

Weimar History, Crises, Culture, and Psychology

German History (political, economic, social, cultural, and psychological shocks)

- a) 1914-1918 – Brutality of World War I
- b) 1918 – Loss of the War and continued blockade of German ports, which led to continued starvation and disease.
- c) 1918 – Revolution of 1918 and its failure to create radical change. Weimar government (Moderate Socialists) had to make a deal with the military and the Freikorps, which led to assassinations through 1919 and Berlin under martial law for 8 months. The deal included the inability of the Weimar Government to replace the Kaiser's military leaders or the civil service. That meant that the conservative elements and institutions blocked many liberal reforms. The radical left (Independent Socialists and later the German Communist Party) continued to oppose the Weimar Government.
- d) 1919 – Treaty of Versailles (which devastated Germany then and in the future.) – Reparations and removal of means to create wealth; War Guilt Clause.
- e) 1919 -- Democratic Constitution passed but not supported by the right or the left
- f) 1920 – Kapp Putsch
- g) 1923 – France occupies the Ruhr because of non-payment of reparations. Germans in the Ruhr go on a general strike. The government prints money to pay the German workers, which led to massive inflation.
- h) 1923 – Hyperinflation – Averaging 20% a day. Mark goes from 4.2 marks to a dollar before WW1 to 4.2 trillion marks to a dollar – Middle class is wiped out while some make huge fortunes through speculation. Middle class values turned upside down. It is much cheaper for foreigners to live in Germany. England sends people living on the dole to Germany. -- "The fundamental quality of the disaster was a complete loss of faith in the functioning of society. Money is important not just as a medium of economic exchange, after all, but as a standard by which society judges our work, and thus our selves. If all money becomes worthless, then so does all government, and all society, and all standards. In the madness of 1923, a workman's work was worthless, a widow's savings were worthless, everything was worthless. 'The collapse of the currency not only meant the end of trade, bankrupt businesses, food shortages in the big cities and unemployment,' according to one historian, Alan Bullock. 'It had the effect, which is the unique quality of economic catastrophe, of reaching down to and touching every single member of the community in a way which no political even can. The savings of the middle classes and the working classes were wiped out at a single blow with a ruthlessness, which no revolution could ever equal...

The result of the inflation was to undermine the foundations of German society in a way which neither the war, nor the Revolution of November, 1918, nor the Treaty of Versailles had ever done. The real revolution in Germany was the inflation." -- *Otto Friedrich, Before the Deluge*

- i) 1923 – Hitler Putsch – unsuccessful but Hitler, sentenced to 5 years in prison spends on 9 months in prison, where he writes *Mein Kampf*.
- j) 1923-4 -- Dawes Plan and the Rentenmark re-stabilized Germany's economy and international relations leading to a short period of calm and growth.
- k) 1925 – Locarno Treaties stabilizes German – European foreign relations
- l) 1926 – German enters the League of Nations
- m) 1929-30 – Great Depression hits Germany. By 1932, only 33% of Germans were fully employed with 44.4% unemployed and 22.6% with short term employment. Unemployment benefits went from 6 months to 6 weeks.
- n) 1933 – Hitler is appointed Chancellor
- o) By 1934 – German has been converted from a democracy to a totalitarian dictatorship

The Weimar period exacerbated an extreme division between the ultra-rich and the hopeless poor.

Politically, extreme right and left clash in the streets.

The PSYCHOLOGICAL and CULTURAL EFFECTS of all of these CRISES.

You cannot control anything in your life; the world is turned Upside Down; rootless; no expectations for the future; feelings of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness; desire for order in the midst of all this chaos, no matter what the cost.

Besides the political conflicts of the era, especially between the Nazis and the Communists, this situation created a unique culture, which emphasized Anything Goes.

Before, middle class morality was based on frugality, stability, saving for the future, social respectability, cultural continuity, virginity (or its appearance), and modesty. Now everything was reversed. "People of good families co-habited and had illegitimate children. The impossibility of making marriage economically secure apparently led to a disappearance of marriage itself. Love was old-fashioned, sex was modern – Pearl Buck noted." "Love is a foolish overestimation of the minimal difference between one sexual object and another."

The Weimar period created a new, decadent and dissolute generation that put Berlin on the cosmopolitan pleasure seeker's map.

Sexual liberation

Many sexual partners

Hotels hired male gigolos and female prostitutes

Open homosexuality

Women often seen as destroyers of men – femme fatales

Drugs – cocaine, morphine, heroin

The underworld

Anything for a thrill – especially something new and extreme

Aggression and blame turned towards Jews and immigrants (Many Jews became rich during the inflation and became visible, while it was very cheap for foreigners to live in Berlin)

It was a blend of pleasure seeking, sexual and political extremism, and a yearning for strange gods. The cult of the irrational. Moral ambiguity.

“One year in Berlin revealed more of the perversions in which man’s lower nature can indulge than a normal lifetime spent anywhere else.”

This lifestyle eventually led to a quest for an alternative – stability and a cleaner and morally clearer society. Nazism.