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CHAPTER 10

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WAR, REPUBLIC,  
THIRD REICH:  
GERMANY, 1914-1939

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*War*

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NOT LONG BEFORE HIS DEATH IN 1983, THE FRENCH POLITICAL philosopher Raymond Aron remarked that the twentieth century “could have been the German century.”<sup>7</sup> He was talking to his friend Fritz Stern, a historian and Jewish exile from the Third Reich. Aron was surely thinking about German accomplishments in science and medicine, its globally admired universities and cultural standing. His backward glance was very much in tune with the sentiments of Germans themselves in 1900, as they looked forward to the new century with pride and optimism.<sup>1</sup> It turned out differently, of course. The German century became synonymous instead with military aggression and Nazi dictatorship, above all with the Holocaust. In the words of novelist Thomas Mann, another exile, speaking in May 1945 from Washington, D.C., Germany had become “a thorn in the flesh of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Then came the slow climb back to acceptance and respect. The trajectory of German history in the twentieth century is a textbook case for those who like their history to come with a moral: the descent into barbarism and moral catastrophe, followed by a prolonged “atonement” (division) and eventual “redemption” (reunification).<sup>4</sup> That is one way of telling the story. But there are other ways to place Germany inside the tumultuous history of the twentieth century. Take Berlin as an example and think about what it stood for decade by decade. The dynamic world metropolis of the years before 1914

was transformed into the desperate, starving city of World War One, before it became a major site of revolution during the turbulent postwar era. Then Berlin, the pulsating symbol of modernity that we associate with Weimar culture and the Roaring Twenties, turned into the capital of Adolf Hitler's murderous Third Reich. After 1945, reduced to rubble and divided, the city enjoyed a new kind of celebrity as the capital of the Cold War, becoming the classic playground of spies and providing photo opportunities from the time of the Airlift (1948–49) to the era of the Wall (1961–1989). It was in Berlin that each half-Germany set out its stall, one economic system against another, one version of culture against another. Meanwhile, on either side of the Wall, a world in motion made itself felt as Turkish workers established themselves in Kreuzberg (West) and Vietnamese workers in Mitte (East). Then, in 1989, the city was once again the center of global media attention as the Wall fell and signaled the unofficial end of the Cold War. Ten years on, as the century came to a close, Berlin became once more the capital of a now reunited country as well as a favored destination for Jews from the former Soviet Union and a global magnet for young creatives. These vignettes from Berlin suggest some of the ways in which twentieth-century Germany was part of a larger global history. They are among the many themes that will be explored in the final three chapters of this book.

But let me go back to the beginning. When did it all start to go wrong? According to the American diplomat and historian George Kennan, it was with World War One, the "great seminal catastrophe" of the century.<sup>5</sup> This war is the most studied event in history. A Google search produces 4.1 billion hits, outstripping even World War Two (3.1 billion hits). More than 13 million Germans put on uniforms, meaning that almost nine in ten of the male population between the ages of eighteen and fifty were in the armed forces at some point. More than 2 million Germans died and more than 5.5 million were wounded. That death toll was proportionately the heaviest among the major combatants, amounting to 1300 deaths every day for more than four years. The French death rate, terrible enough, was 850 a day. The fighting claimed 10 million lives altogether. Civilian casualties came to another 7 to 10 million, a figure that rises sharply if we include the effects of the influenza pandemic that began in January 1918 and which the conflict helped to spread. This was the "people's war" that Helmuth Karl von Moltke, the longtime chief of the Prussian and German General Staff, had predicted in 1890, and the "total war" that General Erich Ludendorff later called it.<sup>6</sup>

The war placed unprecedented strains on society, affecting relations between workers and the better-off, town and country, men and women. The conflict was indeed the great watershed that Thomas Mann suggested when he told readers of his 1924 novel *The Magic Mountain* that it was set "in the long ago, in the old days, the days of the world before the Great War." It was also a truly global conflict. This both determined its outcome and led in the long run to the reduced place of Europe in the world. In the short term the war brought down four multiethnic empires, including Germany and Austria-Hungary; it created millions of refugees, and spawned both bolshevism and fascism. Small wonder that the conflict has been described as a "global revolution."<sup>8</sup>

It was triggered by an act of violence in the Balkans, already the site of two dangerous local conflicts in the recent past. Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Habsburg throne, and his wife, Sophie, were assassinated in Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital, on June 28, 1914. The nineteen-year-old who fired the gun, Gavrilo Princip, was a Bosnian Serb nationalist with links to the terrorist Black Hand organization, which was supported by leading figures in Serbian army intelligence. His act was a protest against the Austrian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina six years earlier. The assassination set in motion the "July crisis" that confronted decision makers and eventually led to war.

How and why war came has been vigorously debated ever since. German actions received special scrutiny from the start, because the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 ascribed "responsibility" to Germany. Trying to reconstruct the steps that led to the outbreak of war is like working through the moves in a particularly complex version of three-dimensional chess—something like the *Raumschach*, or space chess, invented in 1907 by the German physician Ferdinand Maack. The three dimensions in this case were, first, the larger forces that shaped international relations before 1914—imperialist rivalry, the alliance system, the arms race, and the role of domestic issues in determining foreign policy. The second dimension consists of German actions, although its policy choices are impossible to separate cleanly from the shifting policies pursued by others, both allies and adversaries—it is, in other words, often difficult to distinguish between action and reaction. The third dimension is the July crisis itself, with all its hazards and opportunities. Were German decision makers leading or following during the cascade of events that ended with mobilizations and declarations of war? My overall outbreak-of-war verdict is



that Germany bore a substantial share of responsibility for the war but was by no means solely responsible.

Required  
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Two armed blocs faced each other in Europe on the eve of war. On one side was the Triple Alliance of Germany and Austria-Hungary, with its notional ally, Italy; on the other, the Triple Entente of France, Russia, and Britain. Italy was a notional ally because neither of the partners confidently expected its support in the event of war, and in fact Italy remained neutral in 1914, then joined the war on the other side the next year. A joke made the rounds in Germany: "What is the difference between a modern marriage and the Triple Alliance? In a modern marriage you can depend on there being a third party somewhere, but in the Triple Alliance you can safely depend on there being only two."<sup>9</sup> The unreliability of the Italian ally is one answer to the charge made by contemporary critics that the alliance system created rigidity and was destabilizing by itself. The alliances changed their character over time, and the allies could—and did—hold their partners back as well as urge them on. In the pre-1914 Balkan imbroglio, Britain usually held back the Russians, while Germany did the same with Austria-Hungary. Of course, that is another way of saying that a system of armed blocs can serve to keep the peace—until it fails. Even before the July crisis the alliance system undeniably gave shape to growing international tension, and arguably gave it momentum as well.

The true diplomatic revolution of the prewar years was the Triple Entente, which resulted from agreements between France and Russia (1894), Britain and France (1904), and Britain and Russia (1907). In German eyes, this was "encirclement," for what else could have led democratic Britain and France to make common cause with autocratic Russia; and why otherwise would Britain ally with France, when the two had clashed repeatedly in Africa, and with Russia, while disputes over Afghanistan still simmered? Germans saw anti-German animus at work—in France, the desire to "revenge" the defeat of 1870–71; in Russia, a Slav backlash against all things German; and in Britain, "trade envy" and resentment of a vigorous newcomer. None of these suspicions was groundless. But Germany misread the thinking behind these agreements, which were motivated by a sense of vulnerability. Britain, the "weary Titan," faced the challenge of Russian rivalry in Asia, French rivalry in Africa, and the rise of the United States and Japan as naval powers.<sup>10</sup> In response, it ceded primacy in the Western Hemisphere to America, signed a naval treaty with Japan, and came to agreements with France and Russia that settled outstanding colo-

onial disputes. France and Russia had concerns of their own. The final act of this treaty work, the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907, came after the Russo-Japanese War brought home to St. Petersburg its own vulnerability. In other words, the Triple Entente altered the dynamics of international relations, but it was brought about by a series of defensive alliances that Germans chose to perceive as aggressive.

However, Germany also contributed to its own isolation through miscalculation and arrogance. The attempt to maintain a "free hand" between Britain and Russia antagonized both nations. So did a host of decisions made in Berlin. German tariff policies and a growing presence in southeast Europe created friction with tsarist Russia, making Russia more susceptible to British overtures. Meanwhile, the German challenge to British naval power set off alarm bells in London. The expansion of German influence in the Ottoman Empire, symbolized by the German-financed Berlin-Baghdad railway, had the same effect. German policy toward Britain was sometimes menacing, sometimes accommodating. German statesmen behaved like abusive suitors who alternated between whispered endearments and threats. By 1907, German policy had helped to bring about its own isolation. Attempts after that to undermine the Triple Entente proved counterproductive. When the French created international tension over Morocco by occupying Fez in 1911, Germany tried to use the incident to drive a wedge between Britain and France. Instead, this heavy-handed response drew them only closer together.

Colonial rivalry did not necessarily make war more likely. Overseas conquests might even serve as a lightning rod to deflect tensions from Europe, as they did for France after its humiliation in 1870–71. International capitalists frequently cooperated, just as their governments did when they worked together to protect European interests in Egypt or China. European white settler solidarity vis-à-vis native peoples prevailed from Algeria to South Africa. But imperialist rivalry did create new tensions. As the acquisition (or retention) of colonies became a key marker of prestige, their function as a lightning rod disappeared and colonial conflicts were instead conducted back to Europe, as happened over Morocco. While other new players such as the United States, Japan, and Italy joined the imperial rivalry around 1900, Germany's role was especially disruptive. A restless "latecomer" nation looking for its "place in the sun," Germany would have been seen under any circumstances as a challenger to established colonial powers like Britain and France. The hyperactive, petulant style in which

the kaiser conducted "world policy" only made the frequent German interventions more offensive (although not more successful). But there was something else that made German aspirations potentially more disruptive than great-power conflict over Morocco or Samoa. Germany's true "colonial" sphere was arguably in southeastern Europe, where it was extending its influence in the declining Ottoman Empire while tied to an Austrian ally that felt threatened by a combative Serbia. Austrian fears and German ambitions met in the Balkans, the most volatile region in the world in 1914.

The prewar arms buildup injected further volatility into the international system. German strategic choices made a difference here as well. After the Franco-Russian agreement of 1894, Germany faced the threat of a war on two fronts. Hence the Schlieffen Plan, devised by Alfred von Schlieffen, the chief of the General Staff, which proposed a quick strike on France before turning to face Russia.<sup>12</sup> It is hardly surprising that German army planners addressed the war they might have to fight; the French Plan XVII and Russian Plan 19A did the same. But Schlieffen built into his plan a violation of Belgian neutrality that would make it harder to ensure British neutrality in the event of war. Any military planning geared to a future war against France and Russia should also have been accompanied by attempts to win British support. Yet in 1898 Germany began to build a battle fleet that challenged the Royal Navy. Why? Naval enthusiasm was the German version of a global obsession among contemporaries with the importance of sea power, created partly by the writings of the American admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan. Other reasons were specific to Germany. The battle fleet was a favored child of the kaiser, while popular with heavy industrialists, pan-Germans, and liberal nationalists. It was, like colonies, proof that Germany had arrived as a major power—and it is hard to dispute the view in Berlin that Germany would be taken more seriously if it possessed a fleet. Some, including Admiral Tirpitz, its chief architect, also saw it as a means of rallying working-class support behind the monarchy.<sup>13</sup>

The results of German battleship building were uniformly negative. Around 1900, Britain was worried by French and Russian naval strength—it was in response to the French that the Admiralty came up with the "Dreadnought," even if many Germans believed (as some historians still do) that it was directed at them.<sup>14</sup> After 1904, though, it was increasingly the German threat that London perceived, and understandably so. The Tirpitz Plan challenged the Royal Navy in home waters. The battle fleet was supposed to be the lever that would force Britain to accept Germany as an

equal and come to terms. The plan failed: Germany found itself with an unwinnable naval race and a potential ally alienated. The return to a "Continental strategy" after 1909, followed by belated efforts to reach out to Britain, was a tacit acknowledgment of the failure. Like German "world policy" as a whole, this was a case of sound and fury signifying nothing—nothing, at least, in the way of practical results.

The combination of noisy demands and minimal results created dissatisfaction at home. The fact that Germany was being outspent in the arms race only made things worse. There were many reasons for being outspent: the federal tax structure, the reluctance of the landed elite to pay its share of taxes, competing demands for spending on social programs, opposition to military expenditure on the left, and mounting public debt. The outcome was clear. Even after an army expansion in 1912–13, Germany was still spending just 3.5 percent of GNP on defense (and its Austrian ally 2.8 percent), compared with 4.6 percent in Russia and 3.9 percent in France.<sup>14</sup> French and Russian military reforms already in the pipeline on the eve of war would only widen the gap between Triple Alliance and Triple Entente.

None of this was received well by German nationalists. Not that their edgy, dissatisfied mood was unique to Germany. A sense of crisis was becoming unmistakable among European publics in the prewar years, fed by the yellow press, popular jingoism, and "invasion scare" novels. Stereotypes about the "enemy" hardened everywhere, making periodic panics more likely. In Britain, wild rumors about German spies prompted the establishment in 1909 of the Secret Service Bureau, forerunner of MI5 and MI6.<sup>15</sup> A newly belligerent mood, even a "nationalist revival," was evident among young educated bourgeois in France after the second Moroccan crisis in 1911.<sup>16</sup> Whether similar sentiments were more widespread or intense in Germany is hard to say. The social Darwinist view that the struggle for power was inevitable and war toughened the racial stock probably gained special traction among German radical nationalists because it fitted so neatly their belief in a vigorous newcomer taking on effete established powers. *Germany and the Next War*, a 1912 bestseller by a retired cavalry officer named Friedrich von Bernhardi, captured this mind-set perfectly. The repeated cycles of expectation and disappointment created an especially toxic mood among German nationalists, made up of anger, anxiety, and resentment over having seemingly been outwitted and left empty-handed by malign adversaries—and perhaps by bungling on the part of German decision makers.



Some of those decision makers shared the pan-Germans' impatience. Kaiser William had bouts of bellicosity, alternating with panic when the prospect of conflict hove into view. There was impatience and pessimism in military circles. Schlieffen's successor, Helmuth Johannes von Moltke, the nephew of Helmuth Karl, was paranoid about Germany's position. It was he who declared, at a meeting of German military leaders with the kaiser on December 8, 1912, that war was unavoidable and "the sooner the better." Some have seen this Sunday morning gathering as the moment when the German elite decided on a preventive war. Few still try to make that case because so much speaks against it. The meeting was called at short notice to address a series of aggressive Russian moves against Austria. Tirpitz warned against war and Moltke failed to follow up his provocative comments. The Chief of Navy Cabinet Admiral Alexander von Müller wrote in his diary that the outcome was "pretty much zero." Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, who was not present, subsequently took the kaiser in hand and calmed his nerves.<sup>17</sup>

There was no German decision in 1912 in favor of a preemptive strike (for which 1905, 1908-09, and 1911 had all presented better opportunities). This was not a point of no return, in Berlin or elsewhere. The international system was still capable of crisis management. But the repeated stand-offs since 1905 had made decision makers everywhere jittery and prepared Europeans psychologically for war. Each crisis left behind resentment. In St. Petersburg and Vienna at least as much as in Berlin, rulers and military and civilian leaders fretted that *they* had been the ones to back down. Radical nationalists everywhere amplified the resentment, making it harder for political leaders to pull back during the next crisis. Backing down meant losing face. Decision makers talked constantly in these years about the importance of "honor," "resolve," "firmness" of will, and other manly qualities.<sup>18</sup> There was also widespread fatalism about the inevitability of war. Yet the fact that so many crises had been weathered induced a certain complacency when Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated.

The short version of the ensuing July crisis goes as follows. Austria, after consulting its German ally, delivered a strongly worded ultimatum to Serbia. The note was not sent until July 23, partly because of the need to win over a more skeptical Hungarian partner, partly because it was thought better that the ultimatum not arrive in Belgrade until after a scheduled visit by the French president to Russia. Serbia, after consulting its Russian ally, agreed to accept most but not all of the Austrian demands. That was the

point at which the final stage of the crisis began. Despite British efforts to mediate, the movement to war gathered momentum and the sequence of mobilizations and countermobilizations then made it inevitable. The dice were tumbling, as Bethmann put it; the "tragic game of poker had begun," in the words of Louis de Robien, a young French diplomat who had just arrived in St. Petersburg.

The origins of the war have provided a classic test case for competing historical interpretations ever since. The recent tendency has been to play down underlying structural forces—the alliance system, imperialism, chauvinist opinion—and emphasize instead the contingent elements involved in the choices made by a score or so men. Did it matter that during the July crisis both Austria and Russia had foreign ministers who were less decisive than their predecessors? Would it have made a difference if Austria's chief of staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf, had been less bellicose or Bethmann less of a Hamlet figure? What if the peace-minded French prime minister René Viviani had not felt unwell (possibly even suffered a nervous collapse) and therefore left most of the talking to President Raymond Poincaré, a more belligerent nationalist, during the crucial French visit to St. Petersburg in July? There are many more questions of this kind. To which one answer is to quote the Russian proverb: If my grandmother had a beard, my grandmother would be my grandfather. But in our poststructuralist age, the importance of individuals and the decision-making process has returned to center stage, along with counterfactual (or what-if?) questions. That has meant paying more attention to how war came about, rather than why, and spending less time asking who started it.

