



## German History in Documents and Images

### **Volume 8. Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961**

Whereas previous volumes address the troubling question of how Germans got themselves into one of the most brutal dictatorships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this one focuses on how they emerged from the experience of Nazism to rebuild their economy, society, political system, and culture. Key aspects of this process will be introduced in the present narrative and explored in greater detail in the accompanying primary source documents and historical photographs. Before we proceed, however, a few words about the organization of this volume are in order.

The documents included in *Occupation and the Emergence of Two States, 1945-1961* have been divided into 28 sections. The first looks at Allied planning in the final months of war and Allied policies after Germany's defeat. Then follow various sections on the re-emergence of political and economic life in East and West Germany. Among other subjects, these sections introduce the major domestic and international issues that the two Germanies, together with the occupying powers, grappled with throughout the 1950s, right up to the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

Roughly speaking, the first half of the volume deals with economic and political history, foreign and security policy, and population movements, while the second half focuses more broadly on the social and cultural history of East and West Germany. Gender and sexuality, consumption, popular culture, and so-called modern lifestyles are just some of the topics covered. The volume concludes with a selection of West German public opinion polls. These surveys constitute a fitting endpoint insofar as they show how contemporary Germans responded to various questions relating to a host of issues raised in the preceding sections.

Confronted with thousands of documents from the postwar period, we had to be highly selective. This means that some subjects are covered with one or two documents, whereas others – such as the system of civil or criminal law – are not mentioned at all. Readers should also note that no one section has been devoted to “coming to terms with the past,” since the question of Nazi legacies – like the competition between capitalist liberal democracy and state

socialism – shaped all aspects of life in Germany between 1945 and 1961. While the documents we have chosen go a long way in illuminating the process of reconstruction in both East and West, the visual and statistical materials included in this volume constitute an equally rich source of information. We would encourage our readers to take full advantage of them, drawing connections wherever possible. Having said this, we will now offer some general reflections on the postwar period, our aim being to provide a larger narrative framework and some basic points of orientation.

## **1. The Situation in 1945**

In ruin and totally defeated, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies on May 7, 1945. Although the war in Asia continued until August, peace had finally come to Europe. The war had claimed over sixty million lives, ravaged the continent from the Atlantic to the depths of the Soviet Union, and left Europe's surviving population both physically and emotionally drained. In Germany, the country most responsible for this devastation, some seven million people had perished, almost half of whom were civilians of all ages. Among the dead were at least 170,000 German Jews who had been systematically killed in the Holocaust.

Additional millions were missing or had been seriously injured. Those fortunate enough to have been spared permanent physical or psychological damage found themselves surrounded by chaos, unless they happened to live in a remote rural district in the western or southern portions of the country. Systematic air attacks on German cities had left millions displaced. Some 3.4 million apartments and houses – out of a total of 17.1 million – had been destroyed. Another thirty percent had been severely damaged.

Millions of people were milling about the country, adding to the general state of confusion, chaos, and human misery. In the following months, mothers and children who had been evacuated to the countryside struggled to return to the cities they had once called home. On the way, they mixed on clogged roads and in packed train cars with ethnic German refugees and expellees from the East who had fled before the advancing Soviet armies or had been told to leave. By the late 1940s their numbers had swelled to 11 million. Also moving around or waiting in camps were six million DPs (Displaced Persons), mostly former concentration camp inmates or slave laborers who had been forcibly recruited by the Nazi regime to work in the armaments

industry or agriculture. On top of this, millions of demobilized soldiers, most of them German, were trying to make their way home to loved ones.

These are the cold statistics. It is much harder to describe in a few words, or even a full chapter, the extent of the catastrophe that World War II represented for Germany and all of Europe, even after the fighting and mass murder had finally come to an end in 1945. While historical photographs like those included in this volume can help us imagine how it might have felt to have survived this catastrophe – emaciated, starving, in poor or ruined health, confused, and without hope, just as millions of men, women, and children actually were at the time – true understanding must be reserved for those who experienced it firsthand. Still, detailed historical research can yield invaluable insights. Here, it is important to note that the terms employed in the public discourse on various aspects of the transition from National Socialism to a postwar order remained contested over the following decades.

