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A NEW HISTORY OF THE GERMAN PEOPLE

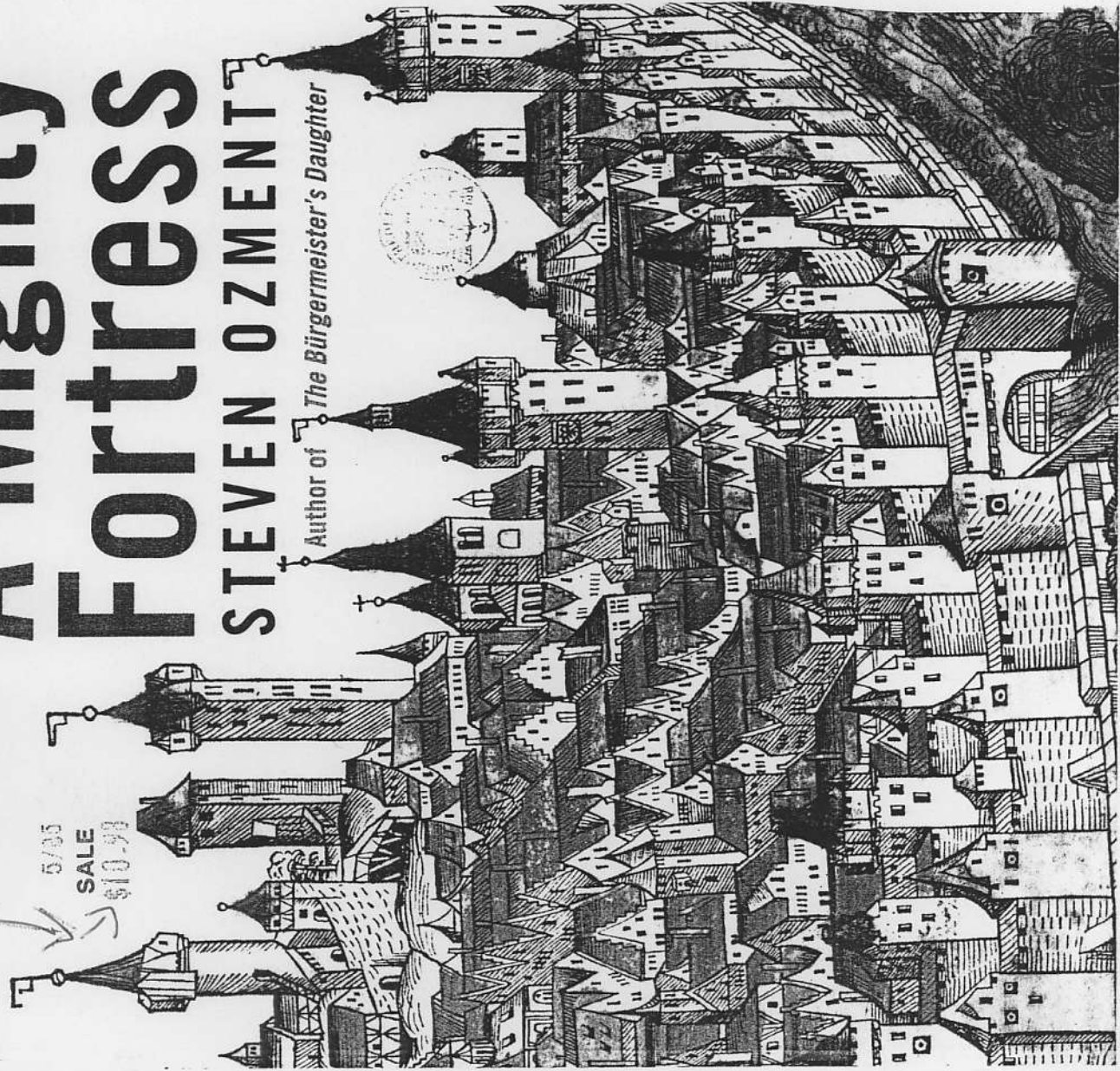
# A Mighty Fortress

STEVEN OZMENT

Author of *The Bürgermeister's Daughter*

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he word "German" was being used by the Romans as early as the mid-first century B.C. to describe tribes in the eastern Rhine

valley. Nearly two thousand years later, the richness and complexity of German history have faded beneath the long shadow of the country's darkest hour in World War II. Now award-winning historian Steven Ozment, whom the *New Yorker* has hailed as "a splendidly readable scholar," gives us the fullest portrait possible in this sweeping, original, and provocative history of the German people, from antiquity to the present, holding a mirror up to an entire civilization—one that has been alternately Western Europe's most successful and most perilous.

*A Mighty Fortress* boldly examines Germany's tumultuous twentieth century in light of its earliest achievements as a prosperous, civil, and moral society, tracing a line of continuity that began in ancient times and has endured through the ages, despite its enemies and itself. Ozment's story takes us from the tribes of the Roman Empire and the medieval dynasties to the fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification. He shows that the Germans are a people who desire national unity yet have kept themselves from it by aligning with autocratic territorial governments and regional cultures. From Luther, Kant, Goethe, and Beethoven to Marx, Einstein, Bismarck, and Hitler, the country's leading figures have always tried to become everything and more than what ordinary mortals could be. In fact, Germans living centuries apart have shared in different ways a common defining experience that is unique to their culture: a convergence of external provocation and wounded pride, and an unusual ability to exercise great power in response to both.

In this work of penetrating, virtuoso scholarship, Steven Ozment captures the soul of a nation that is at once ordered and chaotic, disciplined and obsessive, proud and uncertain. Epic in scope, refreshing in its insights, and written with nuance, acumen, and verve, *A Mighty Fortress* presents the history of the Germans as the story of humanity writ large.





# THE COMPOSITE GERMAN

Germany Since World War II

**MAY 8, 1945, MARKED THE OFFICIAL END** of the war in Europe, the unconditional surrender of all German forces to General Dwight D. Eisenhower having occurred the day before in Reims. By this time Allied bombing had laid waste to Germany's great cities, and the total German war dead would climb to 4.5 million. Of those, 500,000 were civilians incinerated in the cities, 2 million soldiers who died on the battlefields, and another 2 million refugees forced from German-occupied Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia between 1944 and 1946 in what has been called "the greatest migratory movement of modern times."<sup>1</sup>

The victorious Allies who now sought to pacify and unite a defeated Germany were themselves divided by different histories, politics, and cultures. Those differences, later driven home in the occupied zones during the Cold War, also shaped the future of Germany. The French and left-liberal German intellectuals believed a solution to the German problem lay in the permanent division of

Steven Ozment  
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Germany. In the end, however, it was the Allies' need to resolve their own differences that created the two Germanies.

At a meeting in Tehran in November 1943, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union agreed to divide Germany into occupied zones. A second meeting at Yalta, in February 1945, addressed the imperative of disarming and denazifying Germany to the fullest extent. In the three Western zones, the allies proceeded to turn Germans into democrats, while in the Eastern the Soviets sought to make socialists of them. In all four zones the Germans were reluctant converts, the great majority of them hoping for a democratic-socialistic "third way" that would keep German lands united and accessible to all Germans.<sup>2</sup>

The Potsdam Conference implemented the Allied agreements in the summer of 1945. Meeting under the leadership of President Harry S. Truman and British Prime Minister Clement W. Attlee, the Allies adopted a pragmatic rule that had saved Germans after another pan-European crisis centuries earlier: the ruler of a land or, in this case, the commander of an Allied military zone, would govern that zone as he deemed best.

Among the divisive issues were reparations. The Soviets occupied the territorially largest but least populated and industrialized zone, moving the better endowed Western Allies, whose zones included the industrial Ruhr, to pledge them an additional 10 percent of their reparations. The needy Soviets dismantled far more German factories for transport and reassembly at home, suggesting that they had not intended to occupy Germany for long. The French also stripped their zone during the first four years of occupation. However, by 1948, the Western Allies, with France by then in agreement, remembered the aftermath of Versailles and chose a policy of recovery and reconstruction over one of punishment and pillage. Empowered by the Marshall Plan, a four-year strategic investment of \$1.4 billion in rapid European recovery, West German unity and productivity ran impressively apace.<sup>3</sup>

With few true democrats existing in West Germany at war's end

and equally scarce committed Communists in the East, the Allies in both Germanies had their work cut out for them. Viewing the Germans collectively as Nazis, the Western Allies initially denied existing antifascist groups a role in rebuilding their country. In doing so, an opportunity to jump-start German democracy sooner and place it under native political leadership was arguably missed.<sup>4</sup> Also keeping Germans on the sidelines in the Western zones were zealous Allied efforts at denazification and reeducation. The Nazi-ferreting questionnaires of the Americans cited 136 mandatory reasons for excluding a German from postwar employment. For interrogated Germans four possible categories of guilt and only one of exoneration existed.<sup>5</sup> Such postwar scrutiny and tutelage, which continued in different forms during the Cold War, created red-tape nightmares for both the hapless and the guilty, leaving much repressed German resentment.<sup>6</sup>

The Soviets, by contrast, targeted German sociopolitical structures rather than individuals. In place of the old Nazi regime came a Marxist-Leninist collective, into which preexisting Social Democratic and Communist parties were funneled. Established in 1946, the new Socialist Union Party (SED) thenceforth became the only legal East German political party. Repressing individual freedom and entrepreneurship, the new Soviet-style command economy progressively undermined the political stability top-down control had won.

Despite initial screening, a sizable number of former Nazi Party members gained important positions in Germany's reconstruction. In many instances they had the better skills and experience, and in the larger scheme of things their employment was arguably more practical. During the strict Nazi years, many jobs and positions required a party affiliation, which forced untold numbers of Germans to become nominal Nazis not out of ideology but necessity. In the first months of reconstruction, Allied determination to identify and punish real Nazis created a conflict that still continues today—namely, how to balance the humane responsibility of remembering

with the vital need to move on. The first, of course, weighed more heavily on the Allies, the second on the Germans, who had suffered the most devastating defeat of their history within short memory of another like it.<sup>7</sup> Here was a crossroads all too familiar to the Germans, whose inability to put 1918 and the bitter years of Weimar behind them had paved the way to 1933.

In May 1949, under Allied mandate, a German constituent assembly ratified a new provisional constitution for the Western zones known as the Basic Law. Assembly president Konrad Adenauer, a seventy-three-year-old former lord mayor of Cologne, Catholic and anti-Communist, signed the legislation into law three months before taking office as West Germany's first postwar chancellor. More in need of stability than of change, West Germany was ruled for two decades by the conservative Christian Democratic Union Party, an ecumenical postwar reconfiguration of the old Catholic Center Party. Between 1948 and 1952 the Marshall Plan allowed the tough and clever Adenauer to stand even taller, practicing what some unadmirably called "Chancellor democracy."<sup>8</sup> The intention was to rebuild Western Europe's industry and labor into an economic wall against Eastern zone Communism, the first of two great walls to be thrown up between the two Germanies.

In December 1946 the British and Americans merged their zones ("Bizonia") and were joined two years later, in June 1948, by the French ("Trizonia"). In June 1948 Western currency reform, the brainchild of Economics minister Ludwig Erhard, gave the converging Western zones a second big push toward West German statehood. After minting a new German mark in the United States and introducing it into their zones on forty-eight hours' notice on June 20, the Western Allies proceeded to extend the new currency into the sectors of Berlin they occupied, which lay well inside the Russian zone. From there it found its way into the Soviet zone and East Berlin, where a separate currency, the East German mark, was introduced by the occupying Soviets the following week. The western action broke an understanding with the Soviets, and triggered a

blockade of the major western roads into Berlin. Three months earlier, after discovering Allied plans to create a separate Western German state, the Soviets had resigned from the Allied Oversight Commission. Out of this confrontation, which saw Allied planes fly 277,000 sorties in less than eleven months to supply the 2.5 million people unprovisioned in the western sectors of Berlin, East and West Germany were born.<sup>9</sup>

### MIRACLES AND REVERSALS

The great majority of Germans had hoped for a hybrid union of East and West. The new governments instead took their respective states in opposite political directions set by the occupying powers. The new regimes did, however, have this much in common: Unlike the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, each became a highly predictable and productive state.

Adenauer's German counterpart, Walter Ulbricht, had spent the war years in the Soviet Union, whence he returned to eastern Germany as head of the Communist Party in 1945. By the end of that year, the large agricultural estates had been nationalized and the privileged Junker class abolished. During his twenty-two-year tenure as premier of the German Democratic Republic, from 1949 to 1971, Ulbricht nationalized East German finance and industry, converted the five separate eastern German states into party districts, and collectivized agriculture. On June 17, 1953, East Berliners revolted against the Soviet occupation, only to be brutally suppressed. After joining the Warsaw Pact (the East European military alliance) and Comecon (the East European economic union) in 1955, the new Stalinist state became the most important cog in the Soviet empire. In 1960 a new round of agricultural collectivization sparked new protests, quickening the flight to the West. By the time the Berlin Wall was built the following year, 1.65 million East Ger-

mans had moved to West Germany.<sup>10</sup> By 1968 the SED proclaimed its sovereign rule in a new constitution.

The Federal Republic mirrored the Western democracies with its competitive party politics, unabashed materialism, and ban on the Communist Party.<sup>11</sup> Between 1950 and 1980, the West German mark increased in value at an average annual rate of 8 percent, while the GDR counterpart rose at 3 percent—a very respectable growth rate given East Germany's more jarring transformation.<sup>12</sup> In addition to its economic success, the Federal Republic won its citizenry to democracy by achieving what the Frankfurt National Assembly could only blueprint and the Weimar Republic realize in intermittent stretches: an effective government and bankable security. The Basic Law contained new provisions designed to prevent the anarchy and fascism that destroyed the Weimar Republic. It denied seats in the Bundestag, Germany's Federal Parliament, to splinter parties with less than 5 percent of the vote, and recognized the durability of a vulnerable chancellor until parliament had agreed on a successor.<sup>13</sup> The Federal Republic thus became a more stable democracy, whose principles and goals did not overreach or scare anyone.

Undergirding the West's thirty years of industrial boom, from 1950 to 1980, was a policy of joint decision making between industry and labor. In addition to that consensus, German success owed much to German labor's ability to do more and better work in a thirty-five-hour week than many competitors in forty.<sup>14</sup> In East Germany a similar work ethic, both marshaled and repressed by collectivization, nationalization, and political conformity, set the pace of productivity within Comecon.

#### *West Germany*

While a new materialistic society dismayed some West Germans, the rising standard of living and freedom from risky, ideology-driven policies buoyed most. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, the economic miracle became the object of mounting left-liberal criti-

cism, which also targeted the government's slowness to address the Nazi past in the schools and universities. Such criticism helped retire Kurt-Georg Kiesinger's three-party coalition—CDU/CSU (Christian Social Union) and SPD—and bring Willy Brandt and a new SPD/FDP (Free Democratic Party) coalition to power in 1969, the beginning of fourteen years of left-liberal rule. An outspoken, and hence endangered, socialist, Brandt spent the war years in Norway aiding Nazi resistance movements in- and outside of Germany. Prior to becoming chancellor, he had been the popular mayor of West Berlin and a scene-stealing foreign minister in Kiesinger's government.

Kiesinger, by contrast, had been a Nazi Party member throughout the 1930s and 1940s, working in the Foreign Ministry as a radio propagandist. Interned in 1945, he was declared innocent of any war crimes in 1947. That so seemingly odd a couple could create a coalition government was a true snapshot of postwar Germany in transition. When Brandt defeated Kiesinger in 1969, thirty-nine years had passed since the last SPD chancellor. Given Brandt's role in the resistance, it was poetically just that that chancellor, Hermann Müller, had led the last coalition to work in true partnership with a German government prior to the Nazi seizure of power.