But the question of responsibility cannot be avoided. That means the long-term policies that made war more likely, but also how the powers behaved in July 1914. There is plenty of responsibility to spread around when we look at the final summer crisis: Serbian irresponsibility, Russian intransigence, the strong backing they received from the French, the mixed signals that emanated from London, and—not least—the Austrian desire to teach the "Serbian scallywag" a lesson that would send a message to subject peoples in its multiethnic empire.

When it comes to Germany there are really three questions. The first and most easily answered is whether intolerable domestic pressures led German decision makers to embark on an "escape forward" into war. The evidence for this is not compelling. There was no German political crisis in 1914. Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's pragmatic "politics of the diagonal,"

tacking between left and right, had actually been working rather well. It was war itself that represented the greatest threat of future revolution, as Bethmann himself recognized. It is true that civilian decision makers in Berlin faced both impatient soldiers and a nationalist public opinion that demanded firmness. But both of those things were also true elsewhere, above all in Vienna and St. Petersburg.

That raises the second question, about German support for its Austrian ally during the July crisis. Count Alexander Hoyos, Austrian foreign minister Leopold Berchtold's *chef de cabinet*, arrived by night train in Berlin on the morning of July 5. He came to receive a formal answer to the question of German support for Austria as it responded to the assassination. He left with the so-called blank check ("whatever our decision turned out to be, we could be confident that Germany as our ally and a friend of the Monarchy would stand behind us").<sup>19</sup> The kaiser, the generals, and Bethmann were agreed on this. So why did Germany not restrain its ally, as it had during the Balkan Wars in 1912-13? The answer lies partly on the Austrian side. Vienna had expressly sought reassurances of German support. Anything less would have created difficulties for Berlin. Leaving aside the unreliable Italians, Germany was "one of two in a world of five," with Austria its only real ally. As Bethmann mused to his private secretary, Kurt Riezler, on the verandah of his country estate on the evening of July 6: "It's our old dilemma with every Austrian action in the Balkans. If we encourage them, they will say we pushed them into it. If we counsel against it, they will say we left them in the lurch."<sup>20</sup> So there was pull as well as push. But the Germans did push. One reason Bethmann continued to press Austria to take a hard line was concern for Germany's own position. He feared that "the future belongs to Russia, which grows and grows and becomes an even greater nightmare to us."<sup>21</sup>

Here we come to the third and final question. Surely Germany risked a wider conflict by backing Austria so strongly through the middle weeks of July? Admittedly, any offer of support for Austria conditional on Russian nonintervention would rightly have been viewed in Vienna as worthless—the offer of an umbrella, but only until it rained. Russian intervention could not be excluded as a possibility. Bethmann believed that a quick Austrian knockout blow against Serbia could be achieved without Russia intervening; perhaps the French would hold them back, and surely the tsar would be unwilling to fight in defense of a rogue state that encouraged regicides. The delayed Austrian ultimatum undermined one part of this calculation;

the rest of it included plenty of wishful thinking. Berlin knew that Russia was essentially being asked to back down once again, enraging domestic critics. Bethmann later conceded that the blank check to Austria had been a "policy of utmost risk."<sup>22</sup> It has been ingeniously argued that German policy was guided by the conviction that if Russia *did* choose to enter the fray, it could only be because of a prior determination to go to war with Germany, which would prove that war was bound to come anyway, and therefore—following Moltke's dictum—the sooner, the better. This has been described as "testing for threats," but might more accurately be called what most historians have called it: risk taking.<sup>23</sup>

Berlin was also willing to roll the dice when it came to Britain's likely behavior. In the final stages of the July crisis, when it was clear that the optimistic view of Russian and French reactions had been proved wrong, German hopes were pinned on Britain not intervening, or at least not entering the war immediately. How realistic was this? It is true that Britain had held Russia back during the Balkan Wars. Sir Edward Grey, the British foreign minister, was making desperate efforts in late July to prevent a European war, so there is some reason to talk of mixed signals coming from London. The seriousness of the crisis in Ireland also held out hope that Britain would be reluctant to commit troops to a Continental war. But German decision makers knew that trying to drive a wedge between Britain and its partners had proved counterproductive during the second Moroccan crisis, and all the efforts after 1912 to extract a promise of British neutrality had proved fruitless. Grey was privately disgusted by Serbian behavior and dismayed at the idea that the great powers might be dragged into war because of it, but he believed that it would be morally wrong and ruin the country's reputation if Britain failed to honor its commitments. Bethmann instructed the German ambassador in London, Prince Lichnowsky, to do everything possible to avoid giving the impression that "we are egging the Austrians on to war," which suggests that the German chancellor still hoped Britain might stay neutral. But Lichnowsky was reporting that this was not the case. So this, too, was a gamble. When Bethmann referred to Germany's "leap in the dark," he captured the ominous combination of risk taking and fatalism.<sup>24</sup>

Austria rejected Belgrade's response to its ultimatum and declared war on Serbia on July 28. Russia issued the order for general mobilization on July 30, which prompted a German ultimatum calling on Russia to cease preparations for war. Receiving no answer, Germany declared war on Russia on

August 1 and on France two days after that. The kaiser signed the August 1 mobilization order at his writing table, which was made of wood from Admiral Horatio Nelson's ship *Victory*. Three days later Britain declared war on Germany.

The Schlieffen Plan called for an offensive first in the west. In early August five hundred trains a day rolled across the Rhine carrying German soldiers. The wagons were inscribed with upbeat, cheerful slogans: "Excursion to Paris," "*Auf Wiedersehen* on the boulevards!" The expressionist writer Hermann Bahr described the mobilization as a German miracle, which he compared to a Wagner opera: "complete rapture together with complete precision."<sup>55</sup> The resistance in Belgium was greater than expected but German forces still advanced quickly at the beginning. They crossed the Marne in early September, causing panic in Paris. The government fled to Bordeaux. It was in this period of elation that the notorious "September program" was formulated, a maximalist statement of German war aims that has often been read back, wrongly, into German objectives at the outbreak of war. It was actually the by-product of a moment of intoxication, although the ambitions remained outsized even as the military situation changed. The German advance was repelled at the Battle of the Marne. What followed was stalemate. The two sides dug themselves into fixed positions, along a front that by November stretched from the coast of Flanders to the Vosges. Elaborate trenches were a response to the lethal artillery fire that mocked initial hopes for a quick, decisive war of movement. In late November *The Times* in London allowed itself a cry of pain: "Day after day the butchery of the unknown by the unseen. . . . War has become stupid."<sup>56</sup>

That remains the classic image of World War One in most people's minds, the war of attrition depicted in Erich Maria Remarque's 1929 novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* and in countless photographs—trenches and barbed wire, deafening big guns and mortars, mud everywhere, a blasted landscape, then the periodic bloodletting as soldiers were ordered "over the top" in the great battles of the western front: Verdun, the Somme, Ypres, Passchendaele. Schlieffen had foreseen the use of modern communications technology at command level, in the form of telegraph, wireless, telephone, and motorcycle dispatch riders, but not the industrialized carnage that mocked every notion of chivalric war. Efforts to break through the stalemate led to the use of terrible new weapons. The flamethrower was invented by the Germans, just as it was they who first built trenches and used barbed wire to top them off, trenches greatly admired by Marshal Ferdinand Foch,

who wanted the French to copy them.<sup>57</sup> This was technological transfer in time of war. The French were the first to use gas, but this was "merely" tear gas. It was the German chemist Fritz Haber (by 1918, a Nobel Prize winner), working in leafy Berlin-Dahlem, who came up with chlorine gas.<sup>58</sup>

The dreadful sights, sounds, and smells of the western front have understandably secured its place in the modern memory of the war. So has the much more developed modern culture of commemoration. This was also the front where the largest numbers were engaged: 4.35 million in 1915. But it was not the only theater of war. From the start there was fighting in eastern and southeastern Europe, where the fronts were more mobile. Then the war spread as other powers came in. The Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria joined the Central Powers (as the German-Austrian alliance became known), Italy and Romania attached themselves to the Triple Entente (soon to be known as the Allies), all of them hoping to make territorial gains. The entry of the Ottomans turned the whole Middle East into a potential war zone. Japan's early entry on the side of the Entente was aimed at making gains from Germany in the Pacific and the China coast, which duly occurred. Two naval battles in late 1914 underscore the truly global character of the war, one off the coast of Chile (won by the Germans), the second near the Falkland Islands (won by the British). What is remarkable is that the German vessels belonged to an East Asian Squadron commanded by Admiral Graf Maximilian von Spee; it had steamed fifteen thousand miles across the Pacific when the Japanese blockaded its base in Qingdao, in search of neutral Latin American waters and a possible shot at Royal Navy vessels.<sup>59</sup> Spee's death off the Falklands made him a martyred hero at home.

There was German provocation in taking on the Royal Navy like this, as there was when attacks were mounted against oil depots in Madras and against Allied ships in British Malaya. These were glancing blows. But Germany had plans to undermine the British empire on many fronts. India was an early target. Berlin made repeated attempts in 1914-15 to ship arms to India through the Hindu anticolonial network in the United States, which had some prewar contact with the German Foreign Office. Three separate expeditions set out to revolutionize the Raj from Afghanistan. One of them even named a Provisional Government of India in Kabul. Constantinople became the center of efforts to undermine British imperial power by using Indian nationalists. "Eastern experts" in the German Foreign Office, obsessed with the "Muslim mind," believed that Islam was the key to success. That is why Germany funded a pan-Islamic magazine

called *Jihad-Islam* and asked nationalist Hindus working on their behalf to assume Muslim names, so that B. N. Dasgupta became "Ali Haidar."<sup>30</sup>

The German fixation on Islamic revolt ran deep. Kaiser William wrote in July 1914 that "our consuls in Turkey and India . . . must inflame the whole Mohammedan world to wild revolt." A witty U.S. ambassador dubbed the wartime pursuit of this policy "Deutschland über Allah."<sup>31</sup> Wilhelm Wassmuss was just one of several claimants to the title the "German Lawrence of Arabia," figures active from Mesopotamia to Libya.<sup>32</sup> The British were anxious, but German efforts achieved little. The arms shipments were intercepted and the Emir of Afghanistan declined to enter the war on the German side. Efforts to subvert the Raj were largely given up in 1915. The "German Lawrences" were no more successful. Germany played no role in the main uprising against the Allies in Central Asia, the revolt of Uzbeks, Kirghiz, and Kazakhs against the tsar.<sup>33</sup>

The Half-Moon Camp in Wünsdorf, south of Berlin, was an initiative on German soil to mobilize colonial peoples against the Entente. The camp housed mainly Islamic prisoners of war who had fought for Britain or France. They were relatively well treated and could worship at a mosque built within the camp, the first in Germany. Some three thousand of them eventually fought with German armies in the Middle East, but morale was low and there were mutinies.<sup>34</sup> It is easy to see why there were few converts to the German cause, given the racist comments about the "wild hordes" in his charge made by the deputy commandant of the camp. The "jihad experiment" was another venture that failed to bear fruit, except for the scholarly materials compiled by the ethnologists, linguists, and musicologists who poured into the camp to examine the bodies, photograph, and record the words and music of these "exotic" specimens, who included Indians, North Africans, and at least one Australian Aboriginal whose name we happen to know, Douglas Grant.<sup>35</sup> To the scholars the camp offered a captive population, like the participants in Carl Hagenbeck's earlier people shows.

The POWs at Wünsdorf also included several Irishmen. Ireland was another part of the British empire Germany hoped to subvert. Sir Roger Casement, the prominent Ulster-born humanitarian and former British consular official, played a tragic role in this episode. He had become an Irish nationalist before 1914 and took a sympathetic view of Germany when the conflict broke out because it fought against "the hordes of Russian barbarism, the sword of French hatred and the long purse of British greed."<sup>36</sup> Casement spent much of the war in Berlin trying to raise an Irish brigade

and secure German support for an uprising. By 1916 the Germans were fed up with him and he with them (they were "cads," that was why they were "hated by the world").<sup>37</sup> Disillusioned, unwell, and out of touch with both Irish-American nationalists and the conspirators in Ireland, Casement found out about the planned insurrection of Easter 1916 and was landed on the west coast of Ireland by a German submarine in hopes of postponing an uprising he considered doomed. He was arrested and later executed for treason. A German arms shipment (much smaller than the one requested) was also intercepted. The British feared and the Irish rebels hoped for major German support, but it never came.

While Germany hoped to undermine the British empire, the British were looking to do the same against Germany's allies. They attempted to raise an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire, and placed their hopes in discontented subject peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These were not notably more successful than German efforts. It was conventional forces that defeated the Ottomans: T. E. Lawrence's self-dramatizing exploits were militarily unimportant. As for Austria-Hungary, the Habsburg army, symbol of the Empire's multiethnic composition, remained intact almost until the end. There were few desertions or downed weapons among the Czechs, for example, even though Austrian-German nationalists and some army leaders complained that there were, probably to deflect attention from military incompetence. Later Czech nationalists happily perpetuated these myths to help their own cause.<sup>38</sup>

What happened in Germany's overseas colonies was more clear-cut. They were simply seized or conquered. Qingdao and the German Pacific possessions were lost by the end of 1914. In Africa, too, vulnerable Togo was overrun within a month. German Southwest Africa was defeated by a combination of British naval power and South African ground forces. Its governor signed an armistice in July 1915. In Cameroon, a joint campaign by British, French, and Belgian troops was successful by early 1916. It was German East Africa that the British and their South African, Belgian, and Portuguese allies failed to subdue. German troops under Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck succeeded in doing what German forces elsewhere had tried to do—retreat into the interior and refuse to engage in fixed battles, fighting the same kind of guerrilla war the Boers had fought earlier against the British. Lettow-Vorbeck did not surrender his small troop until November 1918.<sup>39</sup>

He was hailed back home as "the Lion of Africa" and greatly respected



as a commander by adversaries such as the South African Jan Smuts. That, at any rate, was the way the war in Africa was remembered—as a white man's war. The relatively small number of European casualties, compared with the western front, may also be why it has been seen as a sideshow—an “ice-cream war” (because everyone would melt in the sun) in the words of a British soldier in William Boyd's 1982 novel.<sup>40</sup> This ignores the importance of Africans, who were mustered by every European army. When the Germans surrendered in Togo, they consisted of 300 Europeans and 1200 Africans. The ratio when Lettow-Vorbeck surrendered was even greater: 155 Germans, 1168 “askaris,” or Indigenous soldiers. He also had 3500 African porters with him. Far more Africans were engaged in these campaigns as porters than in any other capacity. The British mobilized hundreds of thousands, the Belgians in the Congo 250,000 (to service fewer than 20,000 Belgian soldiers). Their mortality rates were appallingly high. Deaths also followed in the wake of the scorched-earth policy pursued by European commanders, not least Lettow-Vorbeck, a veteran of the Boxer Rebellion and the genocidal war against the Herero. An estimated 650,000 African porters and civilians lost their lives in East Africa because of the war.<sup>41</sup>

The colonial theater of war underscores the asymmetry in the global resources available to the two sides. Britain and France could mobilize soldiers, workers, and economic resources in ways that the Central Powers simply could not. More than a million Indians fought for Britain, mainly in the Middle East. It was Nigerians, Kenyans, and South Africans (Black and white) who bore arms in Africa. British forces also included 450,000 Canadians and 330,000 Australians. France mobilized hundreds of thousands of soldiers from French West and Equatorial Africa, whose casualty rates in the last years of the war were two to three times higher than they were in French regiments. Britain and France also depended on colonial labor power to support the war effort, and exacted a financial contribution as well. India contributed 100 million pounds in 1917 to assist with paying Britain's war debt, as well as 20 to 30 million pounds a year in war expenses. This dragooning of the colonies exacerbated prewar unrest. In the long run it fueled liberation movements from India and Cochin China to Algeria. In the short term it reinforced the advantage the Entente powers enjoyed. They could import strategic goods like tin, rubber, and the jute used to make sandbags for the trenches, and in everything from horses to phosphates the world market remained at their disposal. That rested on control of global shipping lanes.<sup>42</sup>

One consequence, decisive for the outcome of the war, was the British blockade, which cut Germany off from the global markets on which it had come to depend. Prewar Germany imported a quarter of its food. These supplies stopped abruptly and efforts to import Argentinian grain and meat through neutral Scandinavia were blocked. Animal fodder imports also collapsed. So did the supply of Chilean nitrates that provided the base for fertilizer. This further reduced domestic agricultural output, already harmed by so many peasants and laborers joining the army. Things were made worse by policy blunders like the wholesale slaughter of pigs in 1915 (designed to release grain onto the market), and by organizational problems with requisitioning and rationing. But the Allied blockade of Germany was at the root of the crisis. A week after Britain declared war, future British prime minister David Lloyd George said to his wife: “Beat the Junkers, but no war on the German people.”<sup>43</sup> The blockade amounted to exactly that, however. We have descriptions of what this meant in practice. Thomas Mann's children in Munich were reduced to eating garden snails. “Our hunger got the better of our disgust,” wrote Golo Mann later.<sup>44</sup> Ethel Cooper, an Australian who spent the war in Leipzig, returned again and again in her letters to food shortages, likening the obsession to Antarctic explorers who “talked and dreamed of food.” She and others in her circle tried crow and raven, walrus and rat. All of them scavenged in the countryside.<sup>45</sup>

These are middle-class accounts. The deprivation was not felt equally. The army and navy were favored in food supplies; so were large companies with their own canteens, such as engineering and munitions works. The countryside and small towns did relatively well in provisioning themselves, even while complaining about government requisitioning and midnight raids by city dwellers. The black market, which accounted for around a quarter of all food available by war's end, was the resort of urban bourgeois families that could afford it, although the wartime squeeze on middle- and lower-middle-class incomes meant that many could not. Resentment of both “Jewish black marketeers” and well-paid factory workers was commonplace. Urban workers in general fared poorly, although a comparative study of London, Paris, and Berlin suggests that the rising mortality rates in Berlin after 1916 were worse than those in the other cities mainly because more of the middle class fell into poverty.<sup>46</sup> The worst-off were those in institutions—the inmates of mental asylums, hospital patients, and prisoners. They had the highest death rates. Elsewhere, a combination of self-provisioning, black market, theft, and “stretching” rations meant that few

starved to death, but persistent hunger took its toll. Deaths from tuberculosis rose significantly; so did deaths in childbirth.<sup>47</sup> In the cities, mortality rates were 65 percent higher during the war. According to German life insurance companies, the death rate of the civilian population in 1918 was approaching the death rate on the battlefield.<sup>48</sup>

The Committee of Imperial Defence in London discussed in advance "how Britain would isolate Germany from the world" if war came.<sup>49</sup> A first step was ruthlessly cutting German submarine cables, but the isolation of Germany and its allies meant cutting off the supply of food, raw materials, and industrial goods as well. German global assets were also forfeited. Overseas investments were confiscated, German merchant banks with branches on British imperial territory were expropriated, and close to a half of the prewar merchant fleet was seized or sunk.<sup>50</sup> The Germans responded to this constraining "ring of steel" in a variety of ways. All their responses ended up doing great damage to Germany's reputation in the world, and one of them—the turn to unrestricted submarine warfare—helped to confirm the outcome of the war.