The unconditional German surrender not only meant that the defeated Nazi regime had disappeared but also that sovereignty lay completely in the hands of the victorious Allies. They were responsible for restoring law and order, feeding the population, and eventually stabilizing and reconstructing their former enemy. This volume begins with documentation on decisions made by the Allies when the defeat of the Third Reich seemed imminent. To be sure, postwar planning had begun at lower levels as early as 1941/42, soon after America entered the war, when it became clear that the defeat of the three Axis powers – Germany, Italy, and Japan – would only be a matter of time. The postwar order was then discussed in broad terms at the highest level when U.S. President Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet dictator Josef Stalin met at conferences in 1943 and 1944.

At these meetings, it had been relatively easy to formulate “negative” peace aims, i.e., the Germans were to be denazified and demilitarized, and their industries were to be decartelized. More difficult, however, was achieving consensus on what to do with the country in positive terms. Should Germany be treated as an economic and political unit or should it be broken up into smaller entities? Should its borders be altered permanently? What shape should be given to the political and economic constitution under which Germans were to live? And a related question: how could democratization – the fourth “D”, along with denazification, demilitarization, and decartelization – be implemented?

Faced with these challenges, the Big Three – the U.S., Britain, and the Soviet Union – could only agree on the following: they would establish zones of occupation and leave all questions concerning the future internal or external shape of the country to a later date. The picture was further complicated when the Big Three carved out a region in southwestern Germany and designated it the French occupation zone, thus making France part of a system of Four-Power control that was ratified at the Potsdam conference in July-August 1945. Berlin, located square in the middle of the Soviet Zone, was also divided into four sectors and put under joint Allied administration.

In 1945, some politicians and bureaucrats in the West were still hoping that the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union would continue beyond the defeat of the Axis powers. It soon became clear, however, that the aims of the two new superpowers of the postwar period, the United States and the Soviet Union, were irreconcilable. Ideological and structural incompatibilities lay at the heart of the East-West divide. American capitalism and the basic principles of the American political system were impossible to align with the axioms of a highly centralized, planned Communist economy and a Stalinist “dictatorship of the proletariat.”

Some scholars have argued that the antagonism between the West and Bolshevik Russia dates back to 1917, the year in which Vladimir Lenin seized power and established his “New Order.” Still, after several years of successful wartime cooperation, it was only in 1945/46 that tensions reemerged. The confrontation between the superpowers escalated, and the two sides consolidated the territorial gains they had made in the heart of Europe after Hitler had refused to sue for peace before the Allies reached Germany’s borders. Europe was carved up into two blocs, and the dividing line – soon to be called the Iron Curtain – ran straight through Germany along the border between the Soviet Zone, on the one side, and the British and American Zones, on the other (see map of occupation zones).

After 1947, the growing perception of a mutual military threat caused the East-West conflict to escalate to such a degree that war might easily have resulted. The West believed that Stalin’s Russia was an expansionist regime, bent on conquering the rest of Europe west of the Iron Curtain. To cope with this threat, Washington, London, and Paris began to pursue a policy of containment that culminated in 1949 in the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Members of this alliance saw it as a political counterforce and deterrent to what they perceived as the aggressive designs of the Soviet dictatorship. Conversely, Stalin viewed the

United States as a capitalist-imperialist power that aimed to spread its political and economic system eastwards. The result was a deepening of the division between East and West along the Iron Curtain and the creation of two opposing German states. In 1949, the three Western zones were absorbed into a new state, the Federal Republic, and the Soviet zone became the German Democratic Republic.