Postwar Germans East and West lived in a society largely shorn of power elites, although the SED represented a very privileged group in the classless GDR. In the West only the remnants of an old aristocracy, a sizable segment of which had resisted Hitler, kept Germany's noble past alive in the public eye.<sup>15</sup> Rather than an ethnic-political union, or the old hierarchy of fixed estates and rankable classes, postwar Germans viewed themselves and their nation pragmatically, as a society of professions (*berufständische Gesellschaft*), citizens grouped around, and defined by, freely chosen productive labor.<sup>16</sup>

With the Berlin Wall incarcerating East Germans after 1961, meritocratic and egalitarian ideals asserted themselves in the West during the 1960s, particularly in the universities.<sup>17</sup> Between 1959 and 1988 university enrollment climbed almost eightfold, from two

hundred thousand to 1.5 million, and grew especially rapidly during the chancellorships of Brandt (1969–74) and Helmut Schmidt (1974–83), who steadily expanded the opportunity for a college education.<sup>18</sup> This convergence of large numbers of students from diverse backgrounds on theoretically open and liberal universities still staffed by a very conservative professoriate—many professors at the time refused to answer questions in their lectures—was a sure recipe for generational conflict.

That, however, was only one reason why German universities became hotbeds of dissent in the late 1960s. The decade also saw the rapid growth of an autonomous youth culture across both Europe and the United States. Large numbers of idealistic youth, with their own money, music, sexual freedom, and unprecedented mass political power, found themselves no longer bound to, or necessarily destined for, the vocational and social worlds of their parents. In addition to many local “tyrants” begging attack, an “imperial” enemy also emerged on the international stage, giving disaffected youth everywhere a rallying cry: the American army in Vietnam with its napalm and B-52s. (When I left the University of Tübingen in the spring of 1968, I watched students spray painting “USA” as “U-[swastika]-A” on university buildings.)

In 1967 the stakes of the generational battle rose even higher after police shot to death a student protester during a state visit by the shah of Iran—an episode made all the more inflammatory after media mogul Axel Springer’s newspapers blamed the death on the protesters. The following year “Red” Rudi Dutschke, an East German pacifist and Marxist turned West German student protest leader, was left a cripple by a right-wing assassin’s bullet, further provoking youthful reaction. For a radical few those two acts of carnage transformed protest into terrorism. The most violent group active in the 1970s was the Red Army Faction (RAF), popularly known as the Baader-Meinhof gang in romanticized honor of pioneer terrorists Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof—the former a professor’s son, the latter a pastor’s daughter, journalist, and mother of two—who

happened also to be lovers. With other kindred groups, the RAF killed 28, wounded 93, took 162 hostages, and robbed thirty-five banks of 5.4 million marks before being neutralized.<sup>19</sup>

The late 1960s and 1970s also saw heightened conflict between parliamentary conservatives and liberals. Willy Brandt spent his political capital on normalizing relations with East Germany—*Ostpolitik*—diplomacy popular with the voters, who always wanted more contact with family and friends on the other side of the Wall. Brandt’s political overtures to the East not only brought the two Germanies closer together, they elevated East Germany onto the European and international stage, leading to its membership in the United Nations and normalcy as a European state. To Brandt’s critics his *Ostpolitik* was just another word for giving aid and comfort to the enemy, and they enjoyed a sweet vindication when one of his top aides was discovered to be an East German spy.<sup>20</sup>

Another major problem whose seeds were sown in the early 1960s also stemmed from the rapidity of postwar reconstruction, and not least that of the physical separation of the two Germanies epitomized by the Berlin Wall. The booming Western economy created many largely menial jobs undesirable to West Germans, and with the building of the Wall, the steady stream of cheap East German labor on which the West relied ceased to flow. In its place came foreign guest workers (*Gastarbeiter*) from the east and the south, mostly Turks and people of Mediterranean descent.

Those who came took full advantage of Germany’s postwar generosity and emotional need to show kindness to strangers. Given pay, benefits, and human rights beyond those in their homelands, new immigrants arrived in ever-increasing numbers, and often with little desire ever to return to the unblest life they had left behind. By 1990 the new work force had become a problem for a reuniting Germany. Some 4.8 million foreign workers and their ever-growing families, a third of them Muslim Turks, lived in Germany. For the most part they integrated themselves poorly into German society and culture, while successfully replicating their own on German

soil.<sup>21</sup> In 2000, 30 percent of Frankfurt's population were Muslim Turks, who worshiped in the city's twenty-seven mosques.<sup>22</sup>

In German history the hyphenated German and the predatory foreigner have often merged into one, and they have done so again in the persons of these modern foreign workers. The workers coming in recent decades, however, cross German borders from the south and the east not as aggressors or invaders but as invited "guests" to help maintain the German economy and way of life—hence, more as federates than as aliens. Yet, with the passage of time, their permanence, proliferation, and nonassimilation have also burdened the economy and threatened German unity and cultural identity. With them have also come hundreds of thousands of economically motivated asylum seekers (*Asylanten*), who take advantage of postwar Germany's penitential need to be a refuge for the politically persecuted of the world. By German law any foreigner, simply by stepping on German soil and claiming to be in flight from tyranny, received an asylum hearing at state expense, including room and board for the duration of the process. Among other postwar immigrants invited to Germany after the dissolution of the Soviet Union were Eastern Jews, who faced renewed persecution there, and nearly two million ethnic Germans.

The Blood Law of 1913 (aka the Nationality Act) had based German citizenship on lineage rather than land of birth. The Aliens Act of 1990 changed that by giving German-born residents with fifteen years of residency, and their children born on German soil, the right to petition for naturalization—a tough scrutiny that only 5 percent of applicants passed.<sup>23</sup> As in the United States and other fat lands, roughly two-thirds of those denied permanent residency became illegal aliens, disappearing into established foreign-worker communities.

By the new law implemented on January 1, 2000, any child born in Germany is today legally a German citizen, provided that one parent has been a legal resident for eight consecutive years and has held a valid resident permit for at least three.<sup>24</sup> However, the new

law discourages dual citizenship. Foreign-born German citizens must choose one or the other nationality by age twenty-three. In cases where the surrender of non-German citizenship may be impossible or inadvisable, dual citizenship can be petitioned up to age twenty-one. The new citizenship law thus prioritizes German acculturation in an apparent effort to minimize large numbers of "hyphenated" German citizens. Assuming Germans can find the will to embrace larger numbers of such citizens, their ability to pay for them and to maintain a unified German culture in the process remains a large, unanswered question.

### East Germany

In the 1950s West Germany's political stability and economic success exceeded the expectations of both the Allies and the Germans. During the 1960s and 1970s, student protest and terrorism, amid unprecedented foreign immigration, threatened the loss of that unity, freedom, and prosperity. Such foreboding played a sizable role in making Helmut Kohl's sixteen-year conservative rule the longest of any German chancellor since Bismarck.

Egalitarian East Germany threw up a more protective shell from the start by installing single-party rule in 1946. That rule steadily tightened through the 1950s and 1960s with the dissolution of East Germany's five separate states, its membership in the Warsaw Pact and Comecon, the building of the Wall, and a hard-line, Soviet-oriented constitution that magnified the German Democratic Republic's separate nation status vis-à-vis the West.<sup>25</sup> Although no Nazi dictatorship, the GDR was a police state from the start, with its own security forces—the so-called *Stasi* (*StAatsSicherheitspolizei*)—who were backed up by Soviet soldiers. After 1960 East Germans could not travel freely to the West, thenceforth bound to their fatherland not only by patriotism and free choice but also by brick walls and bullets—desperate measures taken by a Communist state fearful of losing its vital work force and *raison d'être* to the West.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1970s, after two and half decades of totalitarian rule, the GDR stepped up its dialogue with the West. Its most liberal action during the decade, however, was one the Communist Party came to regret. In 1978 the SED recognized the independence of the Protestant Church, allowing it to become a refuge for the forces of protest and reform, thereby indirectly taking the first steps toward unification with the West.<sup>27</sup>

Contrary to appearances the state's recognition of the Church did not amount to appeasement or cooptation on the part of either side, but was a step taken from deep within German history, with both sides venturing and gaining. Like many East German intellectuals and writers, the Protestant clergy also improved the success of their own mission by cooperating with the state.<sup>28</sup> In 1971 East German bishop Albrecht Schönherr, speaking for the League of Protestant Churches, described the East German church, already then indispensable to the operation of the state's welfare system, as ready to "work within rather than 'against' or 'alongside' socialism."<sup>29</sup> The accord thus reached with the state fulfilled mutually self-interested religious and political goals. Rather than signifying ideological pluralism within the SED, the agreement attested the overriding force of historical cooperation between German Church and state dating back to the Middle Ages. In an effort to facilitate a spiritual mission in even direr need of political support, Luther, centuries earlier, had declared Saxon rule and the Christian cure of souls to be independently tasked yet similarly destined<sup>30</sup>—a latter-day version of which Bishop Schönherr appears to have articulated in 1971.