Allied control of global resources forced the Central Powers back onto the exploitation of those areas of the Continent they occupied. Until the last days of the war, Germany was fighting beyond its own borders. Together with its Austrian ally, Germany occupied vast tracts of Europe east and west, lands that offered a supply of resources no longer available elsewhere. These were ransacked. Romania provided nearly 2 million tons of grain in 1916–1918, plus half a million head of sheep and goats. The 350,000 pigs in occupied France when war broke out had become just 25,000 at war's end.<sup>51</sup> It was the same story everywhere, and not just with food. The occupiers shipped back horses, fodder, metals, and fuel. A million tons of oil came from Romania and over 7 million tons of timber from Poland, as the hardwoods of the Białowieża forest were harvested by forestry officials who had learned about resource extraction in prewar Cameroon.<sup>52</sup>

German labor regimes varied greatly from place to place. The harshest was in the area of Lithuania and the Baltic known as Ober-Ost (for Supreme Command-East) where General Erich Ludendorff ran his fiefdom as a technocratic military dictatorship. Investments in infrastructure were designed to project German cultural superiority, while the lives of the local population were controlled through a system of checkpoints and identity cards. Forced labor became routine. If the occupation anywhere prefigured German World War Two policies in the occupied east, then

it was in the Ober-Ost, although it still fell short of later Nazi brutality. The unconstrained exercise of military power stood in contrast to the relatively more benign military-civilian hybrid regime in the neighboring General Government Warsaw, where the use of local labor built on the tradition of Polish seasonal workers in Germany.<sup>53</sup> But there, too, the exploitation of resources was accompanied by severe reprisals against those who flouted German orders or tore down official notices. "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the Germans," prayed the Poles.<sup>54</sup> When, in December 1916, Germany decided to install an independent Kingdom of Poland, it came too late and was too compromised by prior behavior to be persuasive—although whether it was more compromised than the Allied encouragement of Arab independence from the Ottomans is an open question.

In the west, German treatment of civilians was especially harsh behind the lines on the French front. This was a regime of curfews, deportations, and large-scale requisitions. Entire factories were dismantled in the name of military security. The mixed military-civilian administration in Belgium was less draconian. The governor general of Belgium in 1914–1917, General Moritz von Bissing, was unflatteringly described by an American diplomat as "the only German general who could strut sitting down." But he was seen in military circles as too soft on civilians—"always too much concerned with sparing the Belgians," according to General Karl Wilhelm von Einem.<sup>55</sup> Things came to a head in 1916, when the German Supreme Command under Generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff called for the use of Belgian forced labor. Bissing rebuffed them three times before, in October, reluctantly falling into line. "I am of the opinion that a pressed lemon has no value, and that a dead cow gives no more milk," as he put it.<sup>56</sup> His pessimism was vindicated by the fiasco that followed, when sixty thousand Belgians were transported to camps in Germany, where many sickened and at least one in twenty died from overwork, malnutrition, or inadequate shelter. The program was called off in February 1917, but not before it caused public outrage among neutrals and in the Entente countries.

Anything that involved Belgium was especially sensitive because of what had happened there in the early weeks of the war. As the advancing German army was held up by unexpectedly stiff Belgian resistance, it committed a series of war crimes. Some six thousand civilians were killed by summary execution, hostages taken and used as human shields, buildings

and whole towns destroyed.<sup>57</sup> Dinant was razed and 674 of its inhabitants were killed. The destruction in Louvain included the university library. The "Belgian atrocities," as they quickly came to be called, were mainly concentrated in the second half of August. They had many causes—frustration about the slow advance and a feeling of being pressed for time, inexperience and jittery nerves, anti-Catholic stereotypes about a "priest-ridden" country, and a fixed belief that German soldiers were being fired on by irregulars, or franc-tireurs, as they had been in the war with France in 1870. (There were in fact no shots from irregulars in 1914, unlike 1870.) That German soldiers genuinely believed there were, as diaries show, does not excuse their conduct. Harry Kessler, who saw some of this firsthand, likened it to the Thirty Years War. Kessler still thought the Belgians had brought it on themselves. International opinion thought differently. The Germans were condemned as barbarian "Huns." In the Entente countries, minds were also changed. British academics who had initially been dubious about allying with tsarist Russia against Germany, whose culture they admired, now condemned German actions. Many French intellectuals decided that they had been guilty of an "optical illusion" in respecting German culture too much, and now took to writing the word as "*Kultur*" to denote Germany's lack of civilized values.<sup>58</sup> In their turn, ninety-three prominent German scholars, scientists, and writers, many of them impeccable liberals such as Max Liebermann and Gerhart Hauptmann, responded indignantly with their October 4 "Appeal to the World of Culture!," which denied the accusations against the German army and accused British and French intellectuals of hypocrisy. Thomas Mann's *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (1918) later reclaimed *Kultur* as something that denoted true, deep German culture, the opposite of British materialism and French frivolity.<sup>59</sup>

But Germany lost the propaganda war with the neutrals. The Belgian atrocities in August 1914 fixed the German reputation for barbarism. Their bombardment of the great Gothic Rheims Cathedral the following month under ambiguous circumstances (French artillery batteries may have been located behind the cathedral) only seemed to confirm an established fact. *The New York Times* called it "the Great Crime of Rheims."<sup>60</sup> German actions in France and Belgium caused much greater outrage than comparable events in eastern or southeastern Europe, to say nothing of Africa or Asia. For example, the "Belgian atrocities" attracted far more attention than the brutal Austrian conduct in Serbia, where thousands of civilians were executed and ill treatment and epidemic disease caused the death of



*The destruction of Louvain in August 1914 was one of the "Belgian atrocities" that outraged Allied opinion and damaged Germany's reputation in neutral countries.*

three hundred thousand people, a tenth of the population.<sup>61</sup> Neutrals and Allied commentators also wasted no words on the maltreatment of German POWs in the tsarist empire, where the death rate was one in five, much higher than that of Russians in German captivity. They also passed over the deportation of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Germans and Jews from Russian border regions as part of a "complete cleansing." By the end of 1915, more than 3 million people had been displaced; by the beginning of 1917, almost 6 million.<sup>62</sup>

The Russians cited military security. It was the same justification offered by the German army in northern France, and the same reason given by Turkish authorities when they began systematically deporting the Armenian population in May 1915. Eastern Anatolia was too close to the Caucasian front, they argued, and the Armenians were aiding the Russian enemy. There was murderous intent behind these claims. Some Armenians were killed on the spot. Most were deported, a few in cattle trucks, the remainder on death marches that led them round in circles or deposited their victims in the Syrian desert. There had been massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1894–1896 and again in 1909, but this was different in scale. Contemporaries called it a "massacre to end all massacres." It would



later be called genocide, a systematic Turkish undertaking that caused the death from exhaustion, hunger, disease, or execution of at least two-thirds of the 1.5 million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>63</sup>

What responsibility, if any, did Germany bear for the actions of its Turkish ally?<sup>64</sup> Some have suggested that Germany was a joint perpetrator, or even gave the orders, but there is no evidence for this. It was leading figures in the Young Turk government who planned the genocide, and paramilitary units controlled by their CUP Party that mainly carried it out. Some very pro-Turkish members of the German military mission went along enthusiastically. Lieutenant Commander Hans von Humann wrote to Berlin in June 1915, "Because of their conspiracy with the Russians, the Armenians are being more or less annihilated. That is hard, but useful."<sup>65</sup> But even this harsh judgment suggests that he believed, or chose to believe, the Turkish version of Armenian treachery and the military threat it posed. Almost no German had any direct part in the genocide, although some advised on the logistics of deportation and most accepted the official line. Even when they recognized that the deportations went far beyond anything justified by military necessity, they chose to see this as an internal Turkish affair. When the scale of the deaths became clear, they blamed it on mismanagement.

Plenty of German voices were raised against what was happening—some soldiers, many more diplomats, teachers, and missionaries. German consuls bombarded their ambassador, Hans von Wangenheim, with detailed evidence; German private citizens reported on the horrors they had seen. Many called it "extermination."<sup>66</sup> Wangenheim began to question the official version. He reported along those lines to Berlin and lodged protests in Constantinople. After he returned to Germany on sick leave, his temporary replacement continued the protests. So did his permanent successor, Paul Wolff-Metternich. Within Germany, the "massacres" and "atrocities" were an open secret among the elite by 1916. Arthur von Gwinner of the Deutsche Bank, which funded the Berlin-Baghdad railway, heard from his deputy director on the spot about the Turkish regime's determination to "eradicate" the Armenians; leading parliamentarians found similar evidence during a fact-finding visit; missionaries and scholars provided details that a Protestant pastor named Johannes Lepsius wrote up into a damning *Report on the Situation of the Armenian People in Turkey*. But their concern never sparked a wider public debate, thanks to the censorship. Lepsius mailed out twenty thousand copies of his account,

but many were impounded. The press muzzled itself. The German Foreign Office soft-pedaled its criticism of Turkish policy and Wolff-Metternich became an isolated figure.

The main reason for this muted and inadequate response was the value of Germany's Ottoman ally in military and geopolitical terms. The unfolding of the Armenian genocide coincided exactly with the successful Turkish campaign against British and ANZAC forces on the Gallipoli peninsula. Turkish forces pinned down a million Entente troops all told. It is not hard to see why the beleaguered Central Powers would be unwilling to place this support at risk. Decision makers in Berlin also knew that Germany had little leverage: Constantinople brushed off the protests that were made. It should be said that neither Britain nor France protested about the large-scale and violent (although not genocidal) Russian deportations from rear areas. When London inquired anxiously of its ambassador in St. Petersburg what was going on, he assured them that the measures were justified by the treasonous conduct of those deported.<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, even on the most generous reading, Germany was tarred with the brush of Turkish actions, and deservedly so. Four German missionaries wrote to the Foreign Office from Aleppo warning that German honor was "in danger of being smirched forever" by the treatment of the Armenians. "The fact of our living abroad," they added, "enables us to see more clearly the immense danger by which the German name is threatened here."<sup>68</sup> Two and a half months earlier, in July 1915, *The New York Times* reported the words of British peer Lord Crewe, as he denounced the German influence in the Ottoman Empire as "an absolute and unmitigated curse."<sup>69</sup>

Even more damage was done to Germany's reputation by the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. It has been called "the worst decision of the war" and a "turning point in world history."<sup>70</sup> German submarines, known as U-boats, few in number in 1914, became a key weapon as the war went on. If Britain controlled the world's sea lanes, Germany dominated the ocean depths. The German use of U-boats was an indirect response to the British blockade. Both infringed on the rights of neutral and merchant shipping. The Declaration of London in 1909, designed to offer protection to merchant shipping, had been signed by all the participants at the conference that gave rise to it, including Britain and Germany, but no nation ratified the declaration and it never came into force. Both British and German naval forces harassed neutral shipping during the war. The difference lay in the anomalous position of submarines. The international rules governing

vessels suspected of carrying munitions called for a warning to be given and crews evacuated before a vessel was sunk, if munitions were found. This was much harder for a submarine, which was uniquely vulnerable when it surfaced and had scant space to accommodate evacuated crews. Germany had previously changed the rules of engagement to allow its U-boats to sink vessels without warning. This happened for the first time in March 1915. Two months later came the sinking of the *Lusitania*, a passenger ship that was also carrying munitions to Britain. It went down with the loss of 1200 lives, including 128 U.S. citizens, prompting an exchange of diplomatic notes between Washington and Berlin. The practice of sinking without warning was ended, but became another symbol of German cruelty. The rage extended to the British and French trenches, where letters and diaries indicate that soldiers killed German prisoners in cold blood after learning about the *Lusitania*.<sup>71</sup>

The resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917 followed intense pressure on a reluctant Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg from both the German Admiralty and the Supreme Command. The Admiralty presented statistics based on a heady mix of miscalculation and wishful thinking, purporting to prove that unrestricted U-boat warfare, by answering the Allied blockade with a German blockade, could starve Britain into submission within six months. Submarine crews became national heroes, celebrated in cheap novels rushed out by publishers. The policy succeeded at first, partly by keeping the U-boats at sea longer, but the high point in tonnage sunk was reached in April. Then the Allied convoy system turned the tide. Meanwhile, what Bethmann had feared came to pass. The United States broke off diplomatic relations with Germany on February 3. Sixteen days later, the British passed on to the Americans the contents of a telegram they had intercepted and decoded. It came from German foreign secretary Arthur Zimmermann and promised to help Mexico "reconquer" the territory of three southwestern states lost in the nineteenth century, if it declared war on the United States.<sup>72</sup> This piece of folly, undertaken in anticipation of American entry into the war, continued Zimmermann's enthusiastic embrace of efforts to stir up "subject peoples," following earlier efforts in Ireland, India, and the Middle East. In this instance the results were disastrous. American anti-German sentiment hardened when President Woodrow Wilson released the text of the telegram. The United States had only recently ended a three-year military intervention in Mexico following a 1913 coup there. Germany's challenge to the Monroe Doctrine

compounded the greater provocation of unrestricted submarine warfare. On April 6, America declared war on Germany.

Try, for a moment, to view the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare through German eyes. There was ambiguity in international law and the so-called prize rules governing how U-boats were supposed to conduct themselves. The rules were written with surface vessels in mind, which meant that a submarine had to surface to issue a warning to a merchant ship. But what if the merchant ship was armed, or was an auxiliary cruiser disguised as a merchant ship? The larger moral issue is that the quick and singular cruelty of sinking a vessel without warning, drowning innocents in the process, was no different in its effects from the slow starvation to which the blockade subjected German civilians. That was exactly what Germans argued. Some in the United States agreed. Before he resigned as Woodrow Wilson's secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan urged the president to balance his condemnation of the sinking of the *Lusitania* with condemnation of the Allied blockade. Wilson refused.<sup>73</sup> He offered occasional criticism of the blockade, but his sympathies lay with the Allies. That was true of most Americans. The United States also had a growing financial stake in Allied victory, given the scale of the loans that had been made. For all these reasons, American "neutrality" prior to April 1917 was something of a misnomer.

But American entry into the war still made a huge difference. One irreversible long-term effect was felt by German-Americans. A spasm of anti-German hostility vented itself, as it had earlier in Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and as it would in Brazil after that country declared war on Germany in November 1917.<sup>74</sup> The backlash in the United States took many forms. German culture—or, with a snarl, *Kultur*—was one target. Earlier resentment of German "superiority" was often evident. German orchestral conductors and hundreds of musicians lost their jobs or were deported; some had their lives threatened. A writer in the *Chicago Post* thundered that "the Teutonization of our music in America began with the establishment of the symphony orchestra."<sup>75</sup> German composers were banned from the repertoire, German books burned, German language instructors sacked. At Harvard, Adolphus Busch Hall, built to house an art collection gifted by the German government before the war, was completed in 1917 but not opened until 1921 because of anti-German sentiment.<sup>76</sup> Beethoven was banned in Pittsburgh, the pretzel in Boston. The German language was at the center of the storm. Sauerkraut ("Liberty

Cabbage"), hamburger ("Liberty Steak"), and dachshunds ("Liberty Pups") were given more acceptable names. Towns, streets, and parks were permanently renamed to remove the Teutonic stain. Berlin Avenue in St. Louis became Pershing Avenue. The German language was banned in schools and even churches. One Iowa politician suggested that "ninety percent of all the men and women who teach the German language are traitors."<sup>77</sup> This was the atmosphere in which mobs attacked and lynched German-Americans. The onslaught continued in postwar campaigns against the German language and "hyphenated Americans" whose loyalty was suspect. This delivered a deathblow to a German-American culture that had begun to fray around the edges before the war, but now fell victim with terrible suddenness to external assault.