Thenceforth, the Iron Curtain was transformed into an increasingly fortified and guarded border. To the NATO forces on the Western side and the Red Army in the East were added German police and border patrol units. As Cold War tensions rose, the border became increasingly impassable. Finally, in August 1961, the East German regime received permission from the Kremlin to seal off the Soviet sector of Berlin. With the construction of the Berlin Wall and the erection of a barbed wire fence along the East-West zonal border, the border between the two Germanies became virtually impenetrable. For political and economic reasons, many East Germans tried to reach the West by scaling the Wall or crawling through barbed-wire fences – attempts that often proved fatal.

Under these conditions, Allied cooperation lasted at most until 1947; but even during those early years it was largely confined to implementing the “negative” peace aims agreed upon at Yalta and Potsdam. The Allies even found it challenging to achieve consensus on how to rid Germany of Nazis. From November 1945 to October 1946, they cooperated in the Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg, where leading figures in the Nazi party, the German military, and the country’s business community were tried and sentenced. This, however, remained the sole instance of Allied cooperation in bringing war criminals to justice. Soon thereafter, it was an American military tribunal – not an international one – that opened proceedings against Nazi doctors for their participation in crimes against humanity.

Meanwhile, denazification also affected millions of ordinary Germans. In the Western zones, all adult Germans were required to fill in a questionnaire about the types of political activity in which they engaged both before and during the Third Reich. Afterwards, they had to appear before local Allied-supervised denazification tribunals [*Spruchkammern*]. These tribunals pored over the completed questionnaires and assessed each individual’s level of cooperation with the Nazi regime. People were placed into one of five categories: major offenders [*Hauptschuldige*],

offenders [*Belastete*], lesser offenders [*Minderbelastete*], followers [*Mitläufer*], and exonerated persons [*Entlastete*].

“The Present Status of Denazification,” a December 1950 memorandum by U.S. High Commissioner for Germany John J. McCloy, is instructive reading on the practice and ultimate results of the American denazification program, which many Germans viewed with cynicism and the Western Allies regarded as unsatisfactory. In the Soviet zone, leaders managed to create the impression that their denazification program was more thorough than those in the West. The Soviet program saw the dismissal of numerous educators who were former Nazis but was primarily directed against landowners and the commercial and industrial middle classes who, according to Stalinist doctrine, brought Hitler to power and then pulled the strings behind the scenes. If they were not imprisoned, then their property was confiscated. Their land was partially redistributed to small farmers; industrial and commercial enterprises were nationalized.

## **2. Economics and Politics in the Two Germanies**

With the Iron Curtain being drawn, the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the three Western powers, on the other, began to stabilize their respective zones of occupation, bringing them into line with their own principles of political and economic organization. In doing so, they promoted the establishment of two divergent orders. In West Germany, liberal democracy was eventually enshrined in the Basic Law ratified in 1949 by the Federal Parliament in Bonn, the new West German capital. At virtually the same time, the Soviet-installed communist regime in East Germany promulgated a constitution that looked good on paper and was in some ways similar to the West German Basic Law. Unfortunately, it was constantly violated by the repressive policies of a Stalinist government headed by SED [Socialist Unity Party or *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*] leader Walter Ulbricht.

In the economic realm, stabilization measures adopted in the West with Allied guidance and material aid first yielded results after the currency reform of 1948. With the establishment of a competition-based market economy, the latent potential of industry was unleashed. Under the leadership of Ludwig Erhard, economics minister in the newly appointed coalition government led by Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer of the Christian Democratic Party, the “Economic Miracle” of the 1950s unfolded. It saw increased production, the creation of employment

opportunities, and the appearance of consumer goods that West Germans had been dreaming of for years. For all of Erhard's liberalism, however, this was not an economy that relied exclusively on the dynamic of market forces. The Federal Republic also had an extensive welfare net that provided support for millions of war widows, orphans, veterans, and others who had lost their assets.