Church-state cooperation was not the only part of the German past East Germans embraced to advantage. In the late 1970s historical Saxon and Prussian strongmen—Luther, Frederick the Great, and Bismarck—had wide popularity.<sup>31</sup> Within their own history East Germans found resources to fashion a state of their own beyond Soviet and American models. Both Germanies thought the latter to be flawed, the Soviet by its suppression of individual freedom and

collectivism, the American by its heightened individualism, materialism, and social divisions. The classic German past also offered an alternative to the political universalism then being served up to a new generation in the West by left-liberal intellectuals, who encouraged Germans to think of themselves in European and global terms and not as citizens of a particular nation-state. This may have been the development West German president Richard von Weizsäcker had in mind when he credited East Germans with a "more stable, serious, and truthful consciousness of German history," notwithstanding Communist Party lapses into "ideologization."<sup>32</sup>

While SED officials exploited the past to shore up a failing political system, many East Germans, counting lost freedoms and taking every opportunity to flee to the West, believed relevant answers to individual and national identity loomed large there. For those in flight, the past told a story of German men and women, who, from age to age, had embodied their nation's will in forceful action. In this, the Saxons of the second half of the twentieth century had something in common with those of the first half of the sixteenth. Then, too, a national reform movement explored a largely unknown German past in search of telling examples and native counsel, around which church and state might realign their respective endeavors.

The East Germans' more positive reading of their history contrasted sharply with that of prominent West German intellectuals, who read the past as merely prelude to latter-day horrors—particularly in the ages of strong rulers. Believing the past to be tainted and nowhere magisterial, not a few postwar German historians, philosophers, and writers dismissed its politics, societies, and culture much as the sages of the nineteenth century had. The most critical heard the pleas of postwar chancellors for normalcy as the siren calls of Bismarck's Reich and Kaiser William II's Germany.<sup>33</sup>



### GERMAN UNIFICATION, 1990

The union of the two Germanies and the return of self-exiled Germans from foreign lands made German identity an even more pressing matter. Throughout twenty-eight years of separation, divided families had kept reunion hopes alive. Straws, fanned by the churches, began blowing steadily East to West during the 1980s. In both lands evangelical and Catholic churches had continued to preach an appealing gospel of spiritual freedom and equality beyond the secular confines of Marxist-Leninism and capitalism. That gospel rang true with both Eastern communal and Western democratic ideals. At the same time Mikhail Gorbachev pressed his program of *glasnost*, the freedom to question, and *perestroika*, the right to reform, on the Soviet bloc. After East German leader Erich Honecker's agreement in 1987 to allow his citizens to make brief visits to the west without the usual bureaucratic harassment, the push West became unstoppable.

As the Cold War created the division of Germany, its conclusion made possible its repair.<sup>34</sup> Between the soaring expense of the arms' race and the failure of showcase Communist states, the Soviets had no option but *détente*. Having arguably pursued a collectivist society beyond common sense and human ability, eastern-bloc states became demoralized dictatorships, their citizens alienated from both their labor and their governments.

The first crack in the Iron Curtain came in 1989 when newly democratic Hungary, left to its own devices by the Soviet Union, opened its border to Austria. Soon the Czech border was porous as well. In East Germany smaller curtains began falling, despite the integrity of the Berlin Wall. Rediscovering itself, the SPD challenged the SED, and a new intellectual lobby, the New Forum, made a compelling case for political change. Under the banner "We Are the People," revolutionary protests and marches, particularly those in Leipzig in the summer of 1989, became too numerous and persistent to be crushed by the state. Influential citizens—among

them Kurt Masur, then music director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra—successfully counseled *détente* rather than tanks. With a push from Gorbachev, Honecker resigned on October 1, eventually to become an exile in Chile. In the first week of November, the new government of Egon Krenz recognized the right of its citizens to travel at will to West Germany and even promised them a democratic election. On November 9, the Berlin Wall was breached, with thousands going back and forth on that day, to be followed the next weekend by a throng of 4 million.<sup>35</sup> By New Year's the GDR was crumbling, and Krenz's West German counterpart took notice. While events were moving beyond everyone's expectations, Helmut Kohl positioned himself to put the two Germanies back together.

The Germans called his election in 1982 the *Machtwechsel*, or "change of power"—namely, from the fourteen-year liberal SPD/FPD rule of Brandt and Schmidt to the sixteen-year conservative CDU/CSU rule of Kohl, with center-liberal FDP help. Kohl stuck to his campaign promises of normality and stability. Once breaking events made the unification of the two Germanies a viable option, he stepped under the yoke and never looked back, having correctly read the minds of the majority of Germans, who wanted their country united immediately. Promising East Germans verdant landscapes, and assuring West Germans that it could be done with little pain—neither of which proved true—Kohl threw his full weight behind "unification now."<sup>36</sup>

Within months of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Kohl won the March 1990 election on the promise of immediate German unification, the SPD, to its electoral peril, having campaigned on caution. Kohl and his CDU counterpart in the East, Lothar de Maiziere, began reunion talks almost immediately. The *Machtwechsel* was succeeded by *die Wende*, "the turn," as the two Germanies now united on their own without the hovering, dictating allies. Kohl sweetened the prospects for East Germans by offering a one-to-one currency exchange on the first four thousand marks of wages and pensions (the rate thereafter being adjusted according to age and wealth).

While a boon to East German pocketbooks and unification, that bit of economic parity threw East German industries into an impossible competition with their West German counterparts.<sup>37</sup>

### *Germanness*

Since Roman times Germans have struggled to define themselves as a people. Today, when meeting a foreigner, the citizens of no other European land are more likely to know, or quickly to speak, the foreigner's language—or to do so as well as the Germans. One may see in such behavior only the will to power. More likely it is the reflex of a people hard pressed throughout their history to demonstrate their abilities and worthiness to powerful, distrusting, and dangerous neighbors.

Between the fall of Rome and the creation of the Frankish and Saxon empires, culturally challenged Germans embraced the institutions, languages, laws, and customs of the superior Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian worlds they served and conquered.<sup>38</sup> Germans have ever since been careful students of other people, today going more often to foreign lands when they vacation than the citizens of any other nation.<sup>39</sup> From the beginning geography and history made centralized German lands crossroads of international trade and culture, and thus also classrooms with many nonnative teachers. During and after the Thirty Years' War and then, again, with Napoleon, Germans demonstrated their ability to embrace and rework foreign models. In both cases the scope of foreign conquest and occupation gave them reason to doubt their continued existence, politically and culturally, as a people. During both those wars and into reconstruction, large numbers of defeated Germans lived on native lands reconfigured by foreigners. Making the most of their surroundings became the German way of survival and self-discovery.

This story is particularly well told in the history of German music, where borrowing Germans exceeded their foreign masters. Beginning with the hymns of the Reformation, which set a new the-

ology to both old religious and new popular music, Germans pioneered inclusive musical arts.<sup>40</sup> During the baroque period, master German composers improved on other peoples' signature tunes and songs. Bach and Handel and their Austrian counterparts, Haydn and Mozart, pirated Italian operas—Bach finding additional models among the French masters, while Handel adapted the oratorios of his adopted England, a few of which celebrated the ancient Hebrews.<sup>41</sup>

Such inquiry into the culture of others was not confined to the musical arts. In their studies of early German language and folklore, Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm compared many non-German examples. Jakob had been a student of Friedrich Karl von Savigny, perhaps the age's greatest legal scholar, who sought to fathom German culture through the study of law codes. With similar motivation the Grimms probed the international folk literature, writing to Sir Walter Scott and his counterparts in Ireland, England, Norway, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Serbia, and Russia.<sup>42</sup> In the aftermath of the French occupation, many Germans feared that they were witnessing the end of their culture, for which reason they took reassurance and inspiration from the studies of Savigny and the Grimms.<sup>43</sup>

In the nineteenth century Richard Wagner, director of the Dresden Opera House at thirty and a fervent supporter of the German Revolution of 1848–49, wore the latter's failure proudly on his baton. Joining the romantic reaction in the wake of democracy's defeat, he looked inward for the heights politics had been unable to reach. In doing so he reflected more powerfully than any other nineteenth-century musician the new critical culture pointing the way to the twentieth. On the one hand he feared "foreign intellectual products," both musical and non, believing that they would corrupt the purer German. Yet this most *völkisch* of German composers strove to render foreign talent universal.

