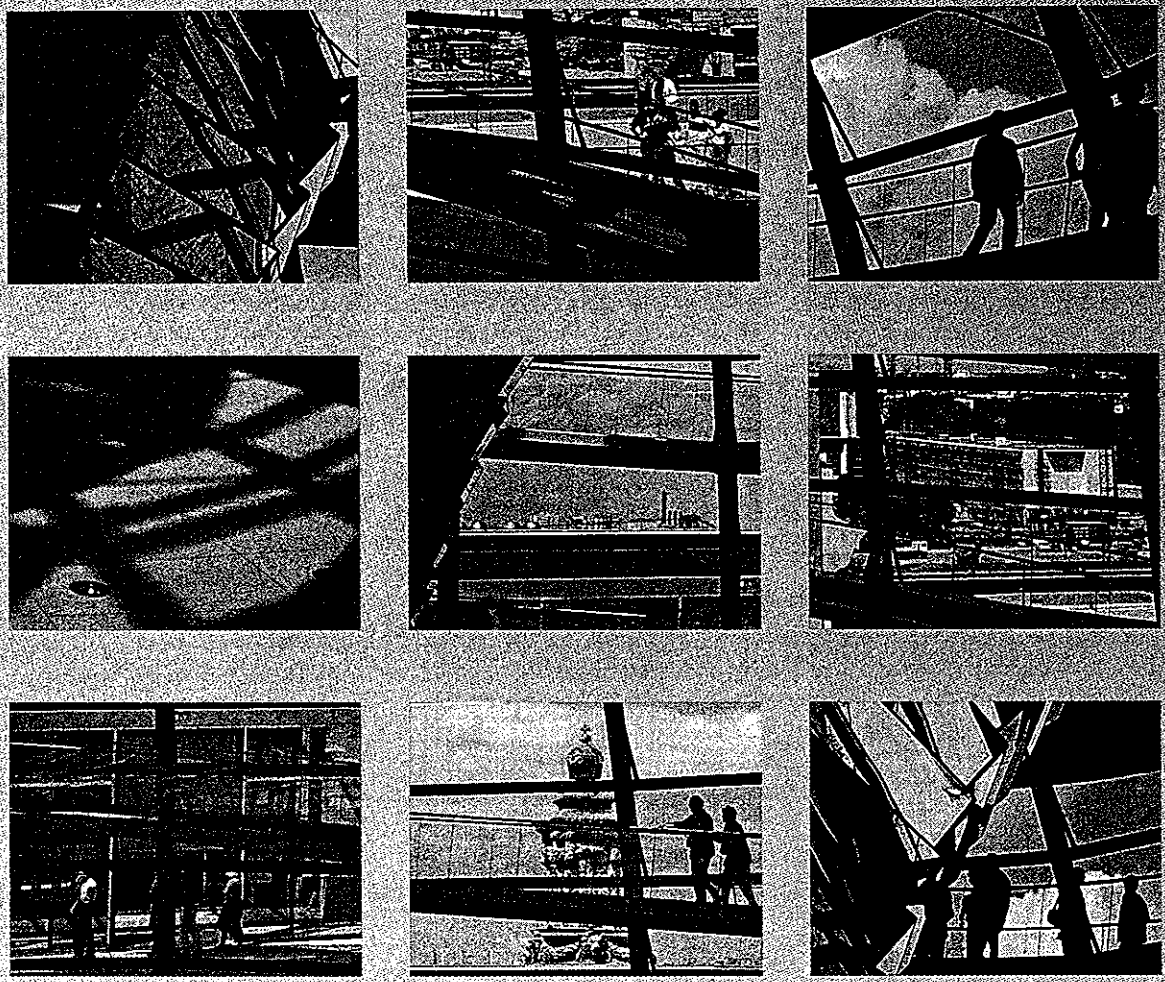
Chapter 14

German Political Culture



A German woman once recounted to me how the Americans, in the last days of World War II, had bombed her hometown, a charming North Bavarian place with a splendid church and no military value. The town was a mess: Bodies lay unburied, water and electricity were out, food supplies were unmoved. What did the towns people do? She shrugged, "We waited for the Americans to come and tell us what to do."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is *liberal democracy?* Why was it weak in Germany?
2. How have Germans handled the Nazi period and the Holocaust?
3. How are German and American multiculturalism alike?
4. What is *postmaterialism?* Is it nearly everywhere?
5. What are Germany's *political generations?*
6. Why do Wessis and Ossis resent each other?
7. Is German democracy as solid as any? How can you tell?
8. How did Willy Brandt represent a turning point?

Such were the beginnings of democracy in West Germany: a foreign implant grafted onto a people who were used to being told what to do. Can democracy be transplanted? (Even in Iraq?) Has it in fact taken root in Germany? This is the bothersome question. Germany's institutions are fine; in several ways the Federal Republic's Basic Law is a model constitution. But, as we saw with Weimar, good institutions are not worth much if people do not support them. Are democratic values sufficiently strong and deep in Germany to withstand economic and political hard times?

