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**FROM PROTESTANT PEASANTS  
TO JEWISH INTELLECTUALS**

**The Germans  
in the Peopling of America**

*BERNARD BAILYN*

**CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES  
OF THE GERMAN  
CATASTROPHE**

*HEINRICH AUGUST WINKLER*



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## Preface

PLANS TO ESTABLISH A GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE in the United States originated in 1976, the year of the bicentennial. It took more than ten years, and the efforts of many, to launch the project. In 1987, finally, the new "voyagers to the West" arrived in Washington, D.C. In mid-November 1987 the Institute was officially opened.

The addresses printed in this small volume were the highlights of the opening ceremony. In "From Protestant Peasants to Jewish Intellectuals: the Germans in the Peopling of America" Bernard Bailyn from Harvard University brilliantly outlined the dimensions and the changes in the process of German migration to the New World; and in "Causes and Consequences of the German Catastrophe" Heinrich August Winkler from the University of Freiburg underscored the Institute's commitment to careful analysis and critical examination of twentieth-century German history. The German Historical Institute is proud to present these two addresses as the first volume of the Institute's Annual Lectures.

HARTMUT LEHMANN

*Washington, D.C., February 1988*



## **From Protestant Peasants to Jewish Intellectuals: the Germans in the Peopling of America**

*Bernard Bailyn*

It is a pleasure and honor for me to have this opportunity to say a few words of greeting on the part of American historians, and to wish the Institute every possible success in its work.

My credentials for being here, however, are not obvious, since I am not a Germanist, or a historian of Germany, or ethnically German. I am a historian of America, and particularly of British America, but my work in recent years has concentrated on the peopling of the North American continent, and it may not be inappropriate on this occasion to say a few words about the role of the Germans in this process, for it is a field of study of great importance, now enjoying a renewal in the most sophisticated form; it is a subject full of strange complexities, paradoxes, and unresolved problems; and it will surely enter into the study that will be conducted under the sponsorship of this Institute.

It was Bismarck who described the peopling of North America as "the decisive fact of the modern world." Involving, in all, the migration of some 50 million people, representing at least 106 ethnic groups, from Acadians and Afghans to Ukrainians and Uzbeks, this enormous movement of people has continued for over three centuries, has drawn on people from every corner of the globe, and has created new communities of people in untraceably complex patterns over an area of more than three and a half million square miles. Since this process is the key to understanding American society historians will never cease tracing its movements, nor sociologists and anthropologists analyzing its consequences. No account of it will ever be complete and final: new information is always accumulating, modes of explanation change, and perspectives shift.

Once, a century ago, the major problem for those who wrote about the history of American ethnic groups was to identify ancestors and trace personal family roots and overseas origins—partly in response to vague cultural nostalgia, partly to satisfy genuine curiosity, partly to fortify threatened pride. Later, a great array of what

we would now call ethnic studies, rising from the tumult of late nineteenth-century social conflicts in America and the pressures of "Americanization," concentrated on identifying the contributions each group had made to the development of American civilization—sought in history, as it were, score cards of the benefits each group had bestowed on the country. Later still, in the burgeoning professional scholarship of the twentieth century, the emphasis shifted to the nation as a whole, reverting back to Crèvecoeurs' famous question of 1782, "What, then, is the American, this new man?" How, it was asked, did the groups relate to each other? Was the nation truