

The weimar republic -- doomed to fail

[People](#), [Adolf Hitler](#)



The Weimar Republic -- Doomed to Fail The Weimar Republic (1919-1933) was born in the aftermath of the defeat of Germany in World War I. Not only was this a fall from grace, it was a resounding crash that shattered Germany's belief that they were the superior undefeatable race. Following the destruction of the old totalitarian German Empire, a new democratic republic was put into place. The question was, could Germany, splintered into groups of socialists, communists and the extreme right, unify into one democratic country? The Treaty of Versailles, signed after the war in June 1919, stripped Germany of its pre-war power and its position in the world as one of the great empires. The Treaty forced Germany to return Alsace-Lorraine to France, West Prussia was restored to Poland and Germany's overseas colonies were relinquished. In addition, the coal rich Saar region and the coal mines of Upper Silesia were turned over to the League of Nations. Furthermore, the Treaty guaranteed that the formidable German military would be destroyed reducing its army and navy to 100, 000 men. The reduction of Germany's battleships, the prohibition against producing submarines and the dissolution of the German General Staff insured that henceforth Germany would be a weakened nation. To oversee and insure that these orders would be carried out, the Allies occupied the Rhineland. But perhaps the most severe economically crippling punishment were the huge reparations that Germany was ordered to pay to the victorious Allied countries; an amount of close to 32 billion gold dollars! A disastrous situation resulted that led to the impoverishment of the German people, creating further chaos, bitterness and divisiveness. On August 11, 1919, in the city of Weimar, a new constitution was drawn up creating a democratic German

republic. A president was elected with the power to nominate a chancellor. The Reichstag and Reichsrat parliament was composed of delegates elected by universal suffrage. Still, Germans, traditionally used to authoritarian leadership, supported by a powerful military and industrial complex, were unsure of the new experimental government. In addition, by 1920, the escalating rate of inflation eventually destroyed the German mark. A loaf of bread, for example, cost 5, 000, 000 marks. Thousands of people were without jobs, forced to beg in the streets for money to put food on the table. Nonetheless, in spite of the ruin of Germany's economy and the suffering of its people, Germany during Weimar was witness to an amazing burst of artistic energy. In art, architecture, theatre, literature, poetry, music and the new medium, film, a renaissance was flowering. In the cafes and cabarets of the cities of Germany, and particularly in Berlin, comics satirized the new government and its leaders. Within the atmosphere of total creative freedom, modernism entered every area of the arts replacing old traditional values. Conservative academic art was displaced by raw expressionism, mirroring the confusion and fear in the country. In the Bauhaus, founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, modern concepts of architectural and interior design, painting, sculpture and crafts were taught. Gropius believed that since the old world had been destroyed by World War I, a new environment, a new art must be created that would change the world for the better. The composer Kurt Weill in collaboration with the poet Bertolt Brecht created the bitter and satiric musical, " The Threepenny Opera." Kurt Jooss choreographed the equally satiric and brilliant expressionist ballet, " The Green Table." A " golden age" of film in Germany was in full bloom making it

possible for the director Robert Wiene to produce the brilliant, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari." Amidst darkly shadowed scenes that were claustrophobic and disorienting, Wiene portrayed a terrifying world of insanity and murder. Drawings and etchings by Max Beckmann portrayed the returned war veterans without arms and legs, their sightless eyes bandaged, begging for food. George Grosz and Otto Dix caricatured the greedy fat-cat industrialists and arrogant militarists who continued to maintain power despite their defeat in the war. Reflecting the national angst in modern paintings with distorted figures and brilliant Fauve color, the German Expressionist painters, Kirchner, Schmidt-Rottluff and Nolde demonstrated the freedom of the new art movement. Abstract artists, Klee, Kandinsky and Mondrian, teachers at the Bauhaus, formulated radical aesthetic ideas that were to influence modern art at its very core. In time, despite the Treaty of Versailles, the Allied countries decided to reduce the punitive reparations that were responsible for Germany's extreme inflation and poverty. Because of this, the Democratic Republic was stabilized for a while, but unfortunately it did not last very long. With extremist groups composed of war veterans who became part of the SA, beatings and assassinations committed by the right against the left escalated. The old military groups still had power to convince people that only a strong Germany and not a democratic one could return Germany to its place of supremacy in the world. It was becoming clear that Germany did not have a chance at democracy. The lingering sense of anger and resentment over the defeat and demoralization of their country created an atmosphere of intense dissatisfaction. In the unsettled Germany of the Weimar period with few jobs and little food a powerful personality such

as Adolf Hitler could and did emerge. Indeed, the country was ripe for a messianic leader who would unify Germany by promising the people that he would restore greatness to them once again. By 1929, as the Weimar Republic continued to struggle with spiraling inflation, a further crises resulting in disastrous consequences throughout Europe and particularly in Germany occurred. The stock market crash in the United States made it necessary for American investors to withdraw their loans to Germany leaving the country weakened even moreso. With the resultant fall of the German stock exchange businesses failed as unemployment multiplied. By 1932, only half of Germany's factories were in operation. Against the background of economic and political chaos, the Nazi's National Socialist German Workers' Party gained momentum. Hitler, while in the beginning of his rise to power, lagged behind in popularity compared to the Communists, slowly gained recognition, acceptance and finally adulation. With the help of the military clique and wealthy industrialists who financed him, Hitler's Nazi party won the support of the German people. Indeed, throughout the country, men, women and children cheered and wept with joy when hearing him speak. The young were especially impressed by his magnetizm and powerful rhetoric that continually preached the return of glory and racial purity to the German people. All that was required screamed Hitler was to rid Europe of its Jews. The Jews, he saidrepeatedly, were the cause of all of Germany's problems. The Socialist party which contained many Jews was a primary focus of Hitler's intense hatred. Since there were Jewish Socialists represented at the signing of the Versailles Treaty, Hitler blamed them for agreeing to the harshness of the document that led to the demise of Germany. Again and

again, he told the German people that Germany's downfall was due to the Jews and to their desire to control the world. Dedicated to destroying the democratic Weimar Republic, Hitler announced that there could be only one leader, and that leader was Adolf Hitler. By 1933, he had pre-empted the elderly and frail president, Paul Von Hindenburg and became chancellor of Germany: the father, the leader, the Fuehrer of Germany. Surrounded by his close aides, Goebbels, Himmler, Goring and his chosen SS blackshirts, Hitler began his maniacal push to purify German blood by persecuting and killing Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, the disabled and mentally ill. Germans who were a political threat to him, who questioned his power and authority, were killed. In brilliant public stagings of glory and power Hitler paraded his army through Berlin where swastikas were emblazoned on every flag and government building. Huge photographs and paintings of Hitler were displayed all over the country. To heighten the drama and excite the people, massive parades with thousands of soldiers holding flaming torches were held at night. The Nazi salute with right arm extended was yelled loud and clear -- " Heil Hitler! At the request of Hitler in 1934, the filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl produced and directed the film, " Triumph of the Will." She made other films extolling the values of Aryan superiority using awe-inspiring pageantry and dramatic lighting. Although years later, Riefenstahl, who lived a long life, denied she was a Nazi enthusiast. But could anyone believe her? The intensity and passion in her films told another story. Hitler used the streets brilliantly for continuous propaganda. No other leader had done this to the extent that he did, assembling huge masses to hear his inflamed oratory of hatred against Jews. " Every Jew must be killed," he screamed as

the Germans en masse listened to him, faces glowing with happiness. Babies were raised up high by their mothers to see the man with the little mustache and hysterical voice who promised jobs for everyone and a new powerful, pure Germany. " Heil Hitler," they yelled. The exhibition of " Degenerate Art" held in Munich in 1937, brought thousands of people to see and ridicule the work of leading modern artists: Klee, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Beckmann, Grosz, Dix, Albers, Nolde, Kirchner and many others. When hundreds of Kirchner's paintings were confiscated, he had no recourse but to take his life. Others fled the country finding safety in Holland, France, England, America and any country that would accept them. Interesting that many of the so-called " degenerate" artists were not Jewish. In a building nearby the " Degenerate Art" exhibition, Hitler showed academic paintings portraying heroic Aryan men and women: young, square-jawed, blonde and blue-eyed. But Hitler had more important issues on his mind than art. As soon as he became Chancellor in 1933, he began his paranoid, single-minded focus on the " Jewish Problem," The Nuremburg Laws, 1935, escalated the non-stop cruelty of the Nazis against the Jews, defining a Jew as any person who had at least one Jewish grandparent. From then on, Jews were denied citizenship with all the individual rights that go with it, including access to legal counsel. Jews were not permitted to vote, work or continue their businesses. They could not walk on the sidewalks. They could no longer function as doctors, dentists, professors, accountants or lawyers. Their children were not allowed to go to school, enter public parks or go to the library. Nor could Jews attend theatres, movies houses, concert halls or restaurants. Any Jew on the street, regardless of age or gender could be beaten at any time. Without warning,

Jewish possessions, including their homes, their property, their businesses, art and jewelry, were taken from them. In order to quickly recognize a Jewish person, every adult or child had to wear a yellow armband which made them vulnerable to attack by the SA and SS hoodlums. In the beginning of the onslaught against Jews, women were beaten less frequently, but that was to change soon enough. As a matter of fact, later when the systematic killing of the Jews began, more women died in the death camps than the men. In order to control the Jews more effectively, ghettos were formed where Jews were packed into small areas of the cities with no chance to obtain food or clothing. The elderly, the very young and the sick were the first to die. Babies were grabbed from their terrified mothers, shot or often thrown to the ground or against a wall, instantly killed. In the ghettos, people were divided into two sections with women on one side, the men on the other. From these two groups of terrified people, kept in line by vicious dogs, beatings and shootings by the SS, decisions were made as to who would be sent to the extermination camps, who would be chosen for forced slave labor or who would be killed immediately. Jews trying to save themselves and their families hid wherever they could, in cellars, between walls and underground in the sewers. Others with forged papers who were fortunate enough to have blue eyes and blond hair attempted to pass as Germans or Poles obtaining jobs outside the ghetto. If their German was not perfect, they would be suspect, killed on sight or sent to a concentration camp. The young and heroic fled into the forest joining the many partisan groups from countries that had been overtaken by the Nazis. They killed German soldiers, destroyed bridges, trains, railroads and tanks, doing whatever they could to

sabotage the enemy. Disregarding the Versailles Treaty, Hitler ordered the factories to operate day and night producing submarines, planes, ships and weapons of destruction. Quickly, he marched into Austria where masses of people greeted him with ecstasy, thrilled that they would be united with Germany. From Austria, the German armies overtook Poland and Czechoslovakia, marching further west into France. From then on until the end of the war, the pro-Nazi Vichy government ruled most of France. England was next, as the world shook with fear at the thought that Hitler might indeed succeed at overtaking all of Europe. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on December 7, 1941, the United States entered the war. Immediately, the Americans declared war on Japan, and joined the English and Russians in the battle to defeat Adolf Hitler. " Kristallnacht" (Night of Broken Glass), November 9, 1938, signalled the Nazi's plan of all-out extermination of the Jews. The windows of stores owned by Jewish merchants were shattered, merchandise stolen or burned. Synagogues went up in fire as the sacred books were thrown on huge piles and set on fire. Jews were beaten on the streets, kicked and spat upon. The crowds looked on and cheered. Kristallnacht was the turning point. No longer could Jews fool themselves by denying Hitler's " Final Solution," to eradicate every Jew on the continent. There was no way out, but to leave Germany and the occupied countries. Refugees, mothers, fathers, children, orphans, swarmed all over Europe attempting to leave by any means possible. Jews and anti-Nazi Germans who were at risk politically, as well as artists, writers, musicians and actors tried to escape by fleeing to other countries. Some went to Russia, some went further west. Marseilles, free of Nazi occupation, was a

center for refugees waiting to obtain forged papers, enabling them to board ships and leave the genocide occurring all over Europe. There were courageous, outstanding people who helped to save the lives of thousands of refugees. One such was Harvard educated Varian Fry, an American Protestant, working for the U. S. Emergency Rescue Committee based in Marseilles. Fry was dedicated to aiding Jews, artists and intellectuals find safe haven in America. Without his help Jacques Lipschitz, Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, Andre Breton and hundreds of others would probably have lost their lives. During the long years of World War II, as millions of people burned in the crematoriums of Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Treblinka and Chelmno, Hitler's war on humanity finally came to an end in 1945. The astonishing thing was that a single individual was able to convince the German people of his insane belief that they were the master race and the Jews, a small percent of Germany's entire population, were to blame for their downfall. Imagine! how a lie when told loud enough, often enough and supported by force, almost destroyed an entire race of people. It is unfortunate that the maniac with the ridiculous little black mustache did not live to be tried by a world court. No death sentence either by lethal injection, hanging, shooting or the electric chair could ever compensate for the countless deaths, torture, sadism and personal tragedy of so many people. Still, it would have been some compensation to see the Fuehrer stripped of his power and diminished to the pitiful, crazed individual that he was. In the chance meeting of a particular sperm with a cell in a mother's womb, a devil of monstrous proportions was born. Multitudes of people believed what the devil told

them. In turn, their own devil found a voice. They followed him into the depths of hell, taking the innocent with them.