The biggest immediate impact of American entry was felt, of course, in its contribution to the outcome of the war. The U.S. Navy supported the British blockade of Germany and joined the convoys that warded off U-boat attacks. The American army, smaller than Belgium's in 1914, grew quickly with conscription. General John J. Pershing arrived in France with the first contingent of 14,000 men in June 1917. The American Expeditionary Forces numbered 175,000 by January 1918 and over 1 million by May. By then, a quarter of a million soldiers were arriving every month, many crossing the Atlantic in German ships that had been impounded. U.S. material and financial support for the Allied cause was also critical. American economic output overtook that of Britain and its empire in 1916. It was during the war, and partly because of it, that the United States flexed its muscles as a global economic power and creditor nation for the first time. After America entered the conflict, munitions, civilian goods, and credits poured into Britain and France. From the middle of 1917, the United States spent almost \$43 million a day on the war, more than any other combatant.<sup>78</sup>

U.S. entry into the war was one of the two reasons that 1917 turned out to be a pivotal year—a watershed in global as well as European history.<sup>79</sup> The other reason was the double revolution in Russia. In February the tsar became the first European ruler to lose his throne during the war. That created the potential opening for a separate peace in the east. Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg had always tried to keep German war aims vague (although by no means modest) because of just such a possibility of detaching one partner from the Allied coalition. Informal talks in Stockholm between two envoys, Matthias Erzberger and Josef Kolyschko, during March and April mapped out conditions for an armistice and peace. although this was

possible only because neither of the two officially represented his government. Kolyschko was regarded by some members of the Russian cabinet as too pro-German. On the other side, Erzberger went to Stockholm with Bethmann's blessing but had been instructed to listen, not talk, something that never proved easy for the locquacious Erzberger.<sup>80</sup>

These talks came to nothing, just as nothing came of other peace feelers in 1917, like those from Austria-Hungary and Pope Benedict XV, and for the same reason. Neither side was willing, in the end, to budge, given how much had already been sacrificed. Would-be peace offers from combatants always turned out to contain unacceptable conditions. Russia in 1917 may have been more willing than Germany (in fact, more willing than Britain or France) to agree to a peace that restored the prewar status quo. But even the Russians would not compromise on Poland or control of the Dardanelles. Despite steady criticism on the left from the Bolsheviks, the government of Prime Minister Prince Georgy Lvov in the spring and summer of 1917 wanted to pursue the war more effectively than the tsar, not to end it. That was why Russia began a new offensive in June.

The German side was equally intransigent. At the time of the Erzberger-Kolyschko talks there was clear daylight between the moderate Bethmann and the hawks in the Supreme Command. But Erzberger's overreach in discussing an armistice with his Russian opposite number gave Ludendorff his chance. He let it be known to Kolyschko that the German Supreme Command would never agree to the moderate terms discussed in Stockholm. The talks were scuppered. The Supreme Command, backed by the kaiser, business groups, and conservative annexationists, forced Bethmann to accept a minimum program of German gains from the war. These amounted to a dictated peace of conquest on the eastern front. Bethmann called the demands "fantasies," but had no room for maneuver.<sup>81</sup> Any opportunity for a separate peace was now gone. Instead, the German government sent Vladimir Lenin back to Russia in the famous sealed train to undermine the Provisional Government (he was working on his "April theses" calling for a second revolution while the train rolled through Frankfurt), and the Supreme Command began a campaign to subvert the Russian army through a blizzard of propaganda leaflets.

War weariness and antiwar sentiment were felt everywhere in 1917. That was most obviously true in Russia, where a second revolution in October brought Lenin and the Bolsheviks to power. But it was true in France as well, where the huge losses sustained in the Nivelle offensive



that year sparked mutinies, followed by strikes. The bloodletting of Ypres and Passchendaele, coupled with the absence of any clear-cut victory, had their effects on morale in Britain. In Italy there were antiwar riots; then came humiliation at Caporetto, where a military collapse resulted in 30,000 dead or wounded and 370,000 prisoners taken. Everywhere that the censors allowed it, liberal and socialist voices called for an end to war and a peace without annexations.

Germany was no closer to collapse in 1917 than France or Italy, never mind Russia. But social tensions were growing. Despite the no-strike pledge made by trade union leaders when war broke out, there were five hundred strikes in 1917 involving 1.5 million people. Many were organized by a radical movement of factory shop stewards. They resulted from worsening shop floor conditions, plus dissatisfaction with food shortages and the growing difficulty of finding basics like matches and soap. Political polarization increased. In early 1917 the Independent Social Democratic Party broke away from the Social Democratic Party, calling for peace without annexations and domestic reform. That fall, a new right-wing political organization was founded. The Fatherland Party supported a maximum program of German annexations and denounced critics who allegedly undermined the war effort. Its founders were former Admiral Tirpitz and Wolfgang Kapp, who later led an unsuccessful coup against the Weimar Republic. The party's uncompromising views, like its violent antisemitism, marked the appearance of a new right in German politics. It attracted 1.25 million members in less than a year. One of them was the Bavarian Anton Drexler, who later founded the Nazi Party.

Germany's political leadership changed decisively in 1917. Bethmann, mindful that what had happened in Russia might happen in Germany in the absence of reform, drafted proposals for a democratic franchise in Prussia. But these were watered down by conservatives into vague promises. At the end of June, as the failure of unrestricted submarine warfare to knock Britain out of the war became obvious and any prospect of a separate peace with Russia disappeared, Social Democrats urged the chancellor to reject annexationist demands and introduce domestic reforms. Soon thereafter, opposition parties in the Reichstag formed the Interparty Committee, a step on the way to a future parliamentary form of government, and Matthias Erzberger gave notice that he would introduce a peace resolution. Germany's second "July crisis" had a paradoxical outcome. The peace resolution passed in the Reichstag but was ignored. Bethmann had been dis-

missed six days earlier, discarded by Kaiser William because the Supreme Command and Prussian conservatives had no further use for him. They rejected his conversion to domestic reform and could dispense with his "diplomatic" qualities now that the United States was in the war anyway.

If 1917 was the year of decision in Russia, the same was true in Germany, but the outcome was—for the moment—very different. It is even more revealing to compare what happened in Germany with what happened in the three west European Allies when they faced their moments of wartime crisis. David Lloyd George in Britain, Georges Clemenceau in France, and Vittorio Emanuele Orlando in Italy all emerged as powerful, charismatic civilian war leaders. They are evidence for political scientist Max Weber's contention that one advantage of a parliamentary system was its ability to select effective leaders, which he set out in a series of trenchant newspaper articles in 1917.<sup>82</sup> The German parliament flexed its muscles with the peace resolution, but Bethmann fell because he lost the confidence of the army. The identity of his successors was largely irrelevant. Power lay with the Supreme Command and its right-wing backers. Even the kaiser slipped increasingly into the shadows. This brought into the open what had been latent since the beginning of the war.

The "silent dictatorship" of Hindenburg and Ludendorff became increasingly apparent after July 1917. At home, state-of-siege laws were used against domestic protests. Wilhelm Groener, one of the few generals convinced that the war could not be won by "fighting against the workers," was dismissed because he was considered too hard on profiteers and too soft on trade unions.<sup>83</sup> Some of the eugenicist fantasies that flourished in the occupied Ober-Ost were also brought back home. The Supreme Command called for a ban on contraception and the punitive taxation of unmarried men, who were failing in their "natural duties" to the nation. The military leadership continued to pursue aggressive war aims. It called for annexations or control of territory to secure supplies of food, raw materials, and oil, especially in the east, where cease-fires with Russia and Romania were followed by the harsh peace treaties of Brest Litovsk and Bucharest.

The military position still looked favorable for the Central Powers as 1917 ended, even though the Allies enjoyed a huge superiority in economic resources. Italy had been routed at Caporetto, Russia and Romania were out of the war, and American troops were still arriving in Europe. The Balfour Declaration in November 1917, designed to win world Jewry for the Allied cause, was partly an attempt to regain the initiative. It was born of

an awareness that, as the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann liked to suggest, if the Entente did not offer the Jews their own homeland the Germans surely would.<sup>84</sup> Later the same month Lord Lansdowne, a member of Britain's wartime coalition as recently as the year before, published a letter in the *Daily Telegraph* calling for a negotiated peace.<sup>85</sup> After Allied forces captured Jerusalem in December, Britain could transfer soldiers to the western front; but Germany could do the same after victory over Russia. Strengthened by forty-four divisions pulled from the east, the German army in the spring of 1918 enjoyed numerical superiority on the western front for the first time since 1914.

In March the German Supreme Command launched Operation Michael, its spring offensive, which began with a lengthy artillery bombardment and an infantry assault across a fifty-mile front—"the greatest onslaught in the history of the world," said Winston Churchill, who witnessed it.<sup>86</sup> There were five waves of German attacks between March 21 and July 15. They advanced the German lines as much as forty miles, within artillery range of Paris. But this was another gamble by German military commanders, another roll of the dice. The advances stretched the supply lines and exhausted the troops. While more and more Americans were now available to the Allies, Germany lacked reserves to replace the huge losses of this spring offensive—300,000 dead or severely wounded between March and July, almost a million casualties in all. Some of the soldiers still preserving German victory in the east might have been better used in the west. From June onward the numbers increasingly favored the Allies. Like the advance of August–September 1914 and the first months of unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917, the intoxicating initial success of the spring offensive was unsustainable. The Allies counterattacked in July, Ludendorff ordered a retreat from the Marne on the twenty-second, and just over two weeks later the German lines were broken. German resistance was hampered by the spread of the influenza epidemic, to which German soldiers proved especially susceptible because of their meager diet and weariness. By summer a crisis of morale led to growing rates of desertion and a great increase in mass surrenders. "No war can be won with men who give themselves up," complained General von Einem.<sup>87</sup> For ordinary soldiers, the elation of spring, with its promise of quick victory and war's end, gave way to the despondency of summer and fall.

The architect of the spring offensive, Ludendorff, remained impervious to growing concerns about the military situation among officers in the

Supreme Command. After a crushing defeat on the Somme, he cast about for scapegoats. In mid-August he was still assuring the kaiser that victory was possible. Ludendorff's nervous exhaustion and erratic decision making led to the appointment of a new chief of operations and the intervention of a psychologist. That doctor ordered his patient to sleep more, take exercise, and (less conventionally) sing German folk songs when he woke up in the morning. Ludendorff, remarkably, did what he was told. The Supreme Command was divided in August and September on whether Ludendorff should be replaced, whether Germany should seek an armistice, and if so, who should seek it and on what terms. A better time to have asked for an armistice would have been April. Even in July, an orderly withdrawal behind the Rhine, coupled with a willingness to give up Belgium and make other concessions, would have made things difficult for the Allies militarily and politically. By late September, the Bulgarian army had been defeated, the Ottomans were on the losing end of an Allied offensive in Palestine, and the Austrian army was falling apart. Even then, Allied military commanders still believed that the Germans could have held out for a long time. So did Lloyd George. Instead, suddenly, shockingly, Ludendorff told Kaiser William at the end of September that the war was lost and an immediate cease-fire was necessary—it was cease-fire or catastrophe. This all-or-nothing quality was characteristic of Ludendorff, making him in some ways a perfect embodiment of the German military.

Ludendorff and the Supreme Command now made a brazen attempt to blame the civilian population for German defeat and foist responsibility onto the politicians they had always treated with contempt. This was the beginning of the pernicious "stab in the back" legend about an "undefeated army," which gained credibility from the fact that Ludendorff threw up his hands while German forces were still fighting on French soil five hundred miles from Berlin. Ludendorff told his section chiefs that he had advised the kaiser to bring into the government the people "largely responsible that things have turned out as they have. . . . They must now eat the soup which they have served us!"<sup>88</sup> Ludendorff's soup was served in the poisoned chalice of the imperial chancellorship, which now passed to its fourth and final wartime bearer, Prince Max of Baden. It says something about the kaiser's Germany that its most reformist chancellor was a prince, albeit a liberal-minded one who brought Social Democrats into the government for the first time alongside representatives of the other parties that supported the peace resolution.

Prince Max rightly believed that an immediate call for an armistice was tantamount to an admission of defeat and tried to persuade Ludendorff and Hindenburg to delay. They refused. The new chancellor therefore sent a note to Woodrow Wilson in the early hours of October 4 to ask the Allies for an armistice. The role of the Supreme Command in insisting that the note be sent, and sent immediately, was not made public. For a month, everything remained open-ended, as decisions were made against a background of military collapse and popular discontent. At home, a series of reforms sailed through after being blocked for years. They included abolition of the notorious three-class Prussian franchise. Meanwhile, Prince Max's government responded to a series of notes from the American president that made an armistice conditional on very harsh terms. Ludendorff, keen as ever not to be associated with the defeat, proposed resuming the war, but succeeded finally in straining the patience of the kaiser and was sacked. German negotiators led by Matthias Erzberger traveled to France on November 8 and reluctantly attached their signatures to an armistice agreements that laid down severe terms. It came into effect on November 11.

By then the political landscape had changed utterly. Domestic reform and the search for an armistice took place while the power of the army was broken, at least temporarily, although it seemed possible that a military putsch might occur in Germany similar to the one attempted against the Provisional Government in Russia in September 1917. Instead, Germany had its version of the Bolshevik Revolution. It was sparked by sailors' mutinies in the north, in Kiel and Wilhelmshaven, after the Naval Command—angered at the armistice talks, and concerned to salvage its reputation after the wartime inactivity of Tirpitz's much vaunted battleships—ordered the fleet to set sail in a futile gesture of defiance. There had been mutinous outbreaks the previous year, but these were more serious. The sailors addressed one another as "comrade Bolsheviks." The mutiny became a revolt, and the revolt a revolution as unrest spread inland. Nineteen eighteen had been a year of growing unrest. In the first week of November, workers' and soldiers' councils—or "Soviets"; the German word *Räte* can be translated as either—were established across Germany. The kaiser fled across the Dutch border and revolutionary crowds filled the streets of Berlin. The War Ministry was occupied by a soldiers' council. At noon on November 9, Prince Max announced that William had abdicated and named Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert his own successor as chancellor. Two hours later Philipp

Scheidemann, another Social Democrat who had served in Prince Max's government, went out onto the balcony of the Reichstag building and proclaimed the German republic.

### *The Weimar Republic* Required Reading resumes here through end of chapter

GERMANY WAS NAMED A REPUBLIC ON NOVEMBER 9, 1918. IT became the Weimar Republic the following year, after a National Assembly elected in January 1919 convened in the Thuringian town and produced a constitution that came into effect in August. That January election had been the first in Germany history that enfranchised women. But why Weimar? One reason was a desire to associate the new Germany with the "good" Germany of Goethe and Schiller. That was in the minds of the center-left parties who dominated the assembly, because they were aware that the victorious Allies were meeting in Versailles during the same months to decide Germany's fate. Choosing a city other than Berlin was also a nod to other parts of Germany leery of what the Prussian capital denoted, which is why cities like Frankfurt and Nuremberg were also considered. There was another reason to avoid Berlin. The capital was the scene of continuing revolutionary unrest, during which the interior of the Reichstag had been seriously damaged. Weimar could be protected by a military cordon. Passes were needed to enter the town; 4000 militia members established machine-gun posts in windows and on rooftops. That was the setting for the 423 delegates who deliberated in the Weimar State Theater and the 1000 members of the press corps who covered them.<sup>89</sup> Not until August 1919 did the government move back permanently to Berlin.

The Weimar Republic began, as it ended, in violence. The violence of its beginning was intertwined with a wider postwar upheaval across Europe, generated by territorial disputes, by revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence, and in the movement of millions of people across contested borders. All three created turmoil that lasted well into the 1920s.

The politics of peacemaking was a prime source of continuing conflict. Representatives of more than two dozen Allies, dominated by the big three of Britain, France, and the United States, convened in Paris in January 1919. They hammered out terms that were presented in early May to members of a shocked German delegation, whose wishful thinking had led them to expect a milder settlement. The treaty was signed, reluctantly, by members of the Social Democratic government on June 28, five years to the day after



the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Its terms were punitive. Germany lost one-tenth of its population, one-seventh of its territory, one-fourth of its coal, and half of its iron. In the east, Posen, and parts of West Prussia and Upper Silesia were ceded to Poland, while an area of East Prussia was carved out to create a "Polish corridor" to the sea. Danzig became a "free city." Memel passed into Allied hands and eventually became Lithuanian. In the west, Alsace and Lorraine reverted to France, Eupen and Malmedy became Belgian. The Saarland was to be administered by the League of Nations, with the French granted rights to mine its coal, and a strip of land along the Rhine border was "demilitarized." North Schleswig was ceded to Denmark. Germany lost its colonies, had the size of its army restricted to 100,000, and was denied tanks, submarines, or planes. It was forbidden to sign any treaty allying it with Austria or to join the League of Nations. Germany was required, finally, to pay scores of billions of marks in reparations, and to accept "responsibility" for the war as set out in article 231 of the treaty.