At thirty-seven, he pseudonymously wrote a minor dissertation ridiculing "Jewishness in Music," the impact of which, upon the discovery of his authorship, brought him public criticism and even

ostracism.<sup>44</sup> From it he apparently learned a small lesson. Thirty-two years later, he invited German Jewish maestro Hermann Levi to conduct the first performance of *Parsifal* in 1882, giving musical talent a belated and, unfortunately, exceptional priority over new-age anti-Semitism.<sup>45</sup>

Unknowingly preparing the way for the darker side of the 1930s, nineteenth-century German musicologists doggedly pursued the search for "Germanness" in antiquity by attempting to document a race-specific "Nordic musical feeling." That search focused on the ancient Alemanni tribe and the widespread popularity of the lyre (*lur*) among the Germanic tribes generally, an instrument that suggested polyphony, which implied musical ingenuity. That conclusion, however, was as erroneous as popular racial profiling was perilous. The classic style of German music appears rather to have derived from Bohemian roots, not precise, identifiable German ones.<sup>46</sup>

In the 1860s the quest for German unity intensified speculation on German identity. Among the nets then being cast, none was larger or retrieved a more various catch than that of the widely traveled nineteenth-century ethnographer, Bogumil Goltz. A self-taught student of world cultures, Goltz wrote on such wide-ranging subjects as the natural history of women, the genius of Shakespeare, German pubs, and Egyptian small towns. These studies provided context and contrast for his exploration of the traits of Germans, which he found to exist both outside German lands and beyond the nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> In casting about for models of the "universal people," which he believed Germans to be, he was not alone. Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, German scholars were among, if not *the*, world experts on ancient Greece and Rome. And they devoted even greater study to contemporary French, English, and American societies.<sup>48</sup>

Writing in the decade of the *Kulturkampf* and national unity, Goltz extrapolated German identity from Germany's historical role as the bearer of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian cultures to

Europe. And by connecting the dots that led beyond Europe, he discovered a cosmopolitan people (*Weltbürgerlichkeit*), who knew both too much and too little about themselves:

As man stands above all other creatures, the German is privileged within the human race, for he unites in himself the characteristic properties, talents, and virtues of all races and nations. . . . We are . . . a cosmopolitan, world-historical people . . . and for that reason cannot be chauvinistically herded and driven like dumb animals. . . . We are the people in whom all other people and races of the earth may find their roots and treetops.

We are as hard-working, diligent, and skillful as the Chinese and possess . . . their reverence for parents, old people . . . and princes, [also] their respect for learning and the ways of the past. . . .

In our scholarship and other endeavors, we exhibit a Jewish-Talmudic subtlety, organizational skill, toughness . . . and indestructibility, [also] Jewish slander, calumny, envy, and quarrelsomeness in our private life, yet without prejudicing Jewish sociability, warmth, sympathy, and tender family feeling. . . .

We are disposed both to the separatist-temporal caste-spirit [of India and] to its polar extreme, the formless, Arabic, fairy-tale fantasy and brooding myth-theosophy of the ancient Indians. . . .

We await the reconciliation of dynastic autocracy and democracy, backwardness and forwardness, pedantry and discovery, refinement and the primordial brew, immanence and transcendence, the centrifugal and the centripetal, [old] authority and [new] ideas, socialism and individualism. . . .

If there is one people who from the [early European] migrations until today have mastered and preserved a world culture in all circumstances, it is the Germans. Roman history flows in German veins, because Germans assimilated Roman law and customs, and thereafter were raised to new powers by Christianity, which allowed the German people to become a new reality. . . .<sup>49</sup>

[Thus] the German, who cannot unify his own land politically, and has so much difficulty grasping the concepts of a nation-state

and a balance of power with other states, that same German helps establish states and cities in faraway parts of the world. . . . And he does so because he identifies so easily with the characteristics of every other people, while not giving up his own.<sup>50</sup>

In a decade when brainstorming a new German state was in vogue, Goltz has been credited with creating the "longest list of improbable models."<sup>51</sup> The thrust of his argument, however, was to derive German identity from a historical amalgam of Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, and ancient-medieval Germanic cultures, thus putting Germans at the center of European and colonized world cultures. Classic German dualism appears in juxtapositions of German desires and the irony of a people who presume to speak for every other, yet cannot create a lasting political union of their own.

The author's constructed German is as presumptuous as he is preeminent, yet this "Everygerman" was no Aryan superman. In a decade when anti-Judaism, racial profiling, Social Darwinism, and philosophical nihilism combined to make anti-Semitism a proper noun, the strengths and failings of no other people were more at the center of Goltz's composite German than those of the Jews. By contrast the mythic superman who materialized at the far end of left-wing Hegelian criticism<sup>52</sup> looked neither backward nor sideways, but only forward to a future alone, choosing not to study man as he had been or to join him as he is, but to leave him completely behind.

### *A German Democracy*

Given the horrors of the twentieth century, few today readily think of Germans as a mirror of humanity. For many, Germany remains a land of late, perhaps permanently arrested, political and moral development—not an exemplary world people, but a special breed the world must always worry about. The mere disagreement with American foreign policy in Iraq recently brought damning American doubts and suspicions of Germans rushing to the surface, which

the Germans repaid in kind. Sympathetic historians and famous Germans themselves have long made a case for the backward German, whose time in the sun has not yet come. From 1076, when the emperor Henry IV watched the German princes and the Roman Church divide his kingdom, to the 1930s and '40s, when National Socialism left Germany in ruins, the long history of Germany has seemed, in the words of Geoffrey Barraclough, "a story of development cut short, of incompleteness and retardation."<sup>53</sup>

Against the euphoria that greeted the fall of the Wall and the unification of the two Germanies, previous attempts at creating a unified and free Germany seem more prophetic than rudimentary. Yet what the Federal Republic, with hindsight, calls "milestones of [German] democracy,"<sup>54</sup> many historians view ambivalently, as they also do Germany's future prospects. Looking back from 1989-90, the Frankfurt National Assembly of 1848-49 appears to have been searching for a polity more congenial to elite revolutionaries than to a divided land recovering from French occupation and a reactionary, post-emancipation restoration. When, in 1871, Germans achieved national unity for the first time, it was a Prussian solution, with Germany's most powerful state muscling the weaker ones into line. In 1918-19, the Weimar Republic gave Germans a true democracy, yet its constitution was fatally flawed and its leaders unable to reassure a defeated and strapped nation that it had a viable future.<sup>55</sup>

The postwar Basic Law also invoked these earlier precedents of German democracy. Imposed on Germans by allied military governors in 1945, Germans, again under Allied patronage, provisionally ratified it in 1949. The Allies dictated democracy to the Germans in the Western zones much as the Soviets did Communism in the Eastern. A true, native German constitution had to await the unification of the two Germanies in 1990, a goal the Basic Law had pledged West Germany would pursue.<sup>56</sup> Fifty-two years of sequential National Socialist and East German dictatorship preceded that epochal event. Once reunited and free, the German people put in

policy, at their own initiative, a democratic government of, by, and for themselves. With that new, united government, Germany became one of the world's youngest democracies.

In nation-building years the German democratic experiment is a work in progress, and therein lies the difficulty for Germany's friends and enemies. Unification was a mighty revival of previously defeated liberal nationalism. So far there have been no ominous signs of a pan-Germanic utopianism likely to revive a dark German past. Despite close elections and disagreements with close allies, Germans have turned inward without breaking apart or lashing out. Present-day industrial and economic policies give every appearance of conforming to democratic imperatives.<sup>57</sup> From a long historical view, post-1990 Germany appears on the verge of securing what Geoffrey Barraclough called the only lasting solution to its political problems: "a limited democratic Germany within historic boundaries."<sup>58</sup>

Since reunification, it has been easy to forget that earlier German attempts at liberal democracy not only failed, but did so miserably. While the new German polity gives every hope of resolving Germany's history of political division and strong-man rule, it has been a long time coming and, until recently, prompted mostly from without. As the abiding old Germany and the brash new nation continue to thrash things out, one can only speculate on the outcome. If the long history of Germany is any guide, it is likely to be a tighter democracy by comparison with that of today. Over the long sweep of their history, Germans have prized authority and order as much as they have freedom and equality, convinced that the best polity requires and protects both.

