

## ONE GERMANY, OR TWO?

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### THE GERMAN NATION IS BORN

Prussia's military success was celebrated throughout the remaining independent German states. Germans everywhere called for a single German nation. On April 14, 1871, a new German legislature, called the *Reichstag*, approved a draft constitution for the German empire, or *Reich*.

On January 18, 1871, months before the constitution was approved, William I, King of Prussia, was named emperor, or *Kaiser*, of Germany. The real force holding the nation together, however, was Prince Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck was a brilliant leader and helped make his new nation rich and powerful. But he distrusted democracy. At a time when other nations grew increasingly democratic, Germany did not. Its lack of democratic traditions would have tragic consequences in the twentieth century.

Prince Otto von Bismarck served as the unified nation's reich chancellor for nineteen years, from 1871 to 1890. Kaiser William allowed his chancellor to make many important decisions.

After unification, Germany quickly joined much of Western Europe in what is called the Industrial Revolution. During this era, huge factories began to be built in Germany. Machines, at first, were powered by steam engines. In the 1870s and the 1880s, German engineers designed the first gasoline-powered engines and the first cars to run successfully with them.

Under Bismarck, the new nation enjoyed two decades of peace with its neighbors. By carefully choosing which foreign nations to befriend, Germany was assured an important place in European political life.

Bismarck's foreign policies were wise, but his tactics at home were disastrous. The Industrial Revolution demanded workers to run the new factories. In some other countries, workers organized



Kaiser William I (left) and Otto von Bismarck, known as the "Iron Chancellor" (right)

trade unions to demand better wages. Bismarck, fearing the power of common Germans, virtually outlawed unions. In Germany, factory workers remained desperately poor. To maintain his power, Bismarck helped pass new laws that seemed to help ordinary people. But behind the scenes, he always sided with Germany's richest and most powerful families, sometimes at the expense of common people.

Kaiser William died in 1888. For four months, before dying of cancer, his son was emperor. Kaiser William II, grandson of William I, became the new emperor the same year his grandfather and father died. The new kaiser was not a wise ruler. Seeing that many Germans were poor, he decided to take their minds off their poverty by trying to expand German power abroad. He fired Chancellor Bismarck in 1890 and began building a huge fleet of German warships. Many European nations were alarmed by Germany's growing military buildup.



Headlines from The New York Times detailing Archduke Ferdinand's assassination

In the early years of the twentieth century, Kaiser William II made speech after speech that seemed to threaten foreign nations. At home, he failed to win the loyalty of German workers. Tensions increased throughout Germany and Europe. Many Germans were allowed to vote in elections for representatives to the Reichstag. But the legislature had limited power. One political party, the Social Democrats, won millions of votes but was totally excluded from the government.

### WORLD WAR I

Germany had little direct, but much indirect, responsibility for the outbreak of World War I. The bombastic speeches by Kaiser William II and other German leaders, as well as the nation's military buildup, seemed to set the stage for war. The conflict was provoked by the assassination of Francis Ferdinand, heir to the



*Kaiser William II (left) received into the background at the outbreak of World War I while Paul von Hindenburg (above) exerted his will.*

throne of Austria, on June 28, 1914. Soon, many of the nations of Europe were at war, most fighting against Germany and Austria. Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, 1914. A few days later, it also declared war on France. Kaiser William II hoped to defeat the French army quickly and to obtain some French land for Germany. Instead, his forces were defeated in the Battle of the Marne. Germany's western front with France soon became stalemated in trench warfare that lasted for years. During the war, German soldiers, especially Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff, dictated many of the day-to-day affairs of the country.

The United States entered the war in April 1917 and soon turned the tide against Germany and its few allies. Ludendorff continued to call for "peace through victory," while the German army and the German economy were destroyed. Of the eleven

million men in Germany's armed forces, more than half were killed or wounded during the war.

An armistice, ending World War I, was signed on November 11, 1918. But for weeks before the treaty was finalized, America and its allies had demanded a more democratic form of government in Germany. Many war-weary Germans agreed. As another price for peace, Germans had to surrender large areas of land, as well as colonies abroad, to other nations. On November 10, the day before the armistice was signed, Kaiser William II fled to the Netherlands. For the first time, the German nation seemed ready for a truly democratic form of government.

### THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

In January 1919, Germans elected representatives to a national assembly that soon met in the city of Weimar, once the home of both Goethe and Schiller. Most of the representatives were members of one of several political parties. The largest party was the Social Democratic party, once totally excluded from government under Kaiser William II. With two other parties, the German Democrats and the Catholic Center, the Social Democrats controlled the Weimar assembly.

Few of the nation's politicians had any experience with democratic governments. In 1925, Paul von Hindenburg, the former World War I field marshal, was elected president. Like so many other German politicians, Hindenburg was distrustful of democracy and did little to promote it. When the worldwide economic depression of 1929 reached Germany, unemployment soared. Germans became increasingly dissatisfied with their government. Some felt that the nation's first real experiment with democracy had failed.

## HITLER'S NAZI PARTY

During the early 1930s, a small political party called the National Socialist German Workers' party grew dramatically. The leader of the Nazi party, as it was sometimes called, was Adolf Hitler. Hitler gave fiery speeches blaming Germany's economic problems on Jews, Communists, gypsies, and other groups. Tragically, many worried Germans began to believe him. By 1932, the Nazis became the nation's strongest political party. On January 30 of the following year, Hitler became chancellor of Germany.

From the moment he rose to power, Hitler encouraged the hatred of Jews, gradually taking away from them all their rights and liberties. Over the next few years, many Jewish people fled, including some of the nation's brightest artists, writers, and scientists. Among the great Jewish intellectuals driven from Germany during this period was the physicist Albert Einstein, who moved to America in 1933.

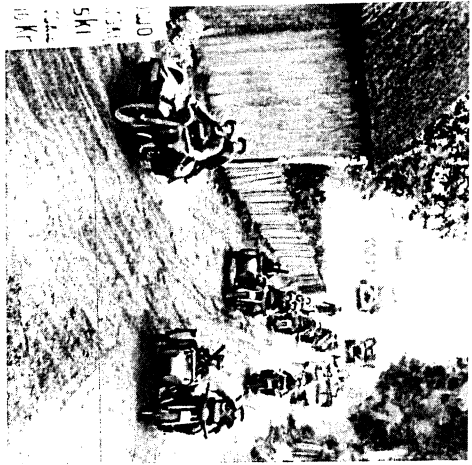
Paul von Hindenburg, Germany's president, died in 1934. Hitler immediately became president as well as chancellor. The presidency gave him control of the nation's armed forces.

Although Germany was supposed to be a democratic republic, Hitler soon had the power of a dictator. During 1935 and 1936, he used his army to control parts of the nation lost after World War I. In 1938, Austria joined his growing empire.

There was a massive buildup of the German military. Many people found jobs making weapons and supplies for the German army. For some Germans, life seemed to be improving under the Nazis. For Jewish people and some others, conditions grew far worse.

*Opposite page: Hitler and his staff command the attention of thousands at a parade. Adolf Hitler (inset) in 1938*

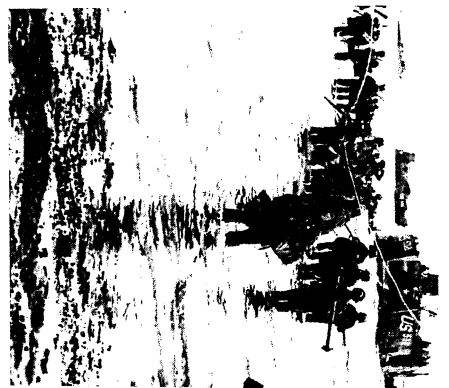




*The Nazi army driving into a small Polish village (left); Buchenwald concentration camp (right)*



*United States soldiers view Nazi victims (left)  
American troops land in France (above)*



## WORLD WAR II

Hitler was not satisfied with total control of just Germany. He seemed driven to rule all of Europe. On September 1, 1939, he issued commands to invade Poland. In a series of lightning attacks, German soldiers invaded and defeated not only Poland, but Denmark, Holland, Norway, Belgium, France, Greece, and Yugoslavia as well. German soldiers also took over large areas in North Africa and marched through the western Soviet Union. Germany allied itself with Japan and, for a time, with Italy. Most other countries of the world soon opposed the three nations.

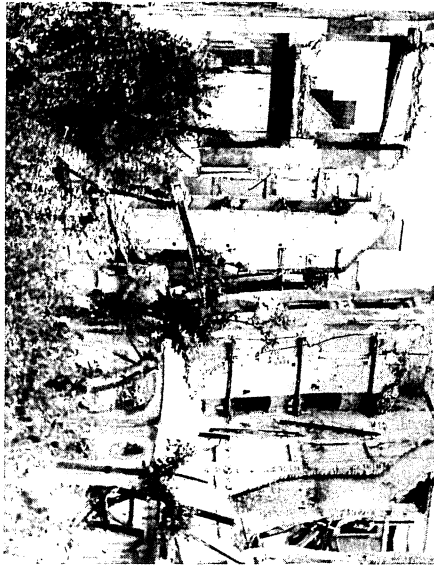
In a number of conquered European countries, the Nazis established concentration camps. There, Jews and other "enemies" of the German nation were imprisoned. By 1942, Hitler had arrived at what he called the "final solution" to the "Jewish problem." He decided to try genocide—to murder every Jewish man, woman, and child on earth. Over the next few years, about

six million Jewish people were killed in Nazi concentration camps. People who opposed this mad scheme were murdered as well.

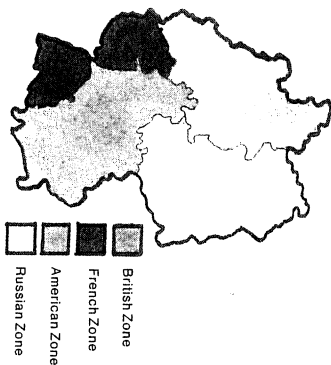
On June 6, 1944, thousands of ships carrying soldiers from the United States, England, Canada, and other nations began landing on the beaches of France. Soldiers from the nations allied against Germany fought their way through Europe. Everywhere, citizens cheered the arrival of the Allies, who freed them from the hated grasp of German soldiers.

By the spring of 1945, Allied soldiers were marching on Berlin, the capital of the Nazi empire. On April 30, Hitler committed suicide. Two days later, Soviet soldiers captured Berlin. In May 1945, Germany surrendered to the United States forces in Reims, France, and to the Soviet forces in Berlin. Japan surrendered a few months later, ending the war.

In all of world history, it is hard to find another nation that behaved as badly as Germany did under Adolf Hitler. For its



*Badly destroyed during the war, Berlin lost most of its historic center.*

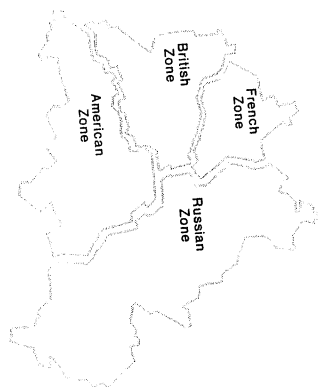


*Germany in 1945*

crimes, the German nation and its people paid a terrible price. In addition to the millions of innocent victims who died in concentration camps, more than three million German soldiers, and an equal number of civilians, were killed during the war. A quarter of all German homes were destroyed or heavily damaged in airplane bombing raids and ground battles. Following the war, millions of German survivors tried to stay alive with very little food, clothing, or shelter.

### GERMANY IS DIVIDED

As a result of the war, Germany was forced to give up some of its northern territory to the Soviet Union and Poland. The land that remained was divided into four occupied zones. Each of the most important Allied countries—the United States, England, the Soviet Union, and France—controlled one zone. The capital, Berlin, was not included in any of the four zones. It was governed by all four occupying nations.



*After World War II, Berlin was divided into four zones. In 1949 the Russian Zone became East Berlin and the three other zones West Berlin.*

Most of the Allied nations planned to reunify Germany within a few years. The Allies also ruled over their parts of Germany somewhat selfishly. Each of the conquering nations developed its own interests in rebuilding the defeated land. Squabbles between American and Soviet leaders grew particularly strong.

Almost immediately following the war, Soviet troops began building fortifications separating Eastern Europe, which they controlled, from the nations of Western Europe. On March 5, 1946, the English statesman Winston Churchill noted that "an Iron Curtain has descended across the continent." A portion of the Iron Curtain, 866 miles long (1,394 kilometers), cut the nation of Germany into two parts.

With unexpected swiftness, Soviet forces were in control of many Eastern European nations, including, among others, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and a large section of northeastern Germany. The city of Berlin was not officially part of the Soviet zone, but Soviets decided to take total control of it anyway. In 1948, soldiers from the Soviet Union set up a blockade around Berlin. For nearly a year, during what was called the Berlin Air Lift, airplanes carried food and other supplies into the city. The blockade was finally lifted.