Legislation introduced in accordance with Article 131 of the Basic Law also restored pension and employment rights to civil servants and former soldiers, lifting the suspension imposed by the Allies in 1945. The Equalization of Burdens Law, which was ratified in 1951, represented an attempt to redistribute wealth from those fortunate enough to have retained property and other assets to those who had lost everything. Efforts to provide restitution to families whom the Nazis had expropriated and forced into emigration – however inadequate they may have been – should also be seen in this context. Still, the overall hope was that full employment and “prosperity for all” (Ludwig Erhard) would eventually solve the enormous social problems the war had left behind, and hence stabilize the expansion of a welfare state that offered universal support in cases of illness or unemployment and in old age. Indeed, Article 20 of the Basic Law put society under a permanent obligation to preserve the Republic as a “democratic and social federal state.”

A growing majority of the working population had no wish to return to the class conflicts of the 1920s, and this aided the restoration of socioeconomic harmony and the gradual spread of prosperity. Even trade union members supported a reformist trend that focused on improving wages and working conditions within the framework of a capitalist market economy. This situation was one factor behind the low incidence of strikes in the 1950s; another was that peculiar West German institution, labor-management co-determination. In the coal and steel industries, co-determination went so far as to provide for a “worker director” who sat on the company management board and participated in all major company decisions. Moreover, capital and labor were equally represented on the company supervisory board under a neutral chairperson. The Works Council Law [*Betriebsverfassungsgesetz*] of 1952 did not extend this arrangement to all larger companies in the remaining fields of industry – the result unions had been hoping for in 1950/51. Still, the law that finally reached the statute books in reduced form reflected some union gains and stipulated the election, by the workforce, of works councils with which management was required to cooperate on questions such as redundancy and location planning.

By 1955, anxieties over the future labor pool were so severe that West Germany concluded its first treaty with Italy on the recruitment of Italian guest workers [*Gastarbeiter*]. Over the next decade, it made similar agreements with Spain and Greece (1960) and Turkey (1961). West German politicians emphasized the economic dimensions of these treaties but also viewed them as opportunities to prove their willingness to cooperate with a range of international partners.

The East German government faced similar problems in its quest to emerge from the rubble of 1945 and create a dynamic economy that was capable of fulfilling the promise of a better life. In accordance with Stalinist doctrine, the East German approach was based on central planning and the expropriation of private industry. Additionally, the government began to collectivize agriculture and to socialize the wholesale and retail trades. By 1953, this system had produced so many contradictions, inequalities, broken promises, and dislocations – and so much popular anger – that it must be counted as a major contributor to the June 17<sup>th</sup> uprising. The strikes and demonstrations began in the capital of East Berlin and quickly spread throughout the country.

The reconstitution of political parties and the restoration of democratic elections at both the local and state levels meant that a civic infrastructure was already in place before the founding of the two German states. But the documentation included in this volume, especially election data and public opinion polls, makes clear that the political system in the West was far from consolidated. The first Adenauer government, for example, had to rely on a welter of smaller parties to gain the required parliamentary majority. There were still many disaffected voters who supported parties on the extreme right or left. In some cases, the rhetoric of these parties was radical enough to raise questions about their constitutionality. In 1952, the neo-Nazi Socialist Reich Party of Germany [*Sozialistische Reichspartei Deutschlands* or SRP] was banned. In 1956, the Federal Constitutional Court also proscribed the Communist Party of Germany [*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* or KPD].

The fact that West Germans reconciled themselves to their new government in ever greater numbers and were increasingly prepared to lend active support both to the republic and its mainstream parties must be viewed within the context of Erhard's economic policies, which were delivering the prosperity that people were looking for. Meanwhile, East Germany's multi-party landscape became increasingly meaningless as the regime continued to waver between

making concessions, especially after the June 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, and tightening its hold on what for all practical purposes was a one-party state run by the SED.