Historically, there has long been a liberal tradition, but a losing one. It grew out of the Enlightenment, as in France. In Britain, democracy gradually triumphed. In France, democracy and reaction seesawed back and forth, finally reaching an uneasy balance. In Germany, on the other hand, democracy was overwhelmed by authoritarian forces. In 1849 the German liberals were driven out of the Frankfurt cathedral. In Bismarck's Second Reich they were treated with contempt. In the Weimar Republic they were a minority, a pushover for authoritarians.

East Germany attempted to develop "people's democracy" (communism) rather than **liberal democracy** in the Western sense. Although communism and fascism are supposed to be opposites, both made individuals obedient and powerless. Many East Germans were confused and skeptical at the onrush of democracy from West Germany in 1990; they had known nothing but authoritarian rule since 1933. It is taking some time and education for East German democratic attitudes to reach the levels of West Germany.

THE MORAL VACUUM

In addition to a weak democratic tradition, Germany faced a more subtle problem after World War II. A liberal democracy requires certain moral foundations. If you are entrusting ultimate authority to the people through their representatives, you have to believe that they are generally moral,

liberal democracy Combines tolerance and freedoms (liberalism) with mass participation (democracy). (See page 195.)

denazification Purging Nazi officials from public life.

Holocaust Nazi genocide of Europe's Jews during World War II.

multiculturalism Preservation of diverse languages and traditions within one country; in German *Multikulti*. (See page 197.)

reparations Paying back for war damages. (See page 197.)

perhaps even a bit idealistic. When this belief vanishes, a democracy loses legitimacy. People may go along with it but with doubts. Such was the Weimar period.

The Nazis left a moral vacuum in Germany, and filling it has been a long, slow process. One problem that hindered German democracy was the persistence of ex-Nazis in high places. Every time one was discovered, it undermined the moral authority of the regime. People, especially young people, thought, "Why should we respect democracy if the same old Nazis are running it?"

Immediately after the war, the Allied occupiers tried to "denazify" their zones. Party members, especially officials and the Gestapo (secret police), lost their jobs and sometimes went to prison. Henry Kissinger, then a U.S. Army sergeant, rounded up Gestapo agents in the town he was running by advertising in the newspaper for experienced policemen; when they showed up he jailed them. Still, aside from the 177 war criminals tried at Nuremberg (twenty-five sentenced to death), **denazification** was spotty, and many Nazis got away, to Latin America or to new lives within Germany. Many made themselves useful to the occupation authorities and worked their way into business, politics, the civil service, and even the judicial system.

It was the judicial system that kept mass murderers from coming to trial. There are German laws against such people, but Nazi criminals were rarely brought to trial until the 1960s. By then younger people had worked their way up the judicial ladder and were willing to prosecute cases their elders let pass. This helps explain why Nazi war criminals were still being tried in the 1990s.

The Cold War also delayed a thorough look at the Nazi past. By 1947 the Western Allies decided they needed Germany to block Soviet power, so they stopped rubbing Germans' noses in the past. Tough questions about the wartime behavior of German civilian and military officials were not asked; now they were on our side. (U.S. occupation policy shifted at the same time and for the same reason in Japan.) With the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949, such matters were placed in the hands of West German authorities, and many preferred not to "open old wounds."

Two presidents of the Federal Republic, Walter Scheel of the FDP and Karl Carstens of the CDU, and one chancellor, Kurt Kiesinger of the CDU, had once been Nazi party members. All asserted they were nominal rather than active members, "just opportunists" out to further their careers during a time when the Nazis controlled paths to success. While none were accused of any crime, what kind of moral authority did "just an opportunist" lend to the highest offices of a country trying to become a democracy?

The Remembrance of Things Past

Can a society experience collective guilt? Was it realistic to expect Germans as a whole to feel remorse for what the Nazis did? The West German response was initially to flush the Nazi era down the memory hole: "Past, go away!" German fathers were reluctant to say much about what they had done. For some decades, German history textbooks stopped at 1933 and picked up again in 1945. The result was ignorance among young Germans in the 1950s and 1960s about the Nazis and the Holocaust. Then, in 1979, the American-made TV miniseries "Holocaust" riveted Germans' attention and triggered German books, movies, documentaries, and discussion. In the 1980s, curricula and textbooks began to treat the Nazi period more fully. This belated Holocaust flood, however, made some Germans feel resentful and picked-upon.