President Woodrow Wilson had warned the European powers in January 1917 what the alternative to "peace without victory" would look like. It would, he said, "mean peace forced upon the loser. . . . It would be accepted in humiliation, under duress, as an intolerable sacrifice and would leave a sting, a resentment, a bitter memory."<sup>90</sup> That was how Germans perceived the Treaty of Versailles, as a vindictive victors' peace. It was a sentiment shared across the political spectrum, although voiced most violently and unceasingly on the right, where the denial of defeat was most intense and the legend that Germany had been stabbed in the back by traitors at home became an article of faith.<sup>91</sup> There were also non-Germans who thought that Versailles was a foolishly harsh, "Carthaginian" peace. The most famous of them was a member of the British delegation at Versailles, the economist John Maynard Keynes.

Were they right? Only in part. The fact is that the Allies disagreed among themselves, the French invariably taking a tougher view than the Anglo-Saxons, and the Germans benefited from that. The French, for example, had pressed for Danzig to be awarded outright to Poland, and for the whole of Upper Silesia to become Polish without a plebiscite. France had also wanted to annex the Saarland and occupy the left bank of the Rhine. The Versailles Treaty is notable in other ways for what it did *not* contain. A preamble that would have underscored German guilt was dropped. The Allies rejected the idea of exacting tribute, instead going the

legal route of asking for itemized "reparations" that reflected heavy real losses (especially for France and Belgium) and were anyway repeatedly scaled back.<sup>92</sup> The loss of colonies was, like so much else in the treaty, a blow to German pride, but might be considered a blessing given the prewar balance sheet and the costs in imperial policing that Germany no longer had to bear. As the pacifist Carl von Ossietzky noted, "Germans can sleep peacefully when the guns start firing in China or Morocco."<sup>93</sup> German territorial losses on the Continent were hardly unreasonable, moreover, given the historical identity and ethnic composition of the country's contested borderlands. Three million of the 6.5 million people living on the "lost" lands were non-German speakers. The new borders in the east were actually drawn with great care. The "Polish corridor," for example, was kept as thin as possible and every effort made to minimize the severing of transportation routes. In the end, despite its losses, Germany remained both intact and a major power in Europe—more like France after Napoleon than Germany after Hitler.

German losses were also modest compared with those sustained by its Central European allies Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Widening the lens to include these settlements reminds us that the German-speaking lands were part of a much larger postwar recasting of former empires, sometimes by treaty, often by violence. Four multinational empires broke apart as a result of the war: the Romanov, Habsburg, and Ottoman as well as the Hohenzollern. The "shatter zones" they left behind were sites of violent conflict for years after the war ended, fueled by the legacy of militarism, the bitterness of defeat, and efforts to construct new nation-states in ethnically mixed areas. The violence flared up across east-central Europe.<sup>94</sup> Ethnic Germans did not play a particularly large role in this, with some important exceptions. In Latvia, German paramilitary Freikorps forces numbering as many as forty thousand men fought brutally, first against the Bolsheviks at the invitation of local authorities, then against Latvians to secure a German presence.<sup>95</sup> In the new Czechoslovakian state, ultranationalists among the German-speaking population established "German provinces." They dreamed about becoming part of an Austrian or Greater German homeland, until the Czech army marched in and quickly quelled the upstart movement, setting off wild rumors across the German border about a threatened "Czech invasion."<sup>96</sup> Above all, there was the German-Polish border. A Silesian plebiscite was held under Allied auspices in March 1921, which led to a short-lived Polish revolt and answering violence from

German paramilitary Freikorps units. As many as two thousand people were killed.<sup>97</sup>

The final postwar settlement of German borders was mostly less violent elsewhere. Plebiscites in Schleswig passed off peacefully, and there was nothing in Alsace-Lorraine or the Saarland that came close to the blood-letting in the Baltic and the German-Polish borderlands. But there was violence along the Rhine corridor. One notorious instance of it remained largely rhetorical. The stationing of around twenty-five thousand French soldiers from North Africa, Senegal, and Madagascar in the occupied Rhineland gave rise to an ugly racist campaign against the "black horror on the Rhine" in word and image, including Carl Boese's 1921 film *Die schwarze Schmach*.<sup>98</sup> Graphic cartoons depicted the rape of German women and girls by semianimal "barbarians." This campaign reached its peak in 1920–21. It was orchestrated by the government in Berlin and played on domestic resentment that Germany's own colonies had just been lost, but the intended audience was also international. The purpose was to discredit the French occupation and the provisions of the Versailles Treaty with it. The politics of the campaign were far from straightforward. The government worked with organizations like the Rhenish Women's League, which spread "black horror" propaganda internationally and found support from women's organizations in Britain and the United States. The British Labour politician E. D. Morel, a fierce critic of earlier Belgian violence in the Congo, wrote a 1920 pamphlet, *The Horror on the Rhine*, which attacked France as an imperialist power that exploited subject peoples far from home while exposing German women to their supposedly uncontrolled sexual appetites.<sup>99</sup> This racism of the left also had a right-wing German counterpart, represented by ultra-nationalist organizations like the German Emergency League Against the Black Horror, whose president, Heinrich Distler, wrote the screenplay for Boese's film. The vicious campaign of 1920–21 left a residue of hatred and fed the longer-term stigmatization of the so-called Rhineland bastards.

There was also more physical violence along the Rhine border in the years 1918–1923 than is sometimes recognized. The region's future was unresolved and a variety of colorful adventurers advocated the cause of Rhenish separatism—the creation of some kind of republic that would be neutral (although effectively pro-French), perhaps under League of Nations protection. A separatist putsch was attempted in 1919 in Speyer. Some leading French figures, including the head of the French Army on the Rhine, still

avored dismemberment of Germany's westernmost limb, however much the British and (while they were still there) the Americans made it clear that this was unacceptable.

Hanging over all this were questions about the size of German reparations, still being haggled over, and the delivery of reparations in kind. The Ruhr, in the northern Rhineland, was the great prize here because it provided most of Germany's remaining coal, iron, and steel. French planning for a possible occupation of the Ruhr went back to 1918, initially conceived as a measure of military security, but increasingly viewed as a way to secure reparations. The Ruhr ports of Düsseldorf, Duisburg, and Ruhrort were occupied in 1921 in response to German stubbornness, and French plans for full-scale occupation were well advanced. "It will come—sooner or later," said a fatalistic Lord Curzon, the British foreign minister.<sup>100</sup>

It came in January 1923, when France finally lost patience with German negotiators and used a shortfall in timber deliveries as justification to occupy the Ruhr. For good measure, they also occupied the right-bank territory between the French military bridgeheads. The German government called for noncooperation and passive resistance. That expressed the feelings of most Ruhr dwellers but was almost certainly the wrong policy choice. Germany could have acquiesced, expressed moral indignation, and insisted on an immediate conference. Given British and American attitudes, this would probably have delivered in 1923 the kind of compromise actually achieved in 1924, but without the intervening pain.<sup>101</sup> In the event, France responded to passive resistance by expelling thousands of German officials, bringing in French personnel, and trying "saboteurs" in military courts. The Berlin government acceded to French demands in the fall, but not before its policy of printing money to keep the economy going during the crisis caused serious inflation (with its origins in the war) to become dramatically worse. This ended in the notorious hyperinflation in November 1923, when a dollar was worth 4.2 trillion marks. The political cost of this "world turned upside down" would be paid later.<sup>102</sup>

The Ruhr crisis prompted a final separatist spasm. There had been French back-channel support for Rhenish separatists since the end of the war, but in 1923 it was the separatists who acted, causing Paris to scramble in response. There was a comic-opera element to some of the putsches and seizures of town halls. The separatists were relatively few and disorganized. Often, their actions bordered on brigandage. But by the first week of November 1923, the Rhenish red-white-green tricolor flew over many towns in the

Rhineland. This final postwar effort to alter Germany's western border by violence was answered with violence. Eight months earlier, in March, a separatist named Josef Smeets had been shot and injured by German nationalists in Cologne and his brother-in-law killed. Six months later, there was a shoot-out between separatists and nationalists in Düsseldorf, which became known as Bloody Sunday. Two months after that, another skirmish outside Bonn left more than a hundred dead. The end of the so-called revolver republic in the Palatinate was equally brutal. Franz-Josef Heinz, self-styled head of the Palatine Republic, was assassinated by nationalists in early January 1924, together with his main advisers, while enjoying afterdinner drinks in a Speyer hotel. Weeks later, a nationalist mob in the town of Pirmasens trapped the remnants of the Palatine separatist movement in the town hall, which they set alight, shooting those who tried to escape. Fifteen bodies were recovered from the ashes the next morning.<sup>103</sup>

This bloodletting was the German version of the borderland violence that exploded across postwar Europe. The revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence that raged from 1918 through 1923 was felt with equal force. Reds and Whites fought each other as viciously in Central Europe as they did in Russia, and with the same slogans. This was a pan-European conflict, which stretched from Russia to Spain and northern Italy. But events in Germany assumed special importance, for what happened there was seen by supporters and opponents of revolution alike as critical for the future.

"The common people are furious, but what is the use of furious sheep." That was the scornful diary entry of Australian Ethel Cooper, who had spent the war years in Leipzig, after the government raided a radical newspaper.<sup>104</sup> It is a familiar gibe: Lenin once scoffed that German comrades told to storm a railroad station would buy platform tickets first.<sup>105</sup> But the cliché is quite wrong. After the initial events that brought down the monarchy in 1918, moderate Social Democrats tried to lead the revolution into safely parliamentary channels. They were challenged not only by attempts on the right to overthrow the new republic, like the putsch in 1920 led by right-wing civil servant Wolfgang Kapp but instigated by elements of the army and Hitler's Beer Hall putsch in 1923, but by repeated efforts on the left to establish a revolutionary or Bolshevik-style regime in Germany. These began with the Spartacist Uprising of January 1919 and the Bavarian Soviet Republic in April of that year, continued with the Red Army of the Ruhr uprising in the spring of 1920 and the so-called March action of 1921, and ended with the October uprising in 1923. All were put down.

Friedrich Ebert and his fellow Social Democrats have been heavily criticized for their conduct, especially for their willingness to use both Freikorps paramilitaries and army to suppress the Spartacist Uprising, in the course of which the radical leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered. Accused by contemporary conservatives of stabbing the old regime in the back, the Social Democrats are now more likely to be accused by historians of not stabbing it hard enough. The critics have a point. The SPD's indecently rapid willingness to embrace the forces of "order" against social revolution emboldened conservatives and left many antirepublicans in place because of the failure to do more housecleaning of the old elite. The judiciary was just one example, with its remarkable leniency in sentencing conservatives who committed political assassinations, which took the lives of prominent figures like Matthias Erzberger and Walther Rathenau. Social Democratic sins of omission and commission undoubtedly contributed to the division and bitterness on the left that proved so disastrous in the last years of Weimar.

But the balance sheet of the SPD's role has entries in both columns. At the head of the Weimar coalition (with the Catholic Center and Democratic parties) the Social Democrats presided over the creation of Germany's first parliamentary democracy, while instituting advanced welfare provisions (hated by much of industry) without resort to the dictatorial methods used by the Bolsheviks in Russia. And they achieved this while constrained by the politics of peacemaking, for the Allied blockade remained in place until the Versailles Treaty was signed in June 1919. Critics might reply that Ebert ("I hate the social revolution like sin") was only doing what he wanted to do anyway, which is true, and that he could and should have harnessed the grassroots radicalism of the councils and shop stewards' movement against the old elite, which is a more dubious proposition. The radical forces unleashed by the revolution were hard for any political party to control, not just Social Democrats, but those to the left of them, too. The revolution was desperate, chaotic, and anarchic. Its ferocious energy came from war weariness and the indignities that workers faced during the war: labor "mobilization," hectoring by the military, dangerously speeded-up production lines, hunger. The sudden collapse of the old regime in November 1918 propelled previously unorganized groups into the streets. For workers of every kind, and especially for the young, the revolution was an opportunity to settle accounts with authority and "them up there." The estimated two million rifles unlawfully in circulation hardly made things more sedate.<sup>106</sup>



Even Rosa Luxemburg, who probably had more faith in the spontaneous good sense of the "masses" than any revolutionary in Europe, referred to the problem of the many "little revolutions," local, splintered, disparate—the *Revolutionchen*—that defined events in Germany.<sup>107</sup>

An "unscripted" revolution, then?<sup>108</sup> In many ways, yes. But no revolution completely lacks a script, even a choreography. Both moderates and radicals were heirs to a wide repertoire of pre-1918 activism, both practical and performative. Social Democrats could invoke the world of workers' libraries and cycling clubs, "respectable" trade unionism, well-organized May Day rallies, and election campaigns; radicals could point to the mass strike, street protests, and a more distant history of building barricades and exercising power directly. When the revolution fell into their hands in 1918, the SPD wanted to tame it; they rejected the "Russian madness" (in the words of Philipp Scheidemann) offered by Lenin and his comrades.<sup>109</sup> The left, meanwhile, drew its inspiration from far and wide. Karl Artelt, a leading figure in the Kiel naval mutiny and later a Communist Party member, had witnessed the 1911 revolution in China as a sailor in the German Pacific squadron stationed in Qingdao. Then, in 1917, he grew close to French and Belgian radicals while imprisoned with them after his arrest for distributing strike material in the Kiel navy yard. Ireland also played its part. When Lieutenant Colonel William Roddie arrived in Berlin during the Spartacist Uprising to report to the British War Office on conditions in Germany, he was disconcerted to be told by a taxi driver that the man firing a machine gun from the top of the Brandenburg Gate was one of "Roger Casement's Irishmen."<sup>110</sup> Revolutionaries were mobile; sometimes they had to be. After Béla Kun's Hungarian Soviet Republic was overthrown at the beginning of August 1919, many supporters joined him in Austrian exile or went on to Germany, where they created a "Budapest-Berlin axis."<sup>111</sup> One of them was the Hungarian Communist Alexander Rado, who fled Budapest for Austria in 1919, moved to Germany in 1922, and played a leading in the Communists' central German uprising in October the following year.<sup>112</sup>

The Russian Revolution that inspired Béla Kun and Alexander Rado had the same effect in Germany, enlarging the sense of what was possible. Leading German radicals had intimate ties to Russia. Rosa Luxemburg was born in the tsarist empire and had been politically active as a student in Warsaw before fleeing as an eighteen-year-old to Zurich and moving to Berlin ten years later. Her close friend Sophie Ryss, from Kharkov, went to Germany to study and married Karl Liebknecht.<sup>113</sup> The hopes Luxemburg

placed in Russia run through the many letters she wrote to Sophie, as they do in a letter to Clara Zetkin, a fellow radical, which called the February Revolution an "overture" and predicted "an echo in the whole world."<sup>114</sup> Russian events also had a powerful impact on Ernst Däumig, a spokesman for the workers' council movement and sometime chairman of the Independent Social Democrats, who briefly joined the Communists. After the October Revolution, he proclaimed: "We are not mere spectators of events in Russia, we participate in them with full fervor. We mean to learn from what happens there and then apply the lessons fruitfully to the struggles for the salvation of humanity from the claws of capitalism."<sup>115</sup>

Russia also inspired Germans of a younger generation. Ernst Reuter, later the high-profile Social Democratic mayor of West Berlin during the Cold War, but an unknown radical thirty years earlier, learned his Communist politics as a Russian POW.<sup>116</sup> Max Hoelz, who became notorious for his left-wing political banditry in the German Vogtland, was an apolitical young man, more Christian than socialist, when he served on the eastern front and learned about the Russian Revolution. This "made a great impression even on those of us who were not socialists," he wrote. None of the German soldiers believed that the revolution would be confined to Russia.<sup>117</sup>

The Red Army was another Russian institution adopted in Germany. Self-styled Red armies formed in several regions where attempts were made to bring about a more radical revolution. The first was created during the tragic sequence of events that transpired in Bavaria. A Bavarian Soviet Republic was established in Munich in April 1919, led by playwright Ernst Toller. Well-meaning and ineffectual, a socialist republic run by bohemian intellectuals, it was overthrown after a week and replaced by a more obviously Soviet-style regime whose leaders were the Russian-born Eugen Leviné and Max Levien. They built a Red army thirty thousand strong. Their attempt to apply uncompromising Soviet methods in Germany ended in violence, with the killing of hostages, which was followed by a bout of "white terror" from the right. Toller, who tried hard to save the hostages, later described how children in Munich played Red army, locking their enemies up in outbuildings or cellars and shouting "Up the Reds" or "Down with the Whites." It was dreadful to hear these games, he said; but the reality was more dreadful.<sup>118</sup> Toller disliked his successors' version of class warfare and criticized how the "magical glow" of the Bolshevik Revolution and the words "we do things differently in Russia" silenced all

debate.<sup>119</sup> But Toller as well as Leviné and Levien had plenty to answer for. During a year, 1919, when social privation was greater than ever, when Germany's political future was still open, the revolutionary playacting by Munich's salon radicals and the ideological rigidity of the Soviet republic that replaced it combined to do great damage to the left-wing cause. They also turned Munich, overnight, into a bastion of the authoritarian right.