It should not be forgotten that the escalating Cold War also acted as political glue for each state. In West Germany, fear of Soviet expansionism – which was especially keen after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 – triggered a long debate on the value of NATO's protective shield, whose strength relied in part on the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons. It also led politicians to ask whether the provision of West German conventional military forces would make the Federal Republic more secure against an attack from the East. NATO's "Carte Blanche" military exercises of 1955 were designed to test the shield defense strategy by showing how West Germany would look if it ever became a battlefield for tactical nuclear weapons. Eventually, popular resistance to West German rearmament was overcome, and the Federal Republic joined NATO that same year. Having already built up the paramilitary People's Police [*Volkspolizei*] in the early 1950s, East Germany became a member of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact that same year and established the People's Army [*Volksarmee*].

As the two Germanies became more deeply integrated into their respective military blocs, it became increasingly clear that division was setting in. Throughout the 1950s, West Germans continued to debate, often heatedly, whether and under what conditions national unity might be achieved. The debate reached a climax in 1952, when Stalin proposed to unify Germany's two halves under the condition that the Adenauer government abandon both West German rearmament and integration into the Western alliance. It is likely that Stalin did not expect the West to agree to these terms. With its four Allied sectors, Berlin was another point of constant friction, from the blockade of 1948, through the crises of the late 1950s, and up to the building of the Wall in August 1961.

### **3. Reconstituting German Society**

The policies adopted by the Allies and the two German governments after 1945 and the reconstruction of economic and political life are not the only subjects worthy of close examination. There is also the issue of societal transformation and the many questions it posed. How did elite groups as well as masses of ordinary Germans negotiate the chaos of 1945?

What became of the country's social and family structures? And what happened to cultural life in the broadest sense?

Casual visitors to occupied Germany who glimpsed the physical, psychic, and moral wasteland that was Central Europe in the summer of 1945 could be forgiven for believing that the country was in the midst of a social revolution, that this was *Stunde Null* [Zero Hour]. The image was deceptive, however. Social structures proved durable, as did cultural attitudes and practices. The impact of the Nazi dictatorship and the war was no doubt profound, but it did not create a *tabula rasa*. For instance, if one takes a purely quantitative approach to what sociologists call "the circulation of elites," it becomes clear that turnover was in fact much lower than human losses and wartime destruction had initially led contemporaries to believe. When viewed from a more qualitative angle, the picture is as complex as it is intriguing, given what German society had just gone through.

Not surprisingly, contemporaries perceived Germany's immediate postwar years as a period of intense crisis, but their perspectives were shaped by their own political outlook and wartime experiences and thus varied considerably. In the Western occupation zones – especially the American zone – Jewish DPs, most of whom came from Central and Eastern Europe, insisted on separate DP camps, which they believed would allow them to rebuild Jewish lives, a project they viewed in both personal and political terms. Jewish organizations pressed hard for improved camp conditions and for visas allowing emigration out of Germany. Jewish men and women, most of them torn from their families by the Nazi genocide, formed new relationships and married with a speed that was often disturbing to Allied observers. A veritable Jewish baby boom soon followed. Over the next few years, only a very small Jewish community would settle or resettle in Germany, for the most part in the West. In both German states, Jews continued to confront anti-Semitism as well as demands for complete assimilation.

Ethnic German women had much lower birthrates in the years immediately after the war and into the 1950s. A range of factors contributed to this: for example, many women of childbearing age were war widows and could not – or did not – find new partners quickly. Additionally, many marriages that survived the war faltered in the postwar period, as economic and social strain caused divorce rates to shoot up. Until the late 1940s, women in all occupation zones and from all ethnic backgrounds could make use of emergency abortion provisions, which were instituted in response to the staggering number of rapes committed (especially by Soviet soldiers) at the

end of the war. Some newborns were subject to close scrutiny, particularly those born out of wedlock or to German women and African-American soldiers. Public discussion of the various challenges these “mixed-race” children would face in the future made clear that many Germans found it difficult to imagine their fellow citizens as anything other than white – and this at a time when, in the aftermath of Nazi racism, many were hoping to achieve a color-blind society.