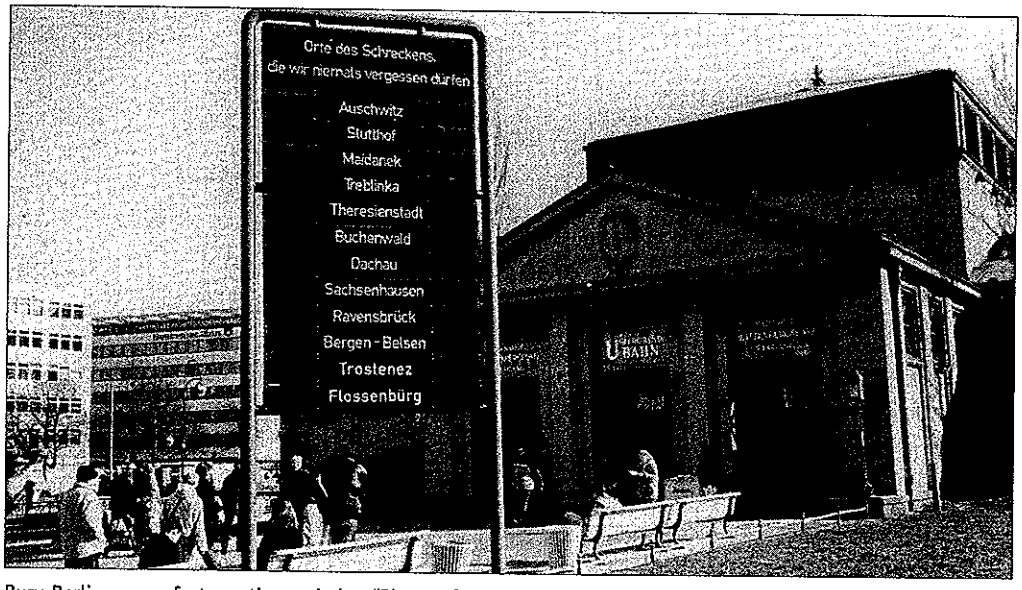
Political Culture

How to Handle the Holocaust

Keep it front and center, or retire it as an overworked issue from a bygone era? This was the dilemma Germany faced as it restored Berlin as the capital in the 1990s. The problem was more subtle than nazism and anti-Semitism, which are not serious threats. Some Germans felt that leftists had turned guilt for the Holocaust into an all-purpose tool to promote **multiculturalism** and political correctness. Many tired of hearing about the Holocaust, which only the oldest Germans have personally lived through.

Germany has paid some $60 billion in **reparations** for the Holocaust, and many Germans felt this was enough. A more recent question was whether and what kind of Holocaust memorial should be built in the heart of Berlin. CDU Chancellor Kohl had urged it; SPD Chancellor Schröder and his party had some doubts. Some argued that there were already enough such memorials. A new Jewish Museum opened in Berlin in early 1999 (designed and directed by Americans). Some argued that no memorial could possibly do justice to the magnitude of the horror. Some suggested that a death camp was the proper site. Some wanted a big memorial, others small. Some wanted a traditional monument, others abstract. In 1999, the Bundestag finally authorized a large memorial by a U.S. architect in the heart of Berlin; it opened in 2005.

German businesses had a rough time with the Holocaust issue as well. Under the Nazis, they had benefited from the money and property seized from Jews and from Jewish (and other) slave labor. For decades, German businesses, banks, and insurance companies rejected survivors' demands for compensation with the claim that private firms, like everyone else, had to follow Nazi orders. They belatedly made efforts to settle when faced with U.S. lawsuits. In 1999, Chancellor Schröder, backed by twelve major German firms, set up a $5 billion compensation fund "to counter lawsuits, particularly class-action suits, and to remove the basis of the campaign being led against German industry and our country." The controversy reminded some of the old Nazi line that an international Jewish conspiracy was keeping Germany down.

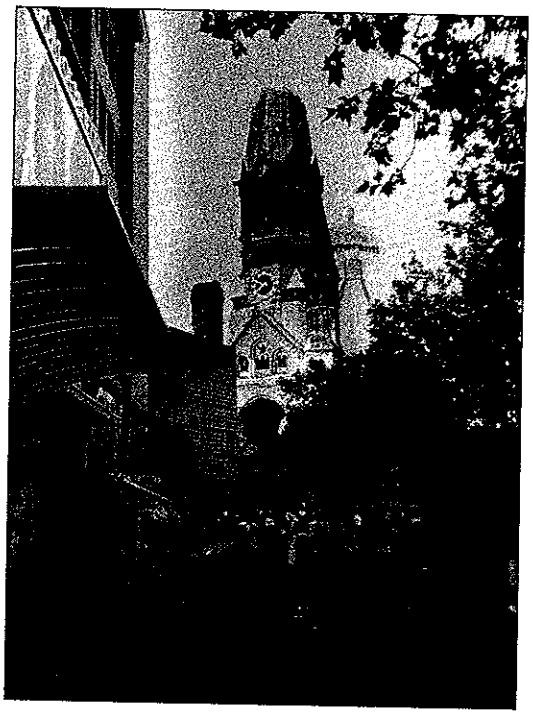


Busy Berlin square features the reminder, "Places of Horror That We Must Never Forget," a list of World War II concentration camps. At the top: Auschwitz.