The second Red army in Germany during these turbulent years was mustered in the Ruhr, in response to the Kapp putsch. It numbered at least 50,000. The insurrection it mounted in March 1920 was the largest workers' uprising anywhere in Germany. The Red Army of the Ruhr controlled cities large and small. As many as 300,000 miners followed the call for a general strike during negotiations between the insurgents and the newly restored government in Berlin. The broad support enjoyed in the Ruhr by this Red army made it very different from its namesake in Munich. The driving force of working-class radicalism was different, too—it was, above all, a by-product of fierce antimilitarism reawakened by the Kapp putsch. But the ending was horribly similar. Military forces and Freikorps units suppressed the uprising. More than one thousand members of the Red army died, many shot while already in captivity or "seeking to escape." It was another white terror.<sup>120</sup>

The radical left was united in the belief that events in Germany formed part of a larger struggle. This was also the view in Moscow. Grigory Zinoviev, head of the new Communist International (Comintern), founded in March 1919, proclaimed the following month that Munich was "where the immediate fate of the proletarian revolution throughout Europe will be decided."<sup>121</sup> The failures that year in Bavaria, Hungary, and in the equally short-lived Slovakian Soviet Republic did not dampen hopes. A west European secretariat of Comintern was opened in Berlin. That was where agents received new identities and papers before going off to the Balkans or Spain. Berlin was the "great waiting room of world history."<sup>122</sup> Even in 1920, as the Red Army advanced on Warsaw in the Polish-Soviet War and the prospects still seemed open for Red revolution in Spain and Italy, Germany remained the great prize for Lenin and the Bolsheviks. It was the most industrially advanced country with the largest organized working class. But 1920 marked the high point of realistic Soviet hopes. What happened in the Ruhr was matched by similar defeats in Italy and Spain. Farther east, the Red Army was turned back from Warsaw.

The prospects for revolution in the west were never what Moscow

thought they were. The most radical movements of the left in Germany (as in Italy and Spain) were regional or workplace forms of activism not easily assimilable to a Leninist view of revolution.<sup>123</sup> They were closer to what Lenin denounced in *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, written in 1920. Twice in three years, however, the German Communist Party itself tried to hurry history along with failed uprisings. The catastrophic March action of 1921, with its "theory of the offensive" (begin the uprising, and the workers will join it) and attempts at provocation with staged attacks on Communist buildings, was a piece of desperate political adventurism, pressed on the German Communists by Zinoviev and Comintern envoys like Béla Kun. The final disaster was an attempt to seize power in the October uprising of 1923, to take advantage of the Ruhr crisis. The decision came from Moscow, which sent Soviet advisers to help set up "Red hundreds," or paramilitary detachments, in Germany. The uprising was called off before it began when the hopelessness of its prospects became obvious. It went ahead only in Hamburg, where one hundred insurgents died on the barricades. This failed "German October" strengthened the reactionary right and further poisoned relations between different parts of the left, for the Communists had recently joined coalition governments with the left-leaning Social Democrats in central Germany, who now understandably felt betrayed.<sup>124</sup>

The radical left crossed borders with ease. Alexander Rado, the Hungarian who headed Leipzig's Communist military units in the October uprising, moved on to Moscow the following year. Ruth Fischer, later a leader of the German Communist Party, passed back and forth frequently between Berlin and Moscow before October 1923. Another inveterate border crosser was the revolutionary-at-large Karl Radek. Born in the Habsburg Empire, he had fought during the 1905 Russian revolution in Warsaw, then settled in Germany as a Social Democratic journalist, before going to Switzerland during the war, where he boarded the "sealed train" as one of Lenin's companions. As the Comintern's German expert, Radek practically commuted between Berlin and Moscow in the early 1920s.<sup>125</sup>

The ultra-nationalist right crossed borders, too. Paramilitary groups in Germany, Austria, and Hungary cooperated closely. Erich Ludendorff, now an embittered enemy of the republic, and Admiral Miklós Horthy of Hungary were in contact with each other, two military men born in the second half of the 1860s and profoundly hostile to the postwar world. Clan-destine meetings took place in the summer of 1920 in Budapest and Bavaria,

to coordinate plans for suppressing revolution and installing authoritarian regimes in Germany and Austria. The members of European paramilitary groups had much in common. The young men in their twenties who filled the ranks of the German Freikorps had experiences that resembled those of young men of similar age and nonproletarian background elsewhere, even in countries that were neutral in the war (like Spain) or nominal victors (like Italy), but especially in the Central European shatter zones of empire. There, paramilitaries were forged by the same encounters with war, defeat, territorial loss, and revolutionary upheaval. Their bedrock mentality was similar. They were violent, ultra-nationalist, anti-Bolshevik, antisemitic, hypermasculine, and antifeminist.<sup>126</sup>

The postwar political turmoil caused another, more large-scale, and often desperate kind of border crossing. No previous conflict produced so many refugees. Ten million people left their country of origin at the end of the war. Sometimes these had become new countries in which people felt, and often were, unwelcome. Some citizens became stateless; revolution or civil war set others on the road to somewhere else. In the case of Germany, large numbers moved in both directions across the country's new borders. Baltic Germans who had been recently dispossessed went to Germany, like Russian Germans whose involuntary displacement had begun in 1914. Then there were Germans from the "lost territories" in the east and from Alsace-Lorraine, 1.3 million in total. One-fifth of all the ethnic Germans living in territory ceded to other powers migrated to Germany. But it was not just Germans who poured into Germany. So did as many as 100,000 Jews, escaping pogroms in Ukraine and Galicia, on the borderlands of the collapsed tsarist and Habsburg empires. Some 40,000 of these *Ostjuden* (Eastern Jews) traveled on to the Netherlands, the United States, or Palestine. The majority settled in Germany, especially Berlin, where their precarious existence was brilliantly described by another Galician-born Jew, the journalist and writer Joseph Roth.<sup>127</sup> Berlin was also the preferred destination for another group from eastern Europe, Russians fleeing from revolution and civil war. Half a million of them went to Germany. In Berlin they settled in Charlottenburg (which was nicknamed Charlottengrad) and in Schöneberg (St. Petersburg on the Wittenbergplatz).<sup>128</sup> Large numbers of Russians moved simultaneously in the opposite direction, former POWs in Germany (approaching two million, all told) who returned home in stages, the last leaving in 1921. More than 100,000 "enemy aliens" who had been interned also left Germany—Britons, other Europeans, Australians, and

New Zealanders.<sup>129</sup> So did large numbers of Poles, among them longtime residents. They moved east into the newly established Polish state while Germans moved west out of the "lost territories," a relatively peaceful exchange of populations, certainly by comparison with the fate of Greeks and Turks in the same years.

Ethel Cooper, the Australian diarist, spoke in 1916 with a Leipzig chimney sweep who assured her bitterly that when the war was over, everyone who wasn't dead would emigrate.<sup>130</sup> Germans did, in fact, emigrate after 1918, but the numbers were smaller than expected and most emigrants had left by 1924. The most unconventional group of them consisted of the 150 Communists who went to the Soviet Union in 1920 to become pioneers in an "Eastern Settlement," helping to build socialism. They belonged to an organization founded by a Leipzig Communist, Alfons Goldschmidt, who was confident that the example of "German work" would be welcomed in the new regime. But when the pioneers arrived in Kolomna, south of Moscow, their "factory in the forest" turned out to be decrepit and filled with hostile Russians. Living conditions were intolerable and most of the Germans returned home.<sup>131</sup>

Latin America was a more common destination for German emigrants, strongly favored by the Foreign Office and newly created Office of Migration, which encouraged emigrants to choose places of existing German settlement and thus "preserve Germandom abroad." A flurry of emigrants left after 1919, 140,000 people, almost equaling the numbers who had left for Latin America in the whole of the previous seventy years. But most went to major cities like São Paulo and Buenos Aires, not to rural "German" settlements. Their exodus was a blip, anyway. After the first postwar years, emigration from the Weimar Republic never approached nineteenth-century levels. The numbers not only lagged far behind emigration levels from Britain and Italy, they trailed those of Portugal and Poland.<sup>132</sup>

The year 1924 marked a change, in this as in so many other respects. It was when the Ruhr crisis ended, and the postwar cycle of attempted insurrections also came to an end. It was when hyperinflation gave way to economic stability, and the Dawes Plan rescheduled German reparations payments. It was when the architect of those policies, Gustav Stresemann, initiated the policy of cooperation with the western Allies that culminated in the Locarno Treaty of 1925. In one of those rare instances when cultural change moved to the same rhythm as political and socioeconomic change, it was also when the edgy, expressionist art, literature, and cinema of the



immediate postwar years was replaced by something more cool, so-called *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the "new sobriety." The years 1924–1929 are usually thought of as the golden years, between the crises of the early and late years of the Weimar Republic. Were they? And how did Germany recalibrate its relations with the wider world after the animosities and broken relations of the war and postwar years had receded?

The German economy was thoroughly deglobalized during the war and its immediate aftermath because of the Allied blockade and the seizure of German overseas assets. The country's prewar capital investments were reduced by more than 90 percent.<sup>133</sup> One positive aspect of the inflationary era, at least until the final hyperinflationary phase, was that German goods were much cheaper on world markets. That produced an export boom, which created full employment and allowed the government to finance its social programs. In the short run, at least, Germany could ride out the world economic crisis of 1920–21 better than its competitors. It is even possible that Germany's export-led boom helped to lift other countries out of the postwar slump.<sup>134</sup>

Longer-term efforts to restore Germany's global economic links had mixed results. In Latin America, for example, German trade grew through the 1920s and German firms were involved in construction and electrification projects, including a large-scale electrification program in Colombia. German banks also issued a loan that helped to finance this undertaking.<sup>135</sup> Everything was not rosy, however. Issuing loans to other countries caused the Foreign Office to worry that this would undermine German claims about its inability to pay reparations. But the larger problems were twofold: the "nationalizing" economic policies that took hold in Latin America and the growing regional dominance of the United States, which made it impossible to restore the prewar status quo. And this was before the world depression after 1929 wiped out three-quarters of German trade with the region.<sup>136</sup>

Latin America encapsulated Germany's problems, which were partly the problems faced by all the established European economies. The German share of world exports fell by almost a third between 1913 and the late 1920s, as global production and trade between non-European countries grew. The United States, Canada, and Japan were the big winners in the postwar economy. World trade also grew more sluggishly than it had in the heady prewar years because of uncertainties in the global financial system and the tariffs imposed almost everywhere. German economic output

finally returned to prewar levels by the late 1920s, but the economy faced two serious underlying problems, both of them connected in one way or another with the United States.

One was the process of "rationalization," which increased productivity but at the cost of unemployment. In the Ruhr, the mechanization of coal mining led to a drastic reduction in the number of miners, from 550,000 to 350,000.<sup>137</sup> This shakeout meant that jobless rates, so low in the early 1920s, rose steadily during the so-called golden years. Unemployment stood at nearly 3 million in the spring of 1929, six months before the Wall Street crash. Rationalization did not just cost jobs; it led to speeded-up work conditions, in mines, factories, and offices.<sup>138</sup> This process was closely associated with two Americans. One was Frederick Taylor, whose time-and-motion, "scientific management" approach to efficiency on the factory floor (known as Taylorism) provided the underlying philosophy of the rationalization movement. The other was Henry Ford, who gave his name to an "ism" in Germany, *Fordismus*. Germans bought 200,000 copies of Ford's *My Life and Work* in translation, and more than fifty books were written about him in the 1920s. Ford represented different things to different people, and arguments about Fordism were really arguments about how to use American economic models in Germany. Industrialists argued that American success was based on the fast pace of work, high productivity, and lack of protective labor legislation. Trade unionists and Social Democrats countered that it was advanced technology coupled with high wages and the resulting mass consumption which underlay American success. These were proxy debates for the fierce class struggles that animated Weimar politics.<sup>139</sup>

Excessive dependence on foreign capital was the other economic problem that lurked beneath the German economic recovery. This was an American question, too, because the United States was Germany's major creditor. Germany borrowed 28 billion marks between 1924 and 1930. About two-thirds was invested, the rest went to reparation payments.<sup>140</sup> These created a perfect triangular system: the United States lent the Germans money, which they sent as reparations to the British and French, who used it to repay their huge war debts to America. German dependence on foreign capital was partly a result of the inflation, which first wiped out domestic savings that might have been invested at home, then caused flights of capital by nervous would-be investors worried about another inflation. So Germany came to depend on foreign capital—which was forthcoming, but

at relatively high rates of interest, and left the country exposed when short-term loans were called home in 1929.

Despite the loss of Saarland and Upper Silesian coalfields, the "heavy metal" branches of coal-iron-steel remained a formidable part of the German economy. This was still the "century of steel," as a French minister remarked during the Ruhr occupation.<sup>141</sup> That was why France took the Ruhr so seriously—can one imagine the occupation of a region that produced shirts or typewriters? Heavy industry represented the sinews of war in a future conflict as well as the hard currency of reparations. German heavy industrialists formed notorious combines and cartels. But so did companies in chemicals, optics, and electrics, the industries that had made Germany a global economic heavyweight. The chemical combine IG-Farben was the classic instance. Both old and new branches faced more difficult conditions than before the war, but the problems facing the agricultural sector were still greater. Like primary producers everywhere, estates owners and peasant farmers alike faced low commodity prices with less tariff protection than they had previously enjoyed. That would have political repercussions.

What captured the imagination of contemporaries was the economy of mass consumption. We are talking here about dance halls and bars, phonographs, the cinema and radio, fashionable clothes and makeup, and sports of every kind, together with new magazines devoted to these activities. The 1930 film *Menschen am Sonntag* (*People on Sunday*) portrays this world, which is above all the world of young people, with affection but also a satirical edge. Directed by Robert Siodmak and Edgar G. Ulmer, with a screenplay by the young Billy Wilder and camerawork by Fred Zinnemann, all of them later successful in Hollywood, the film follows a group of young people as they argue and flirt, go on an outing, and enjoy themselves by the lake at the weekend before work begins again on Monday morning. The amateur actors who play themselves have characteristically "modern" occupations—record seller, taxi driver, fashion model, film extra, wine salesman. Annie has pictures of film actors on the wall, Erwin pictures of actresses, and they quarrel over whether Annie should wear the brim of her hat up or down. Debonair Wolfgang takes Christl to eat ice cream at the beginning of the film, when they meet after her date fails to turn up. Later, Wolfgang and Erwin drink beer and talk about going to a soccer game. As the couples relax by the lake they listen to a portable phonograph.<sup>142</sup>

This culture had prewar origins but came into its own in the postwar years. City dwellers reportedly rushed past gunfire and barricades even

during the Spartacist Uprising to reach cinemas and dance halls.<sup>143</sup> Tennis clubs, dance music, and fashionably dressed girls turn up in the memoirs of young men who grew up in the 1920s and later achieved fame as émigrés, like the historians Peter Gay and Sebastian Haffner.<sup>144</sup> The culture of entertainment, which came in upper-middle-class and lower-middle-class versions, attracted the attention of some of Weimar Germany's sharpest social observers. Siegfried Kracauer pinned down one version in his article "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies," a trenchant account of how capitalist mass culture offered an emptied-out, escapist experience.<sup>145</sup> Joseph Roth ranged widely over upper- and lower-class pleasure haunts in journalistic pieces devoted to a movie theater, amusement parks, Berlin's six-day cycle race, and drinking joints where he managed "to take malicious pleasure at the phenomenon of so much industrialized merriment."<sup>146</sup> In another piece he muses on the imminent arrival of the skyscraper in Germany, adding a typically barbed tailpiece: "Oh—and already you hear that the first skyscraper in Berlin is to have a great entertainment palace, with cinemas, dance hall, bar, Negro bands, vaudeville, jazz."<sup>147</sup> Roth was alluding to new dances like the shimmy and Charleston that took German cities by storm, and to the jazz bands that played them, including the Chocolate Kiddies (with young Duke Ellington) and the great saxophonist Sidney Bechet.<sup>148</sup>



The Tiller Girls on the stage of a Berlin vaudeville theater in 1926. Popular with audiences, they interested critics like Siegfried Kracauer as an example of "assembly-line" entertainment.