In October 1945, the Allied ban on fraternization between occupiers and the German population was lifted. Liaisons between German women and Allied troops, particularly American GIs, contributed to a sense of crisis among many Germans, a sense that German men had failed as providers and protectors and that German women were turning to foreigners for material security. In the 1940s, competition for scarce resources such as food and apartments was intense and often manifested itself in German hostility toward certain people (e.g., the millions who had been displaced by the war) and particular policies, including the Allied requisitioning of living quarters as well as local rationing systems that tried to take victimization under National Socialism into account.

The situation was further complicated by what many perceived as the breakdown of traditional gender roles. Women shouldered much of the burden of cleaning up cities and also provided for their families; in subsequent years, especially in West Germany, these so-called rubble women [*Trümmerfrauen*] were widely celebrated for their bravery and independence. Few questions were asked, however, about what these women had done before May 1945. Likewise, few people wondered about what they would do in the future: namely, whether they would eagerly revert to traditional wifely roles within so-called normal families.

The physical and mental health of former soldiers and their reintegration into society was a matter of concern for many politicians and psychologists. Some in the West chose to see the issue as resolved in 1955, the year the last remaining POWs were released from Soviet captivity. Returning soldiers were repeatedly portrayed as having survived terrible ordeals without sacrificing either their manliness or commitment to family. In East Germany, the political reliability of returning POWs questions was initially questioned, but soon enough they were touted as “state fathers,” men who had successfully converted to the Socialist cause.

The constitutions of both German states gave equal rights to men and women, but the two political systems fostered different gender models. In East Germany, socialist principles and

practical realities led the government to encourage female employment. There was, on the one hand, the general socialist conviction that workforce participation played an important role in women's emancipation. On the other hand, however, there were also labor shortages, not to mention the low pensions paid to widows. To support the female labor force, the East German government began to provide daycare centers for young children starting in the 1950s.

West Germany subscribed to a different model. There, leaders encouraged so-called housewife marriages – ones in which the husband was the sole breadwinner and provider. For conservatives, these sorts of marriages reflected the values of the Christian West, which they saw as a counterweight to National Socialism, state socialism, and American-style “materialism” and consumerism. But the “stay-at-home wife” model was a far cry from the reality of millions of West German women, not only because many of them were forced to head households, but also because growing numbers of women with school-age children worked outside the home to contribute to family incomes amidst the burgeoning “Economic Miracle.” The constitutional requirement of gender equality necessitated the reform of some provisions of the Civil Code [*Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* or *BGB*], and this led to extensive public debate and a number of court cases. The Equal Rights Law [*Gleichberechtigungsgesetz*] of 1958 introduced important positive changes for women: for example, it abolished the husband's automatic right to manage property brought into the marriage by the wife. On the negative side, however, this new law also reinscribed the decisive role of the husband in disputes regarding children. (This provision was struck down by the Constitutional Court in 1959.) Although steps had been made toward official legal equality for women, the question of whether they were indeed on the road to achieving professional equality continued to occupy Germans in both East and West, and various issues (e.g., the distribution of parental responsibilities and household chores) had yet to be worked out in practice. Concerns about birth rates and morality also led to severe restrictions on abortions in both Germanies until the 1960s and 1970s.

Moving beyond the sphere of family and community, the reconstitution of society in postwar Germany also involved larger efforts to come to terms with the Nazi past. That these efforts differed greatly in East and West is attributable in no small measure to the Cold War. As a socialist state, East Germany regarded itself as inherently antifascist. As such – at least according to East German leaders – it could not be viewed as the successor state to Hitler's German Reich. This title was eagerly ceded to West Germany. There, leaders took a different approach to coming to terms with the past and involved their state in efforts to “make good”

[*Wiedergutmachung*]. For example, in the 1950s, West Germany agreed to pay reparations to Israel and also passed the “Federal Law for the Compensation of the Victims of National Socialist Persecution” [*Bundesentschädigungsgesetz* or BEG] on June 29, 1956. The law provided for restitution payments to residents of West Germany who had been victimized by the National Socialists on the grounds of race or political conviction. The implementation of these measures, however, was regularly hindered by bureaucratic inertia. Moreover, they failed to cover a whole range of people who had been persecuted or mistreated during the Third Reich, including foreign slave laborers, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, and “asocials.”