Vergangenheitsbewältigung Literally, "mastery of the past"; coming to grips with Germany's Nazi past.

Can a society simply forget its past, blot it out? West Germans tried. Climbing out of the ruins of World War II, they threw themselves with single-minded devotion into work, making money, and spending it conspicuously. The results were spectacular; the economy soared, and many Germans became affluent. The West German archetype became the *Wunderkind* (wonder child), the businessman who rose from rubble to riches in the postwar boom with a fat body, a fat cigar, and a fat Mercedes. But material prosperity could not fill the moral and historical void. Many young Germans in the 1960s were profoundly dissatisfied with the emphasis on materialism that seemed to be a cover-up for a lack of deeper values. Some of them turned to far-left and later "green" politics.

This factor contributed to the radical and sometimes violent politics among young Germans in the 1970s and 1980s. They were not poor; often they were from wealthy families. Prosperity and materialism, in fact, rubbed them the wrong way. Said one rich girl: "I'm sick of all this caviar gobbling." She joined the terrorists and helped murder an old family friend, a banker. (She and other gang members were arrested in 1990 in East Germany, where the secret police, the Stasi, had protected them.) The Baader-Meinhof gang committed murder and bank robbery in the name of revolution, and some young Germans sympathized with them. The terrorists, in their warped, sick way, put their finger on the German malaise: German society, avoiding its past, had developed a moral void with nothing to believe in but "caviar gobbling." The past does not stay buried; it comes back to haunt the society trying to forget it. As William Faulkner said: "The past isn't dead; it isn't even past."



Memories of war are preserved in the Kaiser Wilhelm Church, which was deliberately left half-ruined in Berlin.

German Catholic writer Heinrich Böll coined the term **Vergangenheitsbewältigung** in the 1950s to direct Germans' attention to the moral vacuum. He meant that Germans must face the past squarely and admit some collective guilt. Many German intellectuals take this as the necessary foundation of German democracy. If Germans cannot come to grips with their own past, if they try to cover it up, German democracy could again be taken over by mindless nationalists, cautioned former President Richard von Weizsäcker and leftist writer Günter Grass.

Under Communist rule, the East Germans used a different approach to avoid coming to grips with the past: deny it was their past. "We were not Nazis," taught the Communist regime. "We fought the Nazis. So we have nothing to be ashamed of or to regret. The Nazis are over there in West Germany." East Germany avoided moral responsibility by trying to portray the Nazis as a foreign power, like Austria has done. In this area, as in many others, East German attitudes lagged behind West German attitudes.

The Generation Gap

output affect Attachment to a system based on its providing material abundance.

system affect Attachment to a system for its own sake.

As a guest in a German home long ago, I saw how the family reacted when one of the daughters found, in the back of a china closet, an old poem, *"Die Hitlerblume"* (the Hitler flower), comparing the *Führer* to a blossom. The three college-age children howled with laughter and derision. "Daddy, how could you go along with this garbage?" they asked. The father, an old-fashioned authoritarian type, grew red in the face and stammered, "You don't know what it was like. They had everybody whipped up. The times were different." He was quite embarrassed.

The incident underscores the rapid generational changes in German political attitudes; simply put, the younger the generation, the more open, free-spirited, democratic, and European it is. Most younger Germans give unqualified allegiance to democracy and European unity. Only a handful of personality problems hanker for an authoritarian system. Feeling no personal responsibility for what the Nazis did, they are also less inclined to ponder Germany's past.

The younger generation has also freed up German society. No longer are German women confined to *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (children, kitchen, and church); most now work outside the home and participate in politics. German youngsters are not so obedient, and German fathers no longer beat them as in the old days. If democracy starts in the home, Germany now has a much better foundation for democracy.

The typical German of today is far more democratic in attitudes than in 1949, when the Federal Republic was founded. Those who would support another Hitler, trade civil rights for "security," or think a one-party system is best have steadily dwindled, while those who think democracy and civil rights are important in their own right have steadily increased. West German attitudes are now at least as democratic as any of their European neighbors, and the East Germans are likely to become so.

Is the change permanent? Political scientist Sidney Verba drew a distinction between **output affect** and **system affect** in his discussion of German political culture. The former means liking the system for what it produces (jobs, security, and material goods), the latter, liking the system because it is perceived as good. Verba thought Germans showed more of the first than the second; that is, they liked the system while the going was good—they were "fair-weather democrats"—but had not yet become "rain-or-shine democrats" the way Britons or Americans are. Verba's point was made in the early 1960s. Since then, system affect among Germans has increased as the younger generation has come of age. Some East Germans, however, are still caught up in the output affect, judging democracy by the cars and jobs it provides them.