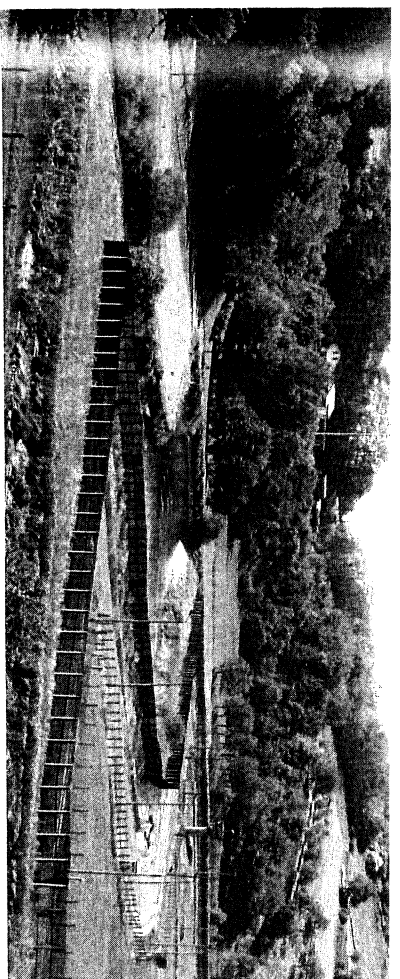
The three German zones formerly occupied by American, British, and French forces were merged to become a single

independent nation on May 23, 1949. Best known as West Germany, the new sovereign state was officially called the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). In West Germany, elections were held to select new political leaders. With the help of billions of dollars in aid, much of its from the U.S., West Germany was able to recover from the devastation of World War II. Within a few more years, the West German economy became Europe's richest. The part of Germany occupied by soldiers from the Soviet Union did not fare as well.

The former Soviet zone of Germany officially became a new country on October 7, 1949. It was named the German Democratic Republic (GDR), but was often called East Germany. Despite its name, the German Democratic Republic was not a democracy. Meaningful elections were not held in the GDR for forty-one years. In the meantime, the East German economy was directed by Communist officials. Although businesses and factories in East Germany eventually became the most productive of all the Communist Bloc nations, they trailed far behind those of West Germany.

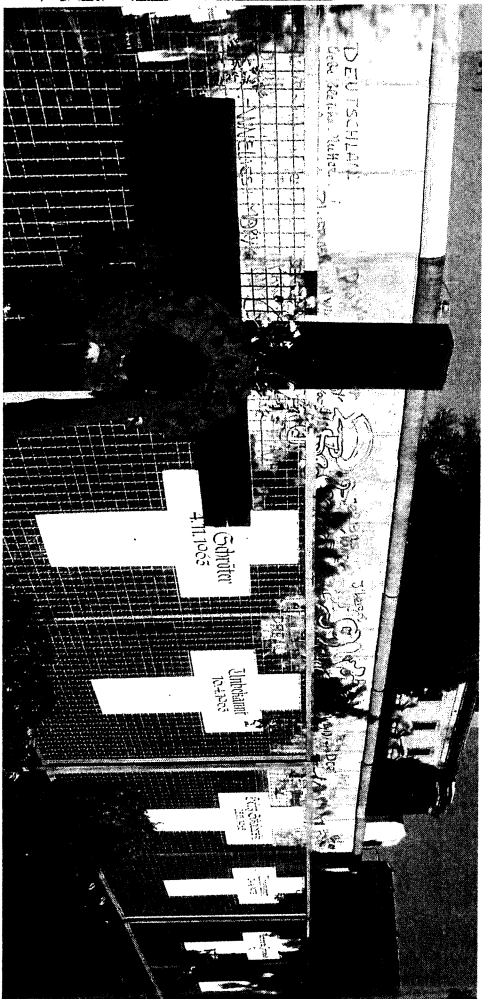
### THE TWO GERMANNYS

For four decades following its creation in 1949, the economic might of West Germany grew at dizzying speed. In 1948, the United States and other countries launched the European Recovery Program, also called the Marshall Plan. To help them recover from the destruction of World War II, billions of dollars of aid and loans were made available to the nations of western Europe, including West Germany. With the help of the Marshall Plan, West German business quickly became successful. The people who developed the Marshall Plan originally



*West Germany lay on one side of the barbed-wire fence. East Germany on the other.*