Germans referred to *die verrückten Zwanziger Jahre*, their version of the Roaring Twenties. Movies, skyscrapers, cocktails, and jazz were all shorthand for "American." The supposed "Americanization" of society was something Germans argued about vigorously in the Weimar Republic. There was undeniably a growing U.S. influence on patterns of getting and spending. It could be seen on the silver screen, where over 40 percent of films shown in Germany by the mid-1920s were made in Hollywood. The Ford Motor Company opened a factory in Cologne. Coca-Cola opened a bottling plant. And when, in its campaign to make "modern" Europeans as clean shaven as their American counterparts, the Boston razor blade company Gillette encountered its chief competition in Germany, it responded by buying a controlling interest in the local company.<sup>149</sup> Coca-Cola and Gillette were two U.S. brands whose advertising in Germany was handled, after January 1927, by the newly opened Berlin office of American advertising behemoth J. Walter Thompson, whose other clients included Kodak, Kellogg's cereals, and Wrigley chewing gum.<sup>150</sup> Even the modern office, like JWT's in Berlin, smacked of America, with its typing pool and messages zooming around in pneumatic tubes. The office and the white-collar workers in it also attracted the attention of critical social observers (including, once again, Kracauer).<sup>151</sup> Then there were those retail emporiums, the department store and chain store. The department store reached Germany before the war. Conservatives criticized it as a "Jewish" institution that supposedly harmed the small shopkeeper, engaged in sharp business practices, and encouraged kleptomania, charges first leveled in the 1880s and repeated almost unchanged into the 1920s.<sup>152</sup> The chain store (the "five-and-dime") did not arrive in Germany until 1927, when the first branch of Woolworth's opened its doors in Bremen. Twenty-three more branches followed in 1928. It was, ironically, the often reviled department stores like Tietz and Karstadt that responded to this American retail "invasion" by establishing German chain stores to compete with Woolworth's.<sup>153</sup>

The turnover of department and chain stores was much lower in Germany than in the United States or Britain. But the arguments about them were highly charged because they raised questions about identity and the future of society, not just what one bought and where one bought it. Like debates over cinemas and dance halls, they exposed generational fault lines. They were also closely tied up with questions of gender. Department stores had been criticized even before the war for their largely female sales staffs and for the unfettered purchase of "luxury" goods by the well-off women

who shopped there. In, the 1920s, a distinct type of female consumer emerged—the "modern girl" (the English term was used interchangeably with the *neue Frau*, or "new woman"). Like her counterparts in other countries, the flapper (U.S.), *garçonne* (France), *modan garu* (Japan), and *modeng xiaojie* (China), the modern girl in Germany used lipstick, nail polish, face cream, fancy soaps, and deodorant; she smoked cigarettes, wore high heels, and favored cloche hats. She was chic, cosmopolitan, sexually adventurous, and nobody's fool.<sup>154</sup> This was not a version of womanhood that went down well among conservative Germans. In fact, many German men were concerned about the "feminization" of German society and the accompanying erosion of "manly" virtues. The critique of "Americanization" was often a proxy for "feminization" in this negative sense.

The scrambling of gender identities is something we associate with "Weimar culture." When the actresses Carola Neher and Marlene Dietrich laced up their gloves and joined the novelist Vicki Baum in Sabri Mahir's Studio for Boxing and Physical Culture on the Kurfürstendamm, they were self-consciously rejecting the image of pliant femininity and proclaiming their own muscularity and power.<sup>155</sup> In Dietrich's case, this androgynous look was very different from the persona of the stocking-clad cabaret siren Lola Lola she would play in the film *The Blue Angel* (1930), the iconic embodiment of "dangerous" female sexuality.<sup>156</sup> Dietrich herself was bisexual. An openness and willingness to experiment with living out different kinds of sexual identity was another characteristic associated with Weimar culture, above all with Berlin. In the 1920s it was "heaven on earth in the German metropolis," recalled Charlotte Wolff, an enthusiastic participant in the lesbian scene. The city had numerous bars and private clubs for gay women, ranging socially from the tony Club Montbijou West (by invitation only from one of its members) to loud, sometimes violent lower-class haunts like Taverne. Newspapers like *Die Freundin*, which featured nudes on the cover, were readily available at news kiosks. Small wonder that a letter from Brooklyn published in *Die Freundin* lamented the relative lack of freedom enjoyed by American lesbians, even in New York City, and proclaimed that "America is fifty years behind Germany."<sup>157</sup> Berlin became the "international center of female homosexuality" in the 1920s.<sup>158</sup>

Male homosexuality, too. Not every gay visitor was enchanted, it is true. Brian Howard, a former Oxford dandy and the probable model for Anthony Blanche in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, found Berlin "unbearably ugly and quite quite awful"; the American composer Paul Bowles thought



the city "the least amusing place I have ever seen."<sup>159</sup> But that was a minority view (and even Howard made an exception for the music and the embroideries in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum).<sup>160</sup> Probably the best-known foreign enthusiasts were the young English writers W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, the latter because in his *Berlin Stories* and in the character Sally Bowles, part femme fatale, part camp figure, he gave us a lasting picture of a time and place. (A case can be made that, for English speakers, Isherwood "invented" Weimar Berlin, the modern Babylon, rather as Charles Dickens "invented" Victorian London.) Auden and "Herr Issywoo" introduced many English friends such as the poet Stephen Spender to gay Berlin. Others from Oxford and Cambridge also found their way there, including several who moved in the circle around the Oxford classicist Maurice Bowra, the leader of what the writer Jocelyn Brooke dubbed the Homintern.<sup>161</sup>

They were drawn by the hundreds of gay locales and the much greater ease of finding sexual partners than at home. It was the same with young American homosexuals, like the painter Marsden Hartley and the architect Philip Johnson. The American lesbian writer Djuna Barnes found Berlin "full of buggers from America who bought boys cheap," and that was no doubt part of the appeal.<sup>162</sup> Following Auden's example, Isherwood carefully recorded his sexual partners, most of them at least occasional prostitutes, a disconcerting parade of Bertholds, Ottos, Heinzes, Piepses, Frantzes, and so on. But Berlin offered more than rent boys: it could be key to accepting one's real identity. Isherwood later said the city had been a revelation because there he was "brought face to face with his tribe," something he had previously denied.<sup>163</sup> He also said that if he had been asked the purpose of his visit when returning to Berlin in 1929, he could have truthfully replied: "I'm looking for my homeland and I've come to find out if this is it."<sup>164</sup> Auden, meanwhile, came out while there, breaking off his engagement with a young woman in England. There is something else. Auden's German was not especially good, but he did learn the word *schwul*. Originally derived from Berlin dialect, the word, still used today, was in circulation in Germany for decades before the equivalent English term, "gay," came into use. Auden was forced to refer to himself in English with the only words available, all of which (like "queer" and "pansy") carried pejorative connotations.<sup>165</sup> But in Germany he could be *schwul*.

Berlin had more than two million visitors a year by 1930. It was exciting and a cheap place to live. Practicing or aspiring writers and artists were not the only ones drawn by the explosion of creative talent and formal

experimentation in virtually every branch of the arts. Often the innovation came precisely from mixing and recombining cultural forms. Alfred Döblin's pyrotechnic novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) derives its extraordinary energy from juxtaposing the story of Franz Biberkopf with popular songs, sound effects, lists of advertisements, and reports of events like the Tunney-Dempsey fight in 1928. The novel's jump cuts and syncopated rhythm, borrowed from contemporary cinema and jazz, mimic the street life of the era even as carefully placed episodes from the Book of Job and Greek tragedy offer moral commentary on the action.<sup>166</sup> The novel, in turn, quickly became a radio play, then a film.<sup>167</sup>

Or consider Bertolt Brecht, a poet and dramatist whose sharp political dialogues borrowed from popular culture and cabaret, who used American settings, wrote screenplays, and employed the novel medium of the radio for a new kind of didactic radio play, the *Lehrstück* (the first, in 1929, was called *Lindbergh's Flight*). He also subverted an established form of musical drama in the internationally successful *Threepenny Opera* (1928), for which Kurt Weill wrote the jazz-inflected music. Weill was preceded by Ernst Krenek's jazz opera *Jonny spielt auf* ("Jonny Strikes Up"), based on a seductive African-American character, a figure found in cabaret and popular songs going back to Friedrich Hollaender's 1920 hit song "Jonny."<sup>168</sup> Weimar high culture plundered popular forms. Jazz was a prominent example. German critics wrote again and again about "jazz as deliverance" or "jazz as point of departure."<sup>169</sup> The poet Yvan Goll argued for Black jazz as a rejuvenating force, ending with the provocative question: "Do the Negroes need us? Or are we not sooner in need of them?"<sup>170</sup>

Goll was born in Lorraine—as he put it, a Jew by fate, French by accident of birth, labeled German by an official stamp. He lived in Paris but frequently visited Berlin, where he had a lover and artistic collaborators. It sometimes seems as if everyone ended up in Berlin. Brecht, born in the Bavarian provincial town of Augsburg, moved first to Munich, then to Berlin. That was fairly typical. Weimar Berlin became the preeminent cultural gathering place, even more than before the war because conservative Munich was now less welcoming. Berlin was home to Germans and Austrians from the provinces, including some (like Joseph Roth and the playwright Carl Zuckmayer) who thought the city cold, even hateful, but found it impossible to leave. It also attracted Poles, Czechs, Scandinavians, and Turks, as well as hundreds of Indian students and intellectuals who turned the area around Kantstrasse into "Little Asia."<sup>171</sup> Charlottenburg was also

where Russian émigrés settled. Conservatives fleeing revolution came first, Vladimir Nabokov among them; they were followed in the years 1921–22 by writers and artists who had initially supported the revolution. Berlin was the intellectual center of the Russian diaspora in the 1920s, with forty Russian publishing houses, cafés, bookstores, newspapers, and magazines. It was home to Marc Chagall, Marina Tsvetayeva, and Boris Pasternak.<sup>172</sup>

If there is a single word that summons up how people thought about Berlin in the 1920s, its sights and sounds, sexual openness, cultural experimentation, and sheer energy, it is “modernity.” Foreigners remarked on this all the time. Emily Pollard, a young American and the niece of the governor of Virginia, was impressed from the moment she stepped off the plane at Tempelhof Airport: “Germany is very ahead of us in its adoption of the modern,” she wrote in her diary. The French writer Roger Martin du Gard thought that “the new man, the man of the future” was being created there.<sup>173</sup> One of the greatest achievements of Weimar Berlin was gaining acceptance for the idea that it was the incarnation of the modern.<sup>174</sup> The city has come to be seen as the temporary resting place of the baton of modernity, as it passed from Paris in the nineteenth century to New York City in the 1940s.

There was another iconic site of modernity in Weimar Germany. The Bauhaus began life in the town of Weimar, moved to Dessau in 1925, and ended its short but brilliant career in Berlin. Its tubular steel chairs, designed by Marcel Breuer, are as emblematic of Weimar culture as Marlene Dietrich’s stocking legs in *The Blue Angel* or the song “Mack the Knife” from *The Threepenny Opera*. The Bauhaus brought art and design together under one roof (a flat roof, of course), combining fine arts, crafts, and technology, and subordinating ornament to function—or, better, insisting that form follow function, so that everything from teapots to typography could dispense with unnecessary curlicues. The Belgian Henry van de Velde had run the prewar forerunner of the Bauhaus, and the 1919 version was self-consciously international in personnel and ideas. Among the Bauhaus teachers were Paul Klee and Johannes Itten (Swiss), Wassily Kandinsky (Russian), László Moholy-Nagy (Hungarian), and Lyonel Feininger (German-American). Guest lecturers included a Czech artist and a Dutch designer. The Russian constructivist El Lissitzky was a visitor. Russia was an important point of reference from the start. There were many parallels between the Bauhaus and the Vkhutemas, the Moscow art and technical school established in 1920. They shared underlying prin-

ciples, were torn by many of the same internal debates, and engaged in exchanges of various kinds.

Cultural exchanges were a problem for Weimar Germany. The country was deglobalized culturally as well as economically by the war. That was especially true in the early postwar years. Germany was not only prevented from joining the League of Nations, but banned from cultural and academic gatherings, sports, and even the Rotary Club—when the organization expanded into Europe, the French insisted on the Germans being excluded.<sup>175</sup> Germans and Austrians were barred when the International Research Council (for the natural sciences) and the International Academic Union (for the humanities) were founded in 1919. Germans were unwelcome at academic conferences, and German was no longer a recognized language at those gatherings.<sup>176</sup> French and Belgian scholars proved especially unforgiving. In the field of history, some of the great figures condemned the wholesale rejection of German scholarship. Marc Bloch called the chauvinism of Alsatian historian Jacques Flach “vulgar and absurd”; the Belgian Henri Pirenne warned of a “fashionable crusade” against German scholarship. But run-of-the-mill historians argued that instead of “learning from the Germans” it was now time to “unlearn.”<sup>177</sup> There was also a backlash in Britain, especially against those who had signed the wartime declaration in defense of German culture. Ernst Troeltsch had been sought after as a lecturer before the war, but invitations from Oxford and Cambridge in the early 1920s were withdrawn because of vocal opposition.<sup>178</sup> German scholars made things worse by retreating into petulant self-pity, failing to recognize their own wartime chauvinism or why there was so much postwar bitterness.

In the early years of the Weimar Republic, there were efforts to end the isolation by cultural bureaucrats of a new kind who recognized the importance of soft power and saw culture was a means of restoring Germany’s standing in the world. Johannes Sievers is an example of the type, a trained art historian before he joined the Prussian Ministry of Education. One of his successes was making it possible for German artists to be shown at the Venice Biennale in 1922. But there were limits to what could be achieved. Even in the mid-1920s the French rejected German arts and crafts. At an international exhibition in Paris of the decorative and industrial arts in 1925, the Bauhaus went unrepresented and even the pavilion of the Swiss Le Corbusier was attacked for representing the “*style boche*.”<sup>179</sup> Music was an easier sell. By the early 1920s the Berlin Philharmonic had already returned

to play in Paris as well as London, although in France—as in the United States—there were still reservations about the German repertoire. Some French critics, taking their cue from Debussy, made the case against German music on aesthetic grounds. The arguments resembled those of French historians: German music was “heavy” and pompous, at odds with the Gallic spirit, and therefore to be rejected as a model. This was the exact mirror image of the long-standing German view that their own music was “deep” and French music was superficial.

Weimar cultural diplomacy had successes to its name. Lecture tours by Albert Einstein successfully presented the “other” Germany, untainted by militarism. The Foreign Office worked behind the scenes to cultivate good relations with wartime neutrals, such as Spain. Some familiar instruments of cultural diplomacy date from the mid-1920s, like the German Academic Exchange Service and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which arranged exchanges of students and scholars. But there was a built-in conflict inside the cultural department of the German Foreign Office between fostering this kind of cultural outreach and supporting Germans abroad, the *Auslandsdeutsche*. Much of the budget ultimately went to support Germans abroad through subsidies to German libraries and schools. In Poland and Czechoslovakia, the support was clandestine.<sup>180</sup>

Many cultural exchanges resulted from individual contacts. A spectacular example of what individuals could achieve, with the right networks, was a German-Indian artistic exchange in 1922–23. It sent 175 pieces of Bauhaus art to Calcutta, while 113 artworks by Bengal modernists were shown in Berlin.<sup>181</sup> The idea for the exchange began with a young Moravian-born expert on Indian art, Stella Kramrisch, who believed that German and Indian artistic modernisms had many common features. She first pitched the idea of a Bauhaus exhibition in Calcutta to the Bengal intellectual Rabindranath Tagore, whom she met in England. The project also needed someone at the Bauhaus who could make it happen. That person was Johannes Itten, who was teaching at the University of Vienna when Kramrisch wrote her dissertation there, and had since joined the Bauhaus. A Zoroastrian with eastern spiritual leanings, Itten was a perfect partner for Kramrisch. The central figure in organizing the exhibition of Indian artworks that traveled in the opposite direction was Benoy Kumar Sarkar. An anticolonial intellectual and art historian in Calcutta, Sarkar had married an Austrian woman and moved to Berlin in 1921. He gained the support of Carl Heinrich Becker, who was Prussian minister of culture in the

early 1920s and one of the intellectual architects of German cultural diplomacy. Becker then recommended the idea to the director of the National Museum. The two exhibitions inaugurated a decade-long artistic exchange between Germany and Bengal.

Mending the broken links with the western Allies was harder. The Foreign Office worked on this through the League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.<sup>182</sup> Cultural relations with France improved after Germany signed the Treaty of Locarno, the key to Stresemann's policy of getting on the right side of the Allies by accepting the western border in the hope of gaining support for eventual revisions of the eastern border. The “spirit of Locarno” brought change, but not all German diplomats were persuaded that cultural diplomacy was important. Nongovernmental organizations were bolder. The pacifist German League for Human Rights organized a one-day conference in the Reichstag in June 1922, with participation by its French sister organization. It also held events to foster understanding on both sides of the French-German border. French speakers regularly lectured in Germany, and vice versa, braving hecklers. The leading figures in the league were the usual suspects—Harry Kessler, the ultimate cultured cosmopolitan, the veteran pacifist Ludwig Quidde, and that perpetual thorn in the side of militarists everywhere, Albert Einstein. The league successfully promoted school exchanges and supported initiatives like the one dreamed up by the Catholic pacifist Marc Sangnier in France to hold a “Locarno of youth.”<sup>183</sup> Richard Schirmann, the founder of the German Youth Hostel Association, sought to build “bridges for peace” through the International Youth Hoteling Association.<sup>184</sup> These efforts all inclined politically to the center-left.