A Normal Germany?

Many Germans now argue that Germany has become a "normal" country and no longer bears any special guilt about the past. Most Germans were born after the Nazis, they note, and German democracy is as solid as any. As good Europeans, Germans should help prevent massacres in Bosnia and Kosovo, a majority of Germans felt, thus breaking the FRG taboo against using German forces outside of Germany. Until recently, most Germans hid their nationalism, but now many politicians say they are patriotic and proud to be German.

Ostpolitik Literally "east policy"; Brandt's building of relations with East Europe, including East Germany.

Is Germany now strictly a normal country? The question flared up in 2002 when the deputy leader of the small Free Democratic party, Jürgen Möllemann, sharply criticized Israel and sided with the Palestinians, as many Europeans do. In Germany, however, this is awkward; some say it is neo-Nazi. Others argue that in a "normal" country criticism of Israel is no longer taboo. Foreign Minister Fischer noted: "Whenever Israel is discussed in Germany, the fundamental debate about German identity is never far behind. Can we criticize Israel? The very question raises suspicion." Germany may never be a completely normal country.

PERSONALITIES

WILLY BRANDT AS TURNING POINT

One of the signs that democracy had taken root in Germany was the 1969 election that made Willy Brandt chancellor. It would not have been possible even a few years earlier, for Brandt represented a repudiation of German history and society that few Germans could have tolerated earlier. First, Brandt was an illegitimate child, a black mark that Adenauer used in election campaigns. Second, Brandt was a Socialist, and in his youth in the North German seaport of Lübeck had been pretty far left (although never Communist). No Socialist had been in power in Germany for decades; the CDU kept smearing the SPD as a dangerous party, and many Germans believed it. Third, and most damaging, was that Brandt had fled to Norway in 1933, became a Norwegian citizen, and had not reclaimed his German nationality until 1947. Some even falsely accused him of fighting Germans as a Norwegian soldier.

With a record like that, it seemed Brandt was starting into German politics with three strikes against him. But many Germans, especially younger ones, admired Brandt. He was "Mr. Clean," a German who had battled the Nazis—literally, in Lübeck street fights—and who had never been "just an opportunist" who survived by going along. Brandt seemed to represent a newer, better Germany as opposed to the conservative, traditional values of Adenauer and the CDU.

As mayor of West Berlin from 1957 to 1966, Brandt showed how tough and anti-Communist he was by standing up to Soviet and East German efforts at encroachment. A leading figure in the SPD, Brandt supported its 1959 move away from Marxism. In 1964 he became the SPD's chairman, and this boosted the party's electoral fortunes.

Willy Brandt

In 1966 the SPD joined the cabinet in a grand coalition with the CDU. As is usual in coalitions, the head of the second largest party is foreign minister. Here, Brandt showed himself to be a forceful and innovative statesman with his **Ostpolitik**. By 1969 the SPD had enough Bundestag seats to form a small coalition with the FDP, and Brandt became the FRG's first Socialist chancellor. The event was a symbolic breakthrough: Germany looked more democratic under an anti-Nazi than an ex-Nazi (Brandt's predecessor, Kiesinger).

In 1974 it was discovered that a Brandt assistant was an East German spy. (West Germany was riddled with East German spies.) Brandt, regretting his security slip, resigned the chancellorship to become the grand old man of not only German but also West European social democracy. By the time he died in 1992 he could see the fruits of his Ostpolitik.

postmaterialism Theory that modern culture has moved beyond getting and spending.

affluence Having plenty of money.

The younger generation of Germans brings with them new concerns about jobs and the environment that the older generation did not worry about. A distance developed between many young Germans and the mainstream political parties. In the German party system, newcomers must slowly work their way up the ranks of the major parties, starting at the local and state levels, before they can have a say at the national level. By the time they can, few are young. (One interesting exception: In 1998, a twenty-two-year-old SPD candidate from East Germany won a seat in the Bundestag, the youngest German deputy ever.) In the meantime, they are expected to obey party dictates and not have much input. Some youth organizations of both the Social Democrats and Free Democrats became so rambunctious that they had to be disowned by their parent parties. For many young Germans, both the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, who alternated in power, looked staid and elderly, and neither was responsive to young people.

Belatedly, some German politicians recognized the problem. Former President Richard von Weizsäcker worried about "the failure of my generation to bring younger people into politics." Young Germans, he noted, "do not admire the moral substance of the older generation. Our economic achievement went along with a very materialistic and very selfish view of all problems."