In East Germany, collectivization and nationalization policies that claimed to root out National Socialism and achieve social justice were pursued first by Soviet occupiers and then by East German leaders. For its part, West Germany embarked on a controversial, decades-long policy of “equalizing burdens” [*Lastenausgleich*], aiming to create greater balance between those Germans who had retained their assets and those who had lost property as a result of the war, including expellees. Payments into the fund amounted to a long-term tax on these assets, and although these payments were initially perceived as burdensome, they were designed not to touch the principal. As critics pointed out, former Nazis could be among those to profit from the payments the government made to claimants who had lost property during the war.

In examining their society, contemporary West German sociologists such as Helmut Schelsky perceived a leveling of class differences, which was supposedly attributable to both wartime dislocation and postwar prosperity. Such assessments may seem overdrawn, particularly since considerable disparities in wealth and education levels continued to exist. Still, class definitions did indeed change in postwar Germany. For example, it became increasingly common for male workers to earn a “family wage” (i.e., one that allowed them to support a wife and children). With its Godesberg Program of 1959, the Social Democratic Party of Germany – the party most closely aligned with the trade unionists who had fought for the family wage in the early decades of the century – abandoned any notion of socializing of industry and accepted capitalism as the basic framework of the economy. As workers were allowed greater participation in consumer society, workers’ organizations became less important to them. Additionally, employment patterns began to shift away from blue-collar work and agriculture towards the service sector and government jobs. While many members of the bourgeoisie remained highly pessimistic about “mass society” and “mass culture,” business leaders followed the example of their

American counterparts and became more accepting of competition as well as mass production and consumption.

#### **4. The Realm of Culture**

In debating the moral foundations of the two new German states, contemporaries delved into the arenas of religion and culture. Although many church leaders had become accessories to National Socialist policies, the Catholic and Protestant Churches in West Germany still managed to position themselves as bulwarks of morality in the wake of the Third Reich. They sought to bolster sexual conservatism as a pillar of the Christian West and railed against cultural goods that appeared to run counter to this goal (i.e., certain movies, types of music, and forms of dance). Representatives of the churches sat on the West German movie rating board and retained an influence on formal education in many West German states. The East German leadership viewed the churches with suspicion. Competing with churches for the allegiance of the young, East Germany promoted the *Jugendweihe* (a state ritual in which young people swore their allegiance to socialism) as a secular alternative to religious Confirmation.

Differences between East and West German schools and universities became increasingly pronounced during the Cold War, as was the case with many other types of institutions. One of the primary goals of state socialism was to open up the East German educational system to the children of workers and peasants. The West German educational system, on the other hand, helped reproduce existing differences between bourgeois and working families (at least until the early 1960s) and in this way worked at cross purposes with other West German institutions that were contributing to a redefinition of class and class difference in the postwar period.

In both Germanies, intellectuals concerned themselves with the diverse legacies of National Socialism and the question of German responsibility. Since the 1950s, many West German historians, writers, and producers of popular culture had highlighted the trope of Germans as victims of war, expulsion, deportation, and imprisonment. In the West, in particular, appeals to a united Europe seemed a healthy antidote to the excesses of German nationalism. Arguably, critical engagement with National Socialism declined under Cold War pressures, but Germans nonetheless debated the nature and extent of German responsibility for Nazi crimes.