Culture bore a different kind of internationalist stamp on the far left. German agitprop groups like the Red Rockets and Red Megaphone, which performed in streets, factories, and workers' clubs, took their inspiration from the Soviet model.<sup>185</sup> In the 1920s, Berlin also became a hub for anticolonial intellectuals who were drawn to the capital of a no longer colonial power. The young Jawaharlal Nehru commented on the strategic importance of Berlin, where Indian nationalists mingled with their Chinese, Indonesian, and North African counterparts. Their writings and lectures at discussion evenings lent a truly global quality to cultural debates on the Communist and fellow-traveling left. The culture of the left was also modern in form. A new kind of travel journalism reported in nonpatronizing ways on non-European worlds. Arthur Koestler and



Egon Erwin Kisch were two stars of this genre; another, still making her name, was the American Agnes Smedley, who lived in Berlin in the 1920s with an Indian Communist. Photography was another key medium of communication. Willi Münzenberg, an indefatigable Communist organizer, founded a photo magazine in 1921 called *Soviet Russia in Pictures*. It became a huge success when renamed the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, or *AIZ* (Workers' Illustrated Paper), and sold 500,000 copies a week by 1930, making it the second-best-selling magazine in Germany. *AIZ* gave visual form to the class struggle at home and the anticolonial struggle abroad. "Red Orientalism" found cinematic expression, too, as German Communist film production units created works like *The Struggle for the Earth* and *Gandhi*.<sup>186</sup>

Urban, self-consciously modern, experimental, internationalist, left-leaning—these are the terms we associate with "Weimar culture," and rightly so. But if we look beyond "Weimar culture" to Weimar cultures, plural, then it is a very different story. The huge, pompous memorial to the Battle of Tannenberg dedicated in 1927 was also a product of Weimar culture. It represented the culture of militarism that still flourished in the republic, fed by postwar resentment. The hero of Tannenberg, Paul von Hindenburg, already almost eighty years old, spoke at the dedication in typically nationalist vein.<sup>187</sup> In German cities, monuments went up to commemorate the country's lost colonies. Publishers released a stream of memoirs, novels, and adventure stories about the colonies, which retained a powerful place in the German imagination. Hans Grimm's colonial novel, *People Without Space*, became a bestseller that fed German self-pity and coined a slogan with ominous undertones.<sup>188</sup> Germany's university towns like Marburg and Göttingen were as deeply conservative then as they are left-leaning now. Professors defended "traditional German culture" out of mandarin disdain for both mass culture and modernist experimentation, while students favored the nationalist right. Fear and loathing of the left was common to both.<sup>189</sup> Even the town that gave its name to the republic and initially housed the Bauhaus became a bastion of culturally conservative antirepublican sentiment. Weimar expelled the Bauhaus in 1924, after the right won a majority in Thuringia. Goethe was harnessed to the nationalist cause, just as Nuremberg harnessed Albrecht Dürer.<sup>190</sup>

The energy and visibility of the "modern" invited a backlash, especially in matters that touched on morality or national identity. Religious morality campaigners redoubled their efforts to stamp out "smut and filth" in the

new republic, their efforts rewarded with a 1926 law designed to protect young people from "immorality." In the countryside, where cinema and radio barely penetrated, local cultural activities often remained in clerical hands and the preferred reading was sentimental *Heimat* literature. Rural Germany retained a rooted dislike of the "decadent" big city, a hostility reinforced by the conservative press. Culture was unmistakably politicized in the last years of the Weimar Republic, after the Wall Street crash of October 1929 triggered a global depression that hit Germany especially hard. How could culture not be affected by a crisis of such magnitude, and how could the political response not be mediated in part through culture? Two films released in 1930 indicate what polarization meant. *The Flute Concert of Sans-Souci*, one of the first "talkies" seen by many Germans, was a conservative celebration of Frederick the Great with an anti-French message. *All Quiet on the Western Front* was the Hollywood version of Erich Maria Remarque's antiwar novel. Its Berlin premiere was interrupted by violent demonstrations from Nazi storm troopers, causing the film to be banned after just a week.<sup>191</sup>

"Whenever I hear the word culture, I release the safety catch of my Browning." This line, often misquoted as "reach for my gun" and attributed to Hermann Göring or Joseph Goebbels, comes in fact from *Schlageter*, a play by Nazi playwright Hanns Johst about a Freikorps soldier executed by the French. The sneering brutality is what we expect from the Nazis, a denunciation of everything associated with Weimar culture. It is not wrong to regard the National Socialists as the party of negation, starting with their rejection of the revolution and the republic to which it gave birth. Anything that was, or seemed to be, international, or cosmopolitan, or "un-German," they rejected. They rejected the Treaty of Versailles, rejected Stresemann's Locarno Treaty and the "spirit of Locarno," rejected the Dawes Plan and its successor, the Young Plan, both drawn up by American bankers, rejected the presence of *Ostjuden*, rejected "Jewish" department stores, rejected modernist art and architecture as foreign and alien, rejected modernist literature and theater for the same reason, rejected jazz as American "mongrel" music, rejected homosexuality and contraception, rejected long-haired men and short-haired women, rejected pacifism, and rejected socialism and communism because they rejected class struggle as an un-German outcrop of "Judeo-Bolshevik" Marxism.

These views had broad appeal among the Germans who propelled the Nazi Party from a mere 2.6 percent of the vote in the 1928 elections to 37.3

percent in July 1932, as the number of seats it held in the Reichstag rose from 12 to 230, making it the largest single party. This remained well short of a majority, but was still an impressive tally in a multiparty system that featured not only six other major parties, but another eight or nine smaller ones. Nazi voters came from every class and region, but not in equal numbers. It is often said that the party owed its success to propaganda, but that hardly explains why its message was so much more successful with some parts of the population than others. The party did poorly at the polls with Catholics and workers. German Catholics mostly stayed with the Center Party; many workers moved from the Social Democrats over to the Communists but the total vote for the two left-wing parties remained the same. It was the conservative and liberal parties that shed votes in large numbers, and the small single-interest protest parties whose supporters deserted them for the National Socialists. To put it another way, the Nazis did exceptionally well among non-working-class Protestants.

National Socialism played adroitly on a host of fears and resentments among these groups. For teachers and for the "little man" who had risen into the white-collar ranks, that meant the threat or reality of unemployment and the accompanying humiliation, for business owners the power of labor and Weimar's generous social welfare, for doctors the expansion of the state insurance system and the problems of an "overcrowded" profession, for shopkeepers the competition of "Jewish" department stores and socialist consumer cooperatives. In the countryside where they did best of all, the Nazis exploited new problems and old hatreds. Mass unemployment meant a collapse in demand for the grain and milk that peasant farmers produced; it also led to raiding parties of urban workers who stripped the crops from the fields. The Nazis blamed the peasant's dilemma on the world economic crisis, and they blamed the world economic crisis on "Jewish finance" on Wall Street. At the same time, there were political rallying cries that resonated with all these groups. The Nazis relentlessly denounced the Versailles Treaty, called for a return to "traditional morality," and attacked the left. They also appealed for "law and order," which may seem counterintuitive, given the notoriously violent storm troopers of the SA (*Sturmabteilung*). But their violence was selective, directed against those perceived by Nazi voters as a threat, especially Communists. Photographs show well-dressed bourgeois looking on indulgently as thugs in Brownshirt uniforms march past.

How did the Nazis come out on top against conventional parties on the

right, which shared many of the same goals and policies? The answer takes us back to propaganda. The Nazis generated a much greater sense of dynamism with their parades and rallies. Before the 1930 election, the party held thirty-four thousand meetings in just six months. Their motorized columns of cars, motorbikes, and trucks with loudspeakers had a powerful impact in rural areas. An activist in Württemberg described how in small towns and villages "the people, who had never seen a *Motorsturm*, were wide-eyed."<sup>192</sup> Dramatizing politics like this was the Nazi version of agitprop. It underscored the party's contention that it was not part of "the system," unlike the conservatives. But something else was at work, too, and it concerned substance as well as style. When the Depression hit rural Germany, traditional conservatives were quick to help themselves, through the assistance to large estates called Eastern Aid, while talking about a common rural front. But the strategy, successful in the past, failed to work this time. Peasant farmers voted for Hitler. Conservative elites, who had practiced the politics of demagoguery in rural Germany for decades, were out-demagogued by a populist party that had perfected the art.

Many elements combined to bring the National Socialists into power. The Depression polarized politics and narrowed the room for maneuver in the Reichstag. With the Communists and the Nazis increasing their vote and unwilling to take part in government, the parliamentary arithmetic pointed to only one possibility—a succession of chancellors who, after March 1930, resorted to rule by emergency decree, without a reliable parliamentary majority. This undermined the legitimacy of Weimar democracy and lent plausibility to Nazi claims about a dysfunctional system. The parties of the left bear some responsibility for bringing Hitler to power. Communist hostility to the republic, and their willingness even to accept support from a Nazi organization during the Berlin transport strike in 1932, followed from their view that the Depression signaled the death throes of capitalism and would bring about a Communist Germany. Hence their disastrous policy that the Social Democrats were the real enemy. The SPD, for its part, was too wedded to a wait-and-see policy, too slow to appreciate the threat. The two parties, divided by ideology and memories of the postwar revolution, were further divided by the Depression. The Social Democrats were the party of older workers more likely to be employed, the Communists of younger workers who were mostly unemployed (a remarkable 85 percent of party members by 1932). One minor tragedy of the late Weimar Republic was the sight of unemployed Communists attacking

Social Democratic welfare clerks as mass unemployment undermined the social security system.

Without question, the right bore much greater direct responsibility for bringing down democracy. Conservatives undermined the republic by their constant criticism and made the Nazis look respectable because they advocated so many of the same policies. Landowning Junkers, army officers, Protestant church and business leaders—all came to believe that their goals and the Nazis' goals overlapped, even if they were not identical. Locally, prominent community figures also lent Hitler respectability. When a village mayor or someone of similar standing backed the Nazi Party, a veterinarian or auctioneer here, a forestry official or estate manager there, others followed. In university towns, the party made inroads among professors and other members of the educated in their social clubs. The Nazis benefited from presenting themselves as outsiders untainted by the system, but they also benefited from insider support.

On the national stage it was the elites that helped Hitler into power. After the failed Beer Hall putsch, he avoided any attempt to seize power by force. Violence remained a weapon to be used on the streets, not against the state. Hitler's opportunity came in 1933. Germany had three chancellors who ruled by decree between March 1930 and January 1933. By the time General Kurt von Schleicher, the last of this trio, took office in December 1932 the Nazi Party had lost some momentum. Its share of the vote and number of Reichstag seats had fallen in elections the previous month, although it remained the largest party. Then, on January 30, President Hindenburg offered the chancellorship to Hitler, who accepted and became the fifteenth and final chancellor of the republic. The former field marshal was a perfect embodiment of the German elites who helped Hitler into power, hoping that he could be tamed and made to do their bidding.

Required Reading Ends Here

### *National Socialism*

NATIONAL SOCIALISTS PROCLAIMED THAT THEY WERE PURSUING the only legitimate kind of revolution, a "national revolution." Germany withdrew from the League of Nations. Nazi leaders repeatedly denounced internationalism, emphasizing again and again the centrality of the German *Volk* and the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the "people's community." The regime promoted pseudo-Germanic cults, trumpeted the virtue of "authentically German" culture over "degenerate art," and denounced "cosmopolitan"

values. And yet: the regime was influenced by ideas and political movements beyond Germany, just as it exerted influence on others. Even the term "National Socialism" was invented by a Frenchman, the nationalist Maurice Barrès.<sup>193</sup> National Socialism can be compared (and has been compared) to other regimes of the 1930s, on both right and left. That is what I want to explore here, looking mainly at the regime and its domestic policies in the years before World War Two.

Where better to start than with the self-styled Führer? Hitler was like the brooding central figure of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz," says Marlow, the narrator of that novella.<sup>194</sup> All Europe contributed to the making of the German dictator. He likened himself and was likened by others to Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini. The Beer Hall putsch of 1923 was Hitler's attempt to imitate Mussolini's March on Rome a year earlier. Hitler admired Kemal Atatürk as a ruthless, antireligious leader who had restored Turkish fortunes.<sup>195</sup> In writing *Mein Kampf*, Hitler borrowed ideas, vocabulary, and whole passages from *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, a violently antisemitic work by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the British-born writer who became Richard Wagner's son-in-law.<sup>196</sup> Hitler also absorbed the message of the notorious antisemitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which circulated widely in Germany through right-wing Russian émigrés.<sup>197</sup> But it was not just "all Europe" that contributed to the making of Hitler. He admired Chiang Kai-shek, as he did Atatürk, for promoting a strong state. He also admired Henry Ford, a large picture of whom adorned the wall of his study. Hitler told a journalist who asked about it: "I regard Ford as my inspiration." He owned a German translation of Ford's book *The International Jew*, which argued that Germany was, with the possible exception of the United States, "the most Jew-controlled country in the world."<sup>198</sup> Hitler admired the work of another American, too: Madison Grant, eugenicist author of *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), which lauded the historical achievements of a "Nordic" race now under threat. Hitler read the book in the German translation of 1925, wrote the author a fan letter, and described the book as "my Bible."<sup>199</sup>

National Socialism as a movement, for all its hypernationalist qualities, also had many non-German genealogies and affinities. So how does it fit into the political landscape of the time? A first way of thinking about that is to draw two lines. One is a straight line, with communism on the left and National Socialism on the right. That puts German fascism with other



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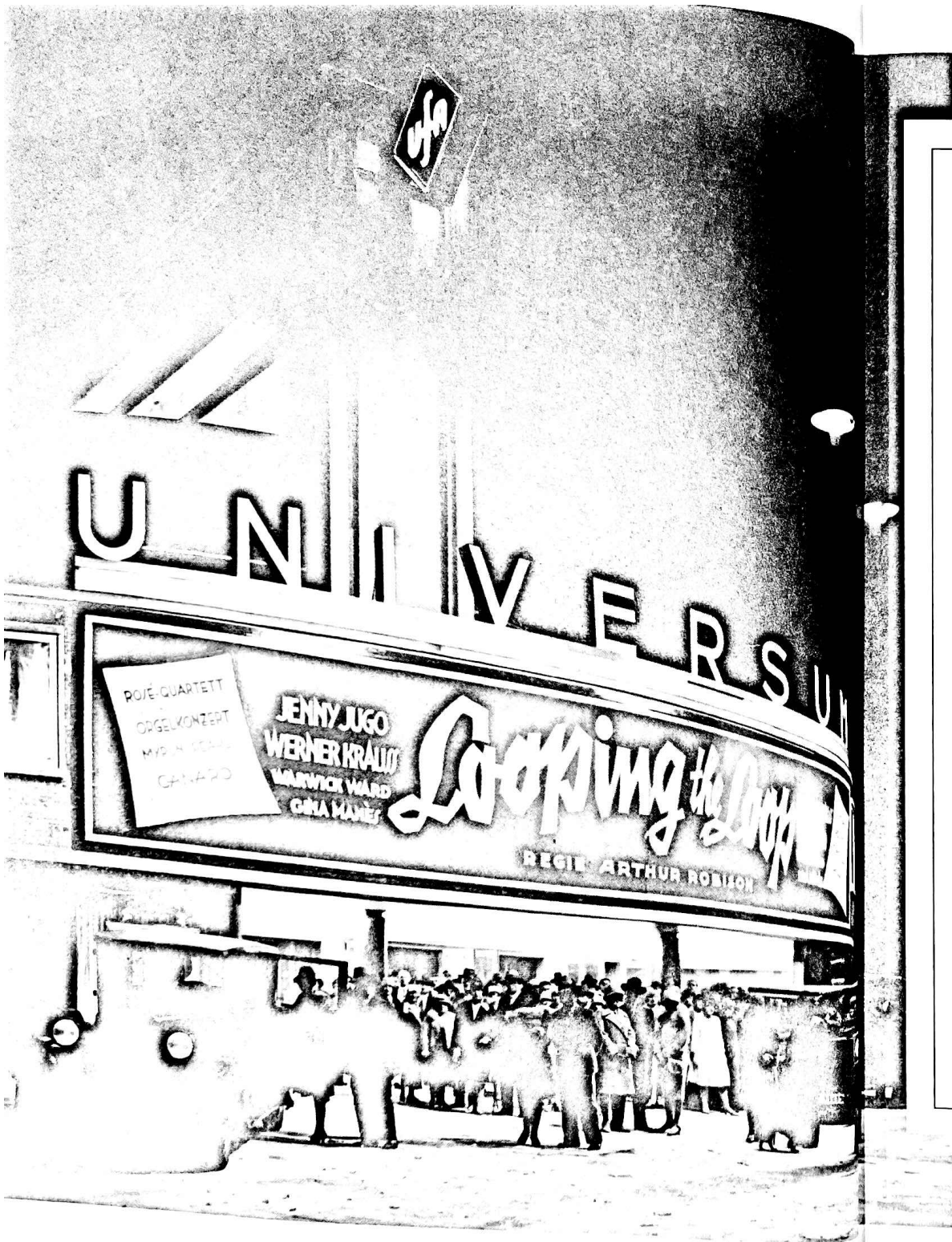
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# GERMANY IN THE WORLD

A GLOBAL HISTORY  
1500-2000

DAVID BLACKBOURN



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