Young Germans also turned away from the United States. In the 1950s and early 1960s, young Germans nearly worshiped the United States; it was their model in politics, lifestyles, and values. Events over forty years reversed this. The assassination of President Kennedy—who had recently proclaimed *"Ich bin ein Berliner"* at the Berlin Wall—horrified Germans and made them wonder about the United States. The Vietnam War was worse; some young Germans compared it to Hitler's aggression. Rising tensions between East and West and the war-like posture of President Reagan convinced many young Germans that the United States was willing to incinerate Germany. With the 2003 Iraq war most Germans saw Americans as violent and arrogant. It was ironic that the United

Key Concepts

The Rise of "Postmaterialism"

One of the trends among rich nations—especially pronounced in West Germany—is the feeling of some young people that modern society is too focused on material goods. Starting in the late 1960s, "countercultures" sprang up in every advanced country. Young people rejected the work-and-buy ethic of their parents and turned instead to beards, blue jeans, and "quality of life" questions. This caught on strongly in the Federal Republic as young Germans sought to repudiate the hypermaterialism of their parents.

Postmaterialism is found throughout the advanced industrialized world. Raised in conditions of **affluence** with no depression or war, young Britons, French, Germans, Japanese, and Americans tend to ignore their parents' values and embrace few causes. The postmaterial generation is tolerant, introspective, fun-loving, and not drawn to conventional political parties or religions or marriage and family. Said young German writer Judith Hermann: "The older generation has been more interested in the past, the war, politics. My generation looks at itself."

Postmaterialism underlies the Federal Republic's leftist, antinuclear, ecology, and pacifist movements, much of which came together in the Greens. Postmaterialism also plugged into German romanticism and nationalism. Will postmaterialism last or decline? If it has created a vacuum of values, what might eventually fill the vacuum?

Wessi Informal name for West German.

Ossi Informal name for East German.

political generation Theory that age groups are marked by the great events of their young adulthood.

States—which had tutored Germans to repudiate militarism—became the object of German antiwar feeling.

The preceding attitudes fed the Green and later the Left parties. In elections, these two parties do best among young voters. Their attitudes also contribute to a new German nationalism that no longer follows in America's footsteps. Instead of automatically looking west, some young Germans look to a reunified Germany taking its rightful place as the natural leader of Central Europe. Some turned anti-United States and anti-NATO. The entirely new situation created by German unification, the end of the Cold War, fighting in Bosnia and Kosovo, and the 2003 Iraq War changed German attitudes, especially those of young people. Schröder boosted the 2002 SPD vote by criticizing U.S. policy on Iraq. Germans no longer look to the United States for guidance or solidarity.

THE DISORIENTING UNIFICATION

There is still a big cultural gap between East and West Germans. When the Wall came down in late 1989, there was much celebration and good will. **Wessis** were generous to the **Ossis**, but soon the relationship soured. The Ossis kept demanding the bounties of the prosperous West as a right; after all, they were all Germans, and the Wessis had so much. The Wessis did not see things that way. "We've worked hard for more than forty years for this," they argued, "Now you Ossis must do the

KEY CONCEPTS

POLITICAL GENERATIONS IN GERMANY

German sociologist Karl Mannheim coined the term **political generations** to describe how great events put a lasting stamp on young people. We can see this in Germany. Today's young Germans were formed by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Sometimes called "89ers," they stand in marked contrast with previous German generations: the 45ers, who climbed out of the rubble and rebuilt a new Germany, and the 68ers, who rebelled against complacent materialism.

Many 68ers changed over time. Chancellor Schröder had been a Marxist Juso who turned quite centrist. Green leader Joschka Fischer dropped out of high school and fought police in the streets but became a popular and effective foreign minister. Otto Schily had been a far-left lawyer who defended terrorists but joined the SPD and became interior minister, which includes internal security. Most Germans were unbothered by their pasts.

The 89ers were relatively few in number (because of the strong trend to one-child couples) and worry about unemployment, destruction of the environment, and having to pay off the staggering burden of German unification and the lavish pensions of older Germans. Generally liberal and tolerant, *postmodern* Germans are also fun-loving, individualistic, irreligious, and apolitical; they do not much care for hard work, marriage, having children, or politics. Many do not vote, and few like the main political parties, but some are open to the Greens or Left. Few join formal groups or associations.

Now some younger Germans repudiate the rebellion of the 68ers and playfulness of the 89ers by returning to the *bourgeois* values of earlier times (*die Neue Bürgerlichkeit*). Relying on the welfare state is less fashionable; self-reliance and volunteering is back in. Hippie clothing is out; nicely dressed is in. Such people could boost CDU electoral fortunes.

same." With newly acquired D-Marks from West German taxpayers, Ossis snatched up modern products while their own economy collapsed. West Germans quickly developed negative stereotypes of East Germans living well at Wessi expense—like poor relatives who had come to sponge off them.

bounce-back effect Tendency of trends and values to reverse.

skinheads Racist youth, begun in England, with shaved heads and quasi-military attire.