East German intellectuals and artists, many of them hoping to build a more democratic culture, withstood several cycles of severe repression, often on account of developments in the Soviet Union. For instance, the heated debates of the late 1940s and early 1950s on “Formalism” versus “Socialist Realism” in literature, music, and the visual arts prompted numerous artists and cultural luminaries to leave for the West at a time when Berlin’s zonal border was still porous. In their quest to depict – and promote – the development of a “new man,” East German authorities, like their Soviet counterparts, embraced Socialist Realism, a grand heroic style indebted to nineteenth-century Realism and Neo-Classicism. Both Germanies laid claim to the classical past of Goethe, Schiller, and Beethoven. By the late 1950s, West Germany had also added various Wilhelmine-era modernists and Weimar avant-gardists to its official cultural canon, often overlooking the fact that many of these artists had been associated with the far left. Abstract Expressionism, a school of painting that developed in New York in the 1940s, was initially rejected in West Germany, but soon became the preferred style of artists there. This seemingly apolitical abstract style stood in marked contrast to Socialist Realism, with its figurative compositions and explicit political visions. Still, promoters of Abstract Expressionism believed that it carried its own message of freedom and autonomy – a message that, if subtler, was no less political.

During the second half of the 1950s, the East German regime encouraged writers to embark on the “Bitterfeld Path” [*Bitterfelder Weg*]. This party-sponsored initiative aimed to expose members of the intelligentsia to the lives of workers and peasants, the idea being that their experiences would ultimately become the central subject of cultural production. Party leaders envisioned a literature freed from the “decadence” and the “cosmopolitanism” that they saw developing on the other side of the Iron Curtain. There, West German writers experimented with a range of genres, from poems to radio plays, and repeatedly criticized what they perceived as a lack of engagement with the German past and an uncritical embrace of the “Economic Miracle,” rearmament, and anti-communism on the part of their government and compatriots.

Architecture and design in West Germany were characterized by simple lines and a lack of ornamentation. Designers and commentators ascribed astonishing authority to “clean” design (for objects ranging from dishes to chairs) in the quest to attain moral regeneration, reconnect with the Bauhaus tradition of the Weimar Republic, and rehabilitate Germany’s image abroad. With certain design types being associated with certain political views, it is not surprising that West German design taste was the subject of many postwar opinion polls. Some East German

architecture, particularly representative buildings, relied on ornamentation, as was the case with East Berlin's Stalinallee, a grand avenue designed to showcase the achievements of state socialism. Elsewhere, the construction of efficient modern housing involved minimizing costs. Due to the imperatives of economy and fashion, the types of home furnishings and clothing promoted by magazines in both East and West Germany were relatively similar in the 1950s. And while the East German planned economy had more difficulty delivering consumer goods than its West German counterpart, journalists and politicians in both states could celebrate levels of affluence that surpassed those found in the years leading up to the start of war in 1939.

American cultural imports, too, became Cold War battlegrounds. Initially, West German politicians and commentators proved sensitive to East German suggestions that West Germany was being overrun by American movies, music, and fashions. Soon enough, however, West Germans were arguing that youthful expressiveness and rock 'n' roll enthusiasm were signs of West German freedom and prosperity. In making these arguments, they also pointed to the repression of "open" dancing in East Germany. Some East German jazz fans managed to promote American popular music by presenting it as a product of the American "Negro" proletariat, but East German authorities remained skeptical. In the second half of the 1950s, they even arrested some outspoken jazz and rock fans. In West Germany, by contrast, politicians declared jazz the music of the new democracy. It thus became part of a Cold War liberal consensus that linked aesthetic modernism to Western political forms and saw youthful rebelliousness as a psychological issue rather than a political threat.

Political and cultural repression in East Germany, together with economic hardship and the perception of greater economic opportunities in the West prompted over 2.5 million East Germans to leave for West Germany between 1949 and 1961. The West German government encouraged intra-German migration. Portraying itself as a haven of democracy and prosperity, the Federal Republic granted special benefits to recognized political refugees. By 1961, the East German leadership was so concerned about labor shortages and the weakening of its image as a workers' state that it sought – and was granted – permission from the Soviet Union to build the Berlin Wall. Construction began on August 13, 1961. During its 28-year existence, the Wall severely curtailed personal contact between East and West Germany, a subject that is explored in detail in the next volume of this project, *Two Germanies, 1961-1989*.

Volker Berghahn and Uta Poiger

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