultz. As a child, he was taught to admire Germany's heroes, some of whom fought the Poles. So he is dismayed that his government signed a treaty that has subjected many Germans, including his uncle, to Polish rule. He is also bothered by greed and corruption he sees in government leaders. This is not the way Prussians should act.

Schultz also worries about the Communists. Neither he nor his father want a system that would eliminate private property. Both are proud to own their own land and anyone who wants to take it away is the enemy.

Elisabeth von Kohler

Elisabeth von Kohler, a prominent attorney who attended the University of Bonn, has a strong sense of German tradition. She believes that her people's contributions to Western civilization have been ignored. Kohler would like to see the republic lead a democratic Europe. She disapproves of the methods the Weimar Republic often uses to repress extremist parties. Her sense of justice is even more outraged by the way the Allies, particularly France, view Germany. She would like to prove to the world that the Germans are indeed a great race. She is proud to be an attorney and a German woman in the Weimar Republic.

Gerda Munchen

Gerda Munchen is the owner of a small Munich grocery store started by her parents. For years, her parents saved to send her to the university. But Munchen chose not to go and the money stayed in the bank. In 1923, she had planned to use the money to pay for her children's education. But that year inflation hit Germany. Just before her older daughter was to leave for the university, the bank informed the family that its savings were worthless. This was a blow to Munchen, but even more of a blow to her daughter, whose future hung in the balance.

Munchen does not think she will ever regain her savings. With so many people out of work, sales are down sharply. And Munchen's small grocery is having a tough time competing with the large chain stores. They can offer far lower prices. She and her children question a system that has made life so difficult for hardworking people.

CONNECTIONS

Was the Weimar Republic a success in 1928? If so, by whose standards? How do people measure the success of a nation? Of its government?

What does it mean to have one's "good instincts distorted into hatred"? How does that happen?

Write a working definition of *depression*. Historians note a decrease in tolerance and an increase in the number of hate groups during periods of depression and other forms of economic instability. How do you account for the decrease in tolerance? The rise in the number of hate groups? Are their observations as true today as they were in the past?

What was the significance of suspending Article 48?

Why did the Nazi message appeal to the industrialists? Why did many of them fear Communism? How do your answers help explain why people often look for simple answers to complex problems? Why they find ambiguity frightening? Record your ideas in your journal so that you can refer to them later.

Divide into small groups with each focusing on one of the individuals described in this reading. Before deciding how the individual that your group was assigned is likely to vote, compare the Nazi plan (Reading 5) with the two party platforms outlined in this reading. Be sure to justify your choices by identifying particular grievances and explaining how each party would redress those grievances. Think, too, about other factors that might persuade a voter to choose one party over another. What effect might such emotions as fear or pride have on the decision to support one party over another?

→*Friedrich* is a novel about two young boys – one Christian and the other Jewish – who came of age in Germany during the early 1930s. What does it reveal about how neighbor can come to turn against neighbor? Multiple copies of the book are available from the Facing History Resource Center.

READING 15

Hitler in Power

In July 1932, Paul von Hindenburg at the age of eighty-four was re-elected president. He promptly chose a new chancellor, because the country was still operating under Article 48 of the German constitution. Hindenburg named Franz von Papen, a close friend, to the post. Papen ran the country for the rest of the year. When he, too, failed to end the depression, yet

another of Hindenburg's friends, General Kurt von Schleicher, took over. He too was unable to bring about a recovery.

Schleicher, Papen, and Hindenburg's other advisers were all conservatives who represented wealthy landowners, industrialists, and other powerful people. They had little popular support. So in January of 1933, they decided to make a deal with Hitler. *He* had the popularity they lacked and *they* had the power he needed. They also agreed on a number of points, including opposition to Communism, hostility to the republic and the need for *Lebensraum*.

Hindenburg's advisors convinced themselves that they could control Hitler. They also believed that he would be less "wild" once he was in power. And they were certain that he too would fail to end the depression. And *when* he failed, *they* would step in to save the nation. Surprisingly, many Communists also supported the move. Unlike the conservatives, *they* did not expect Hitler to become more responsible. Instead they believed he would ruin Germany – a good thing from their point of view. Then the real revolution could begin and they would be able to take over. Hitler fooled them all.

CONNECTIONS

The chart below shows the results of elections to the Reichstag between 1928 and November 1932. Which parties gained the most seats? Why? How do you think the individuals introduced in Reading 15 reacted to Hitler's rise to power?

Party	1928	1930	July 1932	Nov. 1932
SPD	153	143	133	121
Center	62	68	75	70
KPD	54	77	89	100
Nazi	12	107	230	196
People's	45	30	7	11

Why do you think many people underestimated Hitler? Why do you think they failed to see him as a threat?

→ Christopher Isherwood's *The Berlin Stories* show German life in the last days of the Weimar Republic.

NOTES

- ¹ Paul Johnson, *Modern Times: The World from the Twenties to the Eighties* (Harper & Row, 1983), 4.
- ² *Ibid.*
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (St. Martin's Press, 1987), 25.
- ⁵ Paul Johnson, *Modern Times*, 13-14.
- ⁶ George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 173-175.
- ⁷ Ellen Switzer, *How Democracy Failed* (Atheneum, 1977), 12.
- ⁸ Quoted in *Modern Germany* by Koppel Pinson (Macmillan, 1954), 398.
- ⁹ A. M. Rosenthal, Copyright 1992 by The New York Times Company.
- ¹⁰ Ellen Switzer, *How Democracy Failed*, 20.
- ¹¹ Theodore Abel, *Why Hitler Came into Power*, 132.
- ¹² George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 160.
- ¹³ Henry Buxbaum, "Recollections." In *Jewish Life in Germany; Memoirs from Three Centuries*, ed. Monika Richarz; trans. Stella P. and Sidney Rosenfeld, (Indiana University Press, 1991), 303-304.
- ¹⁴ Albert Speer, *Spandau* (Macmillan, 1976).
- ¹⁵ Ellen Switzer, *How Democracy Failed*, 62-63.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ Theodore Abel, *Why Hitler Came into Power*, 47-48.
- ¹⁸ Ingo Muller, *Hitler's Justice, The Courts of the Third Reich*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider, (Harvard University Press, 1991), 23.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.
- ²⁰ Martha Minow, *Making All the Difference*, 376.
- ²¹ Quoted in *The Sex Panic: Women, Censorship and "Pornography"* (National Coalition Against Censorship, 1993), 20-21.
- ²² Quoted in Reinhold Heller, *Art in Germany, 1909-1936: From Expressionism to Resistance* (Prestel, 1991), 163.
- ²³ George Grosz, *A Little Yes and a Big NO*, trans. L. S. Dorin, (Dial, 1946), 63.
- ²⁴ Quoted in Ralph Knight, *A Very Ordinary Life*, 64.
- ²⁵ Quoted in *Hitler: Great Lives Observed*, ed. George H. Stein, (Prentice-Hall, 1968), 97-98.
- ²⁶ Donald L. Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany* (Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 18.
- ²⁷ Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 124.
- ²⁸ Quoted in Frederic V. Grunfeld, *Prophets Without Honour, A Background to Freud, Kafka, Einstein and Their World* (Holt, 1979), 175-176.
- ²⁹ Victoria Bamett, *For the Soul of the People*, 124.
- ³⁰ Myron Magcanas, Whilliker, CA.
- ³¹ James Luther Adams, interview, *No Authority But From God*, vol. 1 (video), James Luther Adams Foundation.
- ³² The case studies that follow are composites based on real individuals in Germany in 1932.