As the costs of bringing East Germany up to West German levels started to sink in, some Germans grew angry. The East German economy was found to be in far worse shape than foreseen and needed huge bailouts. Much industry simply had to be closed; unemployment shot up. West German business executives talk down to their East German counterparts. Wessis think Ossis have been trained into inefficiency by the Communists. Ossis feel belittled by and alienated from the West German system that was quickly imposed on them. This has led to an increase in East German consciousness, which is now greater than before unification. There is nothing like togetherness to separate people.

Politically, Ossis have weak party identification (see pages 61 and 133) and easily shift their votes from one election to the next, first to the CDU, then to the SPD, and recently to the Left party, the party of East German resentment and nostalgia (*Ostalgie*). The Left is supported by ex-Communists, people worried about their pensions, and Ossis who feel the other parties ignore them. The collapse of East Germany left citizens disoriented and lacking something to believe in. "Freedom" is not clear enough; some are still ideologically socialist and crave order and a system that guarantees their livelihood. One of the lessons of Germany's unification: You have to pay as much attention to psychological and social transitions as to economic ones.

The economy, too, was a problem. Since unification, German economic growth has been slow, making many Germans frightened of unemployment (more than twice as high in East Germany as in West) and resentful at the massive transfer of funds to the east. Some Germans wonder if unification has been worthwhile. Some are disoriented and ask which is the right way for unified Germany in a vastly different Europe. Some left-wing intellectuals warn of the return of a racist Germany. Neo-Nazi and skinhead youths (found throughout Europe) lent weight to the warnings: Over a decade more than a hundred Africans and Turks were killed and Jewish sites desecrated. Predicting a stable future for a united Germany is more difficult than it was for West Germany alone.

DEMOCRACY

A BOUNCE-BACK EFFECT?

Germans, especially young Germans, are looser, freer, and more open than ever. Some observers think this is the way things are going worldwide, the generational shift to *postmodernism* (see box on page 202). Historically, however, there have been **bounce-back effects** that have abruptly reversed values. American journalist William Shirer recalled how young Germans in the 1920s pursued fun and freedom, but this reversed under the Nazis. Young Germans in the 1950s and early 1960s were hard-working, moderate, and pro-American; by the late 1960s many were dropout anti-American multicultural radicals. In 2005, a fair fraction of Germans voted left, green, and pacifist.

Many young Germans now face long-term unemployment. Some resent foreigners who, they think, take their jobs. German **skinheads** rob and beat foreigners. Some young Germans reject *Multikulti* and Holocaust guilt. They did not do it, so why should it concern them? Young Germans will likely continue to seek fun and freedom, but that can sometimes turn destructive. What comes is highly unpredictable, but it will probably be to a rock beat.

THE END OF SHELL SHOCK

Many Germans, especially the older generation who had gone along with the Nazis, felt so damaged by political involvement that they swore never to take an active part in politics again. To appreciate how an older German might feel shell-shocked and cautious about politics, imagine a German born in 1900 who was raised under a conservative monarchy and taught to obey authority. All of a sudden a republic comes that expects its citizens to be good democrats (they were not). Then comes a dictatorship that demands the enthusiastic, unquestioning complicity of all Germans. That collapses amid death, destruction, and the arrival of some 12 million Germans expelled from East Europe. In that confused postwar situation Allied occupiers tell Germans that they have been very wicked and must now become democratic. No wonder that in the first decades of the Federal Republic many Germans said *ohne mich* (without me) to politics. Some East Germans still feel this way.

In their famous *Civic Culture* study, Almond and Verba described the German attitude of 1959 as one of detachment. Germans were often well informed about politics but did not want to participate in much more than voting. They were pragmatic and sometimes cynical about politics. If the system worked it was okay, but there was no point in getting personally involved. Germans showed low levels of social trust or willingness to discuss politics with others. In the decades since, however, this attitude receded, making West Germans among the most democratic and participatory in the world. Every decade there are fewer and fewer of the skeptical generation and more and more of the postwar generation. But now Germany, with unification, has entered the post–Cold War period, and it is a time of testing.

SCHOOLING FOR ELITES

German schooling parallels that of Britain and France: Skim off the best and neglect the rest. This is fine if you are from a moneyed, educated family, not so fine if you are not. In all three lands changing to more inclusive systems is difficult and controversial. After four to six years of *Grundschule*

KEY CONCEPTS

LEGITIMACY, AUTHORITY, SOVEREIGNTY

These three terms overlap, and weakness in one usually spreads to the others. Communist East Germany illustrates this overlap. The GDR had weak legitimacy (see page 9), especially as East Germans compared their lot with free and prosperous West Germans. In the absence of legitimacy, the Communist regime needed a massive police apparatus and, in 1961, the Berlin Wall to keep its citizens from leaving. This undermined the authority (see page 57) of GDR rulers. As soon as they could disobey them, East Germans did, leading to the fall of the Wall in 1989. Then, without a leg to stand on, East German sovereignty (see page 1) evaporated and the GDR fell into the FRG's hands. Like falling dominoes, weak legitimacy toppled into authority that then collapsed sovereignty. (For more on the fall of East Germany, see pages 228–229.)

romanticism Hearkening to an ideal world or mythical past.