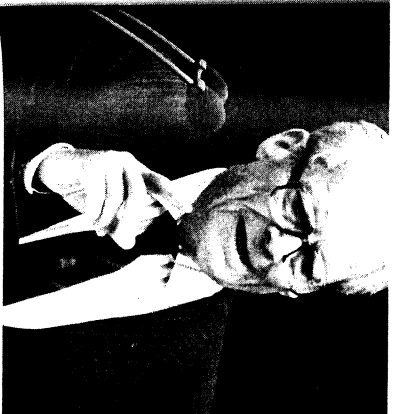
intended to help the nations of Eastern Europe as well as those in the West. But the Soviet government refused to allow that aid to be extended to the nations it now controlled, including East Germany. The GDR could only turn to the Soviet Union for help. The Soviet military had suffered more than twenty million casualties in World War II, more than any other Allied nation. The government of the Soviet Union could afford little sympathy for the nation that had started the war. Instead of giving aid, the Soviets stripped East Germany of what little wealth remained. Even by the early 1950s, it was clear that West Germans enjoyed a higher standard of living than their relatives in the GDR. In 1953, labor strikes and riots broke out in East Berlin and other GDR cities. The protest was smashed by Soviet soldiers and tanks. Many East Germans fled to the west. In Germany and elsewhere in Europe, the Iron Curtain was made of steel, cement, and barbed-wire fences. Deadly mine fields and explosive booby traps were hidden near it. Spaced all along the wall were watchtowers housing electronic spy equipment and soldiers trained in the use of machine guns and other weapons, all readily at hand.



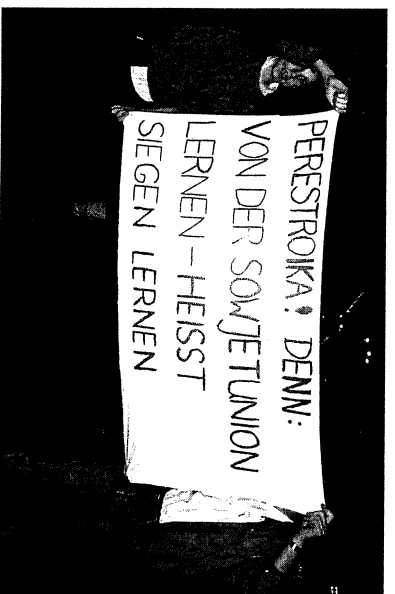
Markers in front of the Berlin Wall honor those who died trying to flee East Berlin.

The Iron Curtain was weakest in Berlin, the divided city within East Germany. During the 1950s, many Germans managed to escape to democratic West Berlin from Communist East Berlin. But in 1961, a second iron curtain was built, this one in the heart of Germany's largest city. Called the Berlin Wall, the huge concrete structure remained in place for nearly thirty years. Throughout almost all of that time, any East German who even came close to the wall risked being arrested or killed.

Despite the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, many East Germans risked their lives by attempting to flee to the West. In 1979, two families flew over the Iron Curtain in a hot air balloon. Where the wall crossed a river, one enterprising man sailed under it in a homemade submarine. Others dug tunnels under the wall; a few flew homemade airplanes over it. Many just ran for their lives, hoping not to step on mines or be hit by machine-gun fire. Estimates of the number of people who succeeded, as well as those who were captured or killed trying, vary widely.



Former West German chancellor, Willy Brandt, delivers a speech to the united German Parliament on October 4, 1990. This banner held during the East Berlin demonstrations on October 8, 1989 reads: "Perestroika! Learning from the Soviet Union means learning to win."



Throughout most of the 1980s, the majority of East Germans were resigned to living their lives under a Communist government. Although their standard of living was low, it was higher than in all other Communist nations.

In the East there also were a few advantages. Housing, food, education, and medical care, although seldom first-rate, were guaranteed to all. In addition, few East Germans were unemployed. During the 1970s Willy Brandt, who was mayor of West Berlin from 1957 to 1966 and chancellor of West Germany from 1969 to 1974, worked to normalize relations between East and West Germany. By the 1980s, some East Germans could travel to the West to visit family.

After 1985, when Gorbachev announced *glasnost* and *perestroika*, East Germans dreamed of greater freedoms and the higher standard of living that could be enjoyed in the West. As recently as the first half of 1989, few thought the dream could come true any time soon. But in the second half of that same year, people everywhere were shocked by the changes sweeping across Eastern Europe.