The ability to act collectively—national unity—and the right to act individually—political representation—have been the twin concerns of Germans since at least the sixteenth century, the first demanding self-sacrifice and conformity, the second permitting self-assertion and dissent. A historically informed, mature German polity will likely be more limiting of freedom than are the egalitarian

democracies of France and the United States, which have arguably forgotten how to discipline freedom and consequently lost control of the individual. In the evolution of Rousseau's and Robespierre's France, and Jefferson's and Emerson's America, individual freedom appears to have become a right of self-absorption, threatening the citizen's responsibility to the public sphere and the believer's obligation to God. The Germans do not believe that true freedom must be untidy, or that a free people have the right to run amok. The new German democracy will likely tolerate more radical, but shorter-lived, dissent and resistance to the state. To the extent that the waning of authority and order has become more problematic to the world's older democracies than the expansion of freedom and equality, the new German democracy may offer a solution for liberal democracy's modern ills.

In light of German history, one must also ask whether polity alone has been, or can be, a German cure-all. That question is pushed to the fore by the largely successful revolt of the moderns against the ancients during Germany's nineteenth-century socio-cultural wars. While a new imperial Germany was constricting a struggling democratic one, a powerful, deconstructive left-liberal intellectual culture was undermining the German Enlightenment, which, unlike the French, had endeavored to fold hard-won moral and religious lessons from the past into modernity. Contemptuous of the beliefs of the old Germany, especially those informed by Judeo-Christian teachings, the spokesmen for that culture proclaimed a new age in which the individual would renovate the world, free of any tutelage from the past.

The fires of twentieth-century liberation movements have since chastened the remnants of nineteenth-century imperial government, racism, and Social Darwinism, and a powerful egalitarian ethos now thrives throughout much of the West. However, the radical individualism, atheism, elitism, and utopianism of that century's intellectual and cultural revolt have also survived into the twenty-first. The ambitions of that revolution, still strong today, are as great

011-14

a threat to a sustainable democracy as any credible revival of fascism.<sup>59</sup> Against both, the best defenses are old and proven: facts and evidence, skepticism and common sense, sobriety and honesty, humility and strength.

#### *Fear of Germans and German Fears*

With German reunification on the horizon, the March 26, 1990, issue of *Time* magazine asked in its cover story: "Should the World be Worried?" Some 61 million West Germans, Europe's largest state, were uniting with 17 million East Germans, to which untold numbers of Germans scattered around the world would gradually be added. Despite their political and cultural differences and the staggering costs, most commentators at the time envisioned the rapid emergence of a political and economic juggernaut. Yet, with the exceptions of Israel and Poland, opinion polls indicated overwhelming approval of unification, even in the Soviet Union, where the war had taken an estimated 26 million lives.

To West Germany's credit, *Time* noted the failure of right-wing parties since the war to gain the 5 percent needed to be seated in the Bundestag. Helmut Kohl pointedly remarked that the majority of Germans living in 1990 had not been born during the war years and could not be blamed for them. Much like Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, he pointed out to those sitting in judgment Germany's positive actions since the war, not least of which has been the \$33 billion then paid in reparations to Israelis and other Jews—a sum that had nearly doubled by the year 2000 and is still climbing.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the euphoria of 1989–90, postunification Germany remains a troubled and divided land. The citizens of the Federal Republic share a twentieth-century legacy that will never be put completely out of mind, certainly not along the lines of earlier East German rationalizations. Declaring Nazism a variant of capitalism, of which its polity was free, the GDR disassociated itself completely from the crimes of the Third Reich, on which grounds it paid no

reparations to Israel after the war and offered only an apology upon reunification.<sup>61</sup>

Beyond the spiritual and economic burdens of war and the Holocaust, the two sides brought almost three decades of oppositional politics and cultures into their union, heavy baggage for a remarriage. After the Berlin Wall was gone, the so-called wall in the head remained.<sup>62</sup> Many East Germans missed the security of the all-provident GDR, especially in jobs, while the West Germans resented the high cost of salvaging the old Stasi state and resettling so many ethnic Germans in their lands. In 1989, 370,000 East Germans moved to the FRG; between 1990 and 1992, more than 1 million settled there. By contrast West Germans moved eastward in a trickle, yet one that had the force of rapids, as not a few were there to reclaim property confiscated by the Soviet regime after the war, or to convert state industries to the Western market economy. This was often viewed by the East Germans as more unwelcome, post-unification pillage.<sup>63</sup>

As the excitement of unification diminished, each side found reasons to be unhappy with the other. In the eyes of West Germans, the repressive East German Soviet state, while taking no responsibility for National Socialism, had far greater political continuity with it than the democratic West. Given their postwar advances, West Germans who came to instruct their fellow Germans in political and economic freedom brought with them an air of moral superiority. The East Germans called them "Besserwissers," a play on "Besserwisser," or know-it-alls.<sup>64</sup> For their part, East Germans, believed themselves to be the truer antifascists, and took pride in their German heritage with an ease many West Germans could not. Today, left-liberal gadflies urge both sides to transcend their national identities and lead historically anonymous and politically neutral lives as Europeans and citizens of the world.

During the 1950s and 1960s, liberal-left German academics and public intellectuals continued the earlier denazification and reeducation efforts by subjecting German history and society to a radical

critique. The children of Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche, these native critics inquired not after the classic German past but after men and women capable of making the freshest of starts. The goal was less to recover and repair a fallen fatherland than to create a new German state powerful in penance and prostrate before the world. In narrowly construing the German past as protofascist and incapable of enlightening a modern world, an attempt was rather made to bury it.

Many of the harshest critics had grown up during the war years, some having been in the Hitler Youth, while others served briefly in the Wehrmacht. All believed they lived in a land with a "democratic deficit"<sup>65</sup> and felt duty bound to confront their parents with war crimes and the abnormalities of German history. Prominent among the new critics were philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas and writer and political activist Günter Grass. Unlike other prominent left, liberal figures who now serve the German government in peace and in war—for example, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, a former Marxist, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, a former student protest leader and long time Green Party member, and Interior Minister Otto Schily, cofounder with Petra Kelly of the Green Party and the defense attorney for the leaders of the Baader-Meinhof gang—Habermas and Grass maintained their youthful idealism and outside criticism of the state into their seventies.<sup>66</sup>

As the leading intellectual of the Marxist Frankfurt School, Habermas espoused a philosophy of "constitutional patriotism" requiring absolute loyalty to a transcendental political ideal that always trumps realpolitik.<sup>67</sup> Those possessing and exercising such principled knowledge are the state's truest patriots and properly judge its actions on behalf of and for the good of all. Much as with Lutheran preachers in the sixteenth century, only less compromisingly, the task of these modern critics has been to arouse the public whenever rulers transgress a once divine, but now strictly citizens', mandate to rule. Here was a new breed of hyphenated Germans—not those beholden to another community, nation, or ruler beyond

the German state, but self-appointed, native citizen monitors with a prior allegiance to a supreme moral imperative.