(elementary school), exams selects young Germans for either *Hauptschule* (aimed at blue-collar jobs), *Realschule* (aimed at white-collar jobs), or *Gymnasium*, which awards an *Abitur* (like the French *bac*) for university admission. Trying for greater equality, in the 1960s some *Gesamtschulen* (comprehensive schools), more like U.S. high schools, opened but did not catch on. Some politicians—especially on the left, such as Brandt, Joschka Fischer, and current SPD chief Kurt Beck—went to neither a *Gymnasium* nor a university, although most now do.

There is no German equivalent of Oxbridge or the Great Schools. As in America, the typical German politician has studied law, although in Germany this is done at the undergraduate rather than the postgraduate level. German (and other European) legal systems produce different attitudes than the Anglo-American Common Law system. Continental law developed from Roman law—usually in the updated form of the Napoleonic Code—and it emphasizes fixed rules. The Common Law, on the other hand, is judge-made law that focuses on precedent and persuasion; it is flexible. The former system produces lawyers who go by the book, the latter lawyers who negotiate and make deals. Consequently, German politicians with their legal background are heavily law-oriented rather than people-oriented.

Much of the work of the Bundestag, for example, is devoted to the precise wording of bills, making that house a rather dull, inward-looking chamber that has failed to win admiration from the German public. Likewise, cabinet ministers conceive of their role heavily in terms of carrying out laws. Every cabinet has many lawyers; often the chancellor is one (for example, Schröder).

Besides lawyers, a smaller group has had a disproportionate role in German politics: economists. In few other countries have professional economists achieved the stature they have in the FRG. One German chancellor had a Ph.D. in economics: Ludwig Erhard. Under Adenauer, rotund, jolly Economics Minister Erhard charted Germany's rise to prosperity; later he became chancellor. Helmut Schmidt, an economics graduate, succeeded Brandt as SPD chancellor and managed to keep both inflation and unemployment low in Germany while much of the world went through a major recession. In Germany, economists are not just advisers but often important politicians.

THE GERMAN SPLIT PERSONALITY

The French, as we discussed, often seem split between demanding impersonal authority and rebelling against it. The Germans have a sort of split personality, too, but it is between **romanticism** and realism.

GEOGRAPHY

SAILING THE BALTIC

Back on your luxury yacht, you are sailing in a great, clockwise circle around the Baltic Sea, always staying with land a few kilometers to port (left). Upon entering the Skagerrak, which countries do you pass on your left?

Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia again (Kaliningrad Oblast), Poland, Germany, and Denmark.

Most of the time Germans are pragmatic realists: hard working, thrifty, clean, orderly, cooperative, family-oriented. But a persistent romantic streak runs through German history that comes out every now and then: the nineteenth-century intellectuals (such as composer Richard Wagner) who reveled in the *Volksgeist*, the Nazi youth who really believed they were building a "thousand-year Reich," and in the 1970s, far-left terrorists who sought utopia by assassination. The latest German romantics are the Greens, who long for an imaginary pastoral idyll free of industry and pollution. German romanticism also manifests itself in the striving for perfection, which may lead Germans to undertake absurd projects. Hitler's plan to conquer all of Europe, including Russia, is an infamous example.

Germans set high store by achievement. To work harder, produce more, and proudly let others know about it seems to be an ingrained cultural trait (although fading among young Germans). This helps explain Germany's rise after the war to Europe's number-one economic power. Both East Germany's leader Walter Ulbricht and West Germany's Helmut Schmidt toured their respective camps giving unsolicited advice on how other countries should copy the German economic miracle. East Germany's, although not as spectacular as the Federal Republic's, nonetheless made it the economic leader of the East bloc. Back when the Wall stood, I told an anti-Communist West Berliner that East Berlin also looked prosperous. He nodded and said, "Of course. They're Germans, too."

Perhaps the archetypal German figure is Goethe's Faust, the driven person who can never rest or be content with what is already his. This quality can produce both great good and evil. Former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, himself an archetype of the German realist strain, once said, "Germans have an enormous capacity for idealism and the perversion of it."

KEY TERMS

affluence (p. 201)
bounce-back effect (p. 203)
denazification (p. 196)
Holocaust (p. 196)
liberal democracy (p. 196)
multiculturalism (p. 196)
Ossi (p. 202)
Ostpolitik (p. 200)
output affect (p. 199)
political generation (p. 202)
postmaterialism (p. 201)
reparations (p. 196)
romanticism (p. 205)
skinheads (p. 203)
system affect (p. 199)
Vergangenheitsbewältigung (p. 198)
Wessi (p. 202)

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