Grass wrote speeches for Willy Brandt in the early 1970s and, like him, became a Nobel laureate—in 1999, for a body of work begun forty years earlier with *The Tin Drum*, a ferocious exposé of the Nazi mind. Grass also opposed German reunification as a new *Anschluss*, believing that a reunited Germany would soon devour Europe as it had done after annexing Austria in March 1938. As penance for its war crimes, Grass wanted Germany to forgo the normal ambitions of statehood: power, security, and wealth. The good Germany would remain a divided, decentralized, apolitical state, with the dimmer East playing the "contrapunctal suffering nation" to the brighter, hedonistic West.<sup>68</sup>

What Grass proposed was historical Germany's worst nightmare. Being an internally divided and externally resented people had been the burden of German history. To have saddled postwar Germans with such a fate, both as a matter of principle and as far as the eye could see, was the most dangerous course Germany could have taken, both for itself and the peace of the world. As with the earlier conservative turn of the Adenauer government, Social Democratic wavering on German unification helped make Helmut Kohl Germany's longest ruling chancellor since Bismarck. In a more recent reaction to the peril of Grass's utopianism, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, critic and literary editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, appeared on the cover of the German weekly *Der Spiegel* in 1995 literally shredding Grass's latest version of it—a history-roaming novel set in postunification Berlin.<sup>69</sup>

Because Germany's strength is so great and its cooperation vital to Europe and the world, a retreating, self-doubting Germany is a worst-case scenario.<sup>70</sup> To date neither the spiraling costs of reunification and immigration nor the durability of "the wall in the head" have stampeded Germans. Far from shrinking from new responsibilities in Europe and the world, the governments of chancellors Kohl and Schröder have embraced them at the highest European

and international levels.<sup>71</sup> That Schröder refused to rubber-stamp American foreign policy in Iraq was no reneging on such commitments, much less any dark, new *Sonderweg* ("special path"), as American and German critics were quick to allege. Even if politically expedient, or misguided, that contrarian stance was a proper action for a normal nation, and supported by a solid majority of Germans mindful of their own historical experience.<sup>72</sup>

Where, then, does the danger lie for, and from, the Germans? The present-day German is five persons in one, three of whom remain ineradicably German, while the other two are comparatively new experiments. Each has developed chronologically from the other, and each transcends the other in scope, if not in attachment and loyalty. One is the citizen of a village or a town, the most basic German self. Running close behind is the German who is a citizen of one of Germany's sixteen states. Since 1871 every German has also been a citizen of a united German nation, governed by an elected, transregional parliament. More recently, Germans have become part of a transnational European Union beyond their native urban, state, and national identities. Finally Germans are today global persons, ubiquitous by virtue of international trade, immigration, and communications.

For all the power and attraction of the new European and global personae, they pose no threat to the native German. That truism popped up memorably in an interview with German filmmaker Roland Emmerich, who became known to his countrymen as the "king of Hollywood" after directing the American box-office hit *Independence Day*. Working back and forth between high-tech studios in Los Angeles and Ludwigsburg, he confessed frequent longings for nothing so much as his mother's Swabian *Maultaschen*, literally "mouth pockets," stuffed pasta that resembles ravioli.<sup>73</sup>

In a needed effort to reassure a fearful world of German power, Helmut Kohl declared Germany's first identity to be European and global. Germany, however, possesses an irradicable history and destiny as a nation-state, which must be embraced and asserted in both

glory and shame, if it is to become a normal nation. Attempts to cloak national identity in European and global ones threatens to hyphenate Germans and raise again the specter of predators within—a problem as old as the Germanic tribes and one the Schröder government appears to have taken more seriously than Kohl's.<sup>74</sup>

Europe and the world have both realistic and unrealistic fears of Germans. Foremost among the former is Germany's potential to disrupt important segments of their economies. Between 1998 and 2000 major German companies bought major foreign ones—Volkswagen acquiring Rolls-Royce Motor Cars, Deutsche Bank Bankers Trust of New York, Daimler-Benz the Chrysler Corporation, and Mannesmann, cellular telephone manufacturers in Britain and Italy. At the same time the Germans threatened to take over the London Stock Exchange.<sup>75</sup>

More worrisome has been Germany's ability to dominate the European Union. Chancellor Schröder's 2001 plan to increase EU centralization on the German federal model, which would have strengthened both the parliament's authority over member states and the latter's rights, brought excited flips from the British and indignant croaks from the French. Because Germany is the EU's most populous and richest member and pays a disproportionate share of its bills, the proposal gave rise to fears of even greater German influence.<sup>76</sup>

Underlying such fears has been a suspicion that Schröder's government is not as Eurocentric or global as Kohl promised the world Germany would be. Concurrent with his proposals to revamp the EU, Schröder has insisted on the world's recognition of Germany as a normal nation-state. By the latter he means one that may freely pursue its national interests in proportion to its strength, free to be selfish and to err—a delicate if not taboo subject for Kohl, who had to prepare a skeptical world for German unification. Taken together Schröder's initiatives suggest a new German patriotism determined not to leave Germany mired in a crippling twentieth-century past.<sup>77</sup>



Beyond realistic fears of German economic and political power within Europe is the arguably unrealistic fear that Germans are congenital anti-Semites and recidivist Nazis, who require the world's constant scrutiny and vigilance. Even when Germans argue among themselves, the issue of the good German is quick to surface. Looking backward and forward from Germany's provocative role in the years leading up to World War I, twentieth-century historians tied imperial Germany closely to the Third Reich. This has more recently seemed an unfair assessment of what had been a complex, if far from glorious, imperial Germany. Likewise historian Ernst Nolte ignited a bitter "historians' quarrel" in the 1980s by placing National Socialism and the Holocaust within a larger, generic twentieth-century pattern of fascism and genocide, suggesting that the German example was different only in scale. From Jürgen Habermas to the editorial page of the *New York Times*, the uniqueness of Nazi criminality was restated, and Nolte condemned for "whitewashing" the Nazis.<sup>76</sup>

The skittishness over resurgent neo-Nazism was also demonstrated in February 2000, when the conservative Austrian Freedom Party, having won 27 percent of the vote, the most yet for a West European postwar rightist party, took its seats in the Austrian government. European and world reaction was immediate. For the first time in its history, the European Union imposed sanctions on one of its fifteen member states, and the *New York Times* printed three major cautionary pieces on the event within a five-month period.

The story became large because a man named Jörg Haider had led the Freedom Party to victory. The son of prominent Nazi parents from the same region as Hitler, Haider gained fame and infamy by refusing to make blanket condemnations of either Germany's or Austria's wartime pasts. Haider also insisted that good Germans had served not only in the Wehrmacht but even in the Waffen SS. A handsome globetrotter who burnished his image in California and at the Harvard Business School, Haider attacked the growing influx of foreign workers in Austria and opposed Austrian payment of

reparations to Israel in a position that won him the support of large numbers of blue-collar workers and youth.<sup>79</sup> Critics who rebutted him with accusations of neo-Nazism, a crime in Austria, found themselves at the losing end of lawsuits. With 80 percent of Austrians opposing the EU's sanctions, and smaller member states also protesting the heavy hand of Big Brother, the EU lifted its sanctions on Austria after seven months.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the hand-wringing at the time, the main lesson of the Haider affair may be neither *carte blanche* neo-Nazism in the larger German world nor moral cowardice on the part of the European Union. It may rather be the unwillingness at the time of Austria and other European states to subject their national politics to the new Brussels collective, a sentiment both predictable from history and compatible with evolving democracies.

In the same summer of 2000, as the EU debated lifting sanctions on Austria, Chancellor Schröder reacted to a pathetically small but highly disturbing outbreak of neo-Nazi violence in eastern Germany. Touring towns with large numbers of foreign workers and many successful far-right parties, he tried to remind their citizens who true Germans were. In Eggesin and Wolfen-Nord, he told audiences to "take stronger grasp of their destiny . . . and stick up for the weak, the old, and the foreign." His government subsequently demonstrated its determination to end skinhead violence by offering generous incentive packages to members willing to leave the gangs: up to \$45,000 per individual, including cash, a new name and job, relocation, and counseling.<sup>81</sup>

Since unification of the two Germanies, the German government has conducted its affairs with every appearance of good faith and endeavored to make a larger European identity alter ego to the German. Despite repeated threats on the life of Germany's finance minister, the mighty and beloved mark gave way to the euro.<sup>82</sup> Although Germans hold the lion's share of power within the EU today, the Federal Republic's actions can leave little doubt that German intent is to be an active partner within, not a commanding

power over it.<sup>83</sup> Germany also continues to pay reparations to Israel on what has been called "penance on a vast scale."<sup>84</sup> During Willy Brandt's visit to the Warsaw ghetto memorial, and, more recently, Schröder's to the new Berlin Jewish Museum, the German government literally fell to its knees in setting a national example of compassion. And former federal president Richard von Weizsäcker has urged postwar generations to accept collective responsibility for the Holocaust and continue to remember.<sup>85</sup>

Present-day Germans also have realistic and unrealistic fears of the world around them, which they address in signature fashion. In a cover picture worth a thousand words, the German magazine, *Wirtschaft Woche*, Business Weekly, re-created the Normandy invasion on its November 22, 1999 cover, depicting foreign businessmen and women charging ashore under the headline: INVASION! ATTACK ON THE CONSENSUS SOCIETY. There a new German predator, the global economy, threatened to divide and conquer the fabled integrated network of government, banks, industry, and labor that has sustained modern Germany.

The editors had two recent examples in mind. The first was the economic collapse and forced government rescue of Germany's leading construction company, 150-year-old Philip Holzmann A.G. The second was a pending hostile bid by Britain's Vodafone Air Touch for a controlling interest in German communications giant Mannesmann A.G. Holzmann was a mismanaged and highly leveraged company that German banks had earlier bailed out but now abandoned to market forces. When the Schröder government came at last to its rescue, a cracking of the "consensus society" was heard throughout Germany, moving one German commentator to complain again about "barbarians within our own midst."<sup>86</sup> Another shaking of Germany's carefully integrated economy came when the government failed to rally German interests behind bankrupt media giant KirchGroup, whose possible loss to foreign conglomerates threatened a further coarsening of German culture.<sup>87</sup>

The American economic model has also been something of a

bogeyman for Germans. While loving American freedom and prosperity, Germans hate "the shop-around-the-clock mentality, the chaos of the unfettered market, the huge gap between CEO pay and workers' wages, and [the unbridled] immigration."<sup>88</sup> However, these perceived American vices, particularly the latter, seem to be marching irresistibly Germany's way with the global economy.

### *The Canary in the Mine*

Does Germany's long history offer any clues to its future course? Present-day observers scrutinize German reaction to ever-growing numbers of foreign *Gastarbeiter* and the impact of an often-reckless global economy. Attention is also given to mounting German exasperation with American, especially Jewish American, efforts to keep the Third Reich and the Holocaust in the forefront of German history.<sup>89</sup> The left-liberal critique from within has been no less trampling of German history, skeptical of German democracy, and alarmist with regard to future prospects. After a half century of continuing unprecedented reparations, responsive democratic government, and model service within the European and the international communities, Germans still remain latent barbarians, anti-Semites, and fascists in the unforgiving minds of many.<sup>90</sup>

Recently a new reparations front opened on yet another area of National Socialist criminality: the slave labor, Jewish and non, extracted by German businesses in wartime. In December 1999 the German government agreed to pay \$5.2 billion to settle claims against three multinational German companies (Siemens, Daimler-Chrysler, and BASF), with government and business splitting the costs equally. In May 2000, under intense international legal pressure, the Austrian government created a \$395 million fund to pay off similar claims. Since more than half a century has passed, the burden of these new reparations falls on workers and stockholders, foreign and domestic, who were not living at the time of the crimes or too young to have committed them.<sup>91</sup> More recently lawsuits

have been filed against the American government and U.S. multinationals (General Electric, Chase Manhattan Bank—now JP Morgan-Chase—and IBM), alleging complicit action, or inaction, during World War II. These include IBM's sale of calculators used to manage the concentration camps and the failure of the American and British high command to bomb the railways leading to the death camps.<sup>92</sup>

Such attempted shakedowns have been roundly condemned by Gentile and Jewish critics alike, yet targeted companies choose to pay rather than face the threatened deluge of negative publicity and righteous litigation.<sup>93</sup> As U.S. journalist Holman Jenkins sees it, the demands are being paid “in obedience to a political consensus that atonement for Nazi crimes is necessary to ease the acceptance of German power in the world.”<sup>94</sup> Thus originally uninvolved governments and generations living more than a half century after the crimes, and with most of the actual perpetrators long since dead, are forced to play the scapegoat for the sake of the normality Germany craves.<sup>95</sup>

Today the canary sings in the German mine, assuring everyone that the mine is currently safe. One development that might stop that song is postwar criticism, particularly the kind that escalated during the 1960s, intent on making National Socialism and the Holocaust, with their attendant war guilt and reparations, the book-ends of German history. No more than Germans could or should live as the nontechnological, pastoral people the “Fundis” Greens would have them become can they be the perpetual penitential society literary and philosophical utopians demand.<sup>96</sup> Historically Germans have been haunted by the fear of becoming other nations’ doormat, and innocent present and future German generations neither should nor can build a normal state on imputed guilt and penitential servitude. Should, however, such a point of view ever catch on in Germany, and a new generation of Germans attempt to create a democratic republic distinguished foremost by sackcloth and ashes, the resulting pain and suffering for Germans and the world

might well approximate the past. Normal nationhood is Germany’s best hope for the future.

The canary is also likely to continue to sing the all-clear if Germans who have learned Faust’s lesson fill the mine. In Goethe’s famous telling of the story, Faust pursued an insatiable will to power, which brought him personal tragedy and loss. In later life, however, he came to accept his human limitations, and in doing so found an inner peace in freely chosen, anonymous service to neighbors he also did not know.<sup>97</sup> The history of Germany, including the bloody twentieth century, is also a story of such deeds. Since 1952, when Konrad Adenauer and David Ben-Gurion reached the first accord on reparations, Germany has quietly assisted the new state of Israel, becoming, after the Americans, its surest trading partner and most reliable military ally—the source, for example, of its submarine fleet. While some Germans believe themselves to be the targets of what *New York Times* reporter Roger Cohen has called an “American ‘Holocaust industry,’” German-Israeli friendship has remained strong.<sup>98</sup> And despite serious new strains placed on that relationship by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s prosecution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, neither side is likely ever again to think of the other as illegitimate or, much less, an enemy.

Anecdotal evidence appears regularly in German and foreign newspapers recounting Faustian conversions of individual Germans. One such story is that of former convicted RAF terrorist, Silke Maier-Witt, who, in 1977, was party to the kidnapping and execution of German Employers president Hanns-Martin Schleyer. Today Ms. Maier-Witt is a social worker and trauma therapist in Kosovo. Addressing the congregation of a Lutheran church in Bonn in 2001, she was asked why her “youthful idealism” had turned her to terrorism. Her answer was that the “disillusionment of [my] ideology” demanded more of German society than it could reasonably give, leaving her with the cynical belief that nothing one did mattered or could make a difference. “I don’t believe I will let that happen again,” she told her audience, concluding rhetorically: “What

else can I do?"<sup>99</sup> Such "darning and patching" of the social fabric—the phrase is Martin Luther's summary of his social ethics—has many precedents in German history.

Germany today is Western Europe's most populous state, and in 2000, it was also home to its largest immigrant population: 7 million and growing. As Germans have watched those numbers swell, they have made it clear that they do not want to become, as Roger Cohen kindly puts it, "a multi-cultural unit of the European union"—but then, neither do any of their peer nations.<sup>100</sup> Not surprisingly the seeming German drift in that direction has sparked right-wing protests. Relegating the potential for neo-Nazi ideas to a small, violent minority, Foreign Minister Fischer has expressed his own fears of "passive xenophobia" and even a revived Red Army Faction in eastern Germany.<sup>101</sup>

However, such modest fascist violence—just over a hundred people were killed in "xenophobic attacks" between 1990 and 2000—seems the least possible reaction the German government could expect at the end the Cold War, and is thus rather good news within and outside Germany.<sup>102</sup> The more revealing fact about Germany's new immigrant tinderbox has not been the small outbursts of xenophobia lamented by Fischer. It is the Federal Republic's faithful payment of \$450 per month to each immigrant, providing food, lodging, education, and medical and dental care, as long as that immigrant is unemployed.<sup>103</sup>

There are clear signs that the foundations of the postwar welfare state, exceedingly generous to natives and foreigners alike, are shaking under the accumulated weight of what has been called egalitarianism. German wages and taxes, if not the world's highest, are among them, and they threaten both the viability of companies and the security of workers, who can pay as much as 70 percent of gross salary in state pensions, insurance, and taxes.<sup>104</sup> The good Germans are today being undone not by war crimes and war guilt but by their own postwar generosity and pursuit of a just society. Refusing on moral grounds to let theirs become a riven land of haves and have-

nots like the United States, Germans seem unable to let go of the beleaguered consensus society and its increasingly coerced cornucopia. But if the latter are to continue, new ways must be found to discipline freedom and ration equality, so that less may still seem to be as much, if it cannot be more—a goal history suggests is well within the abilities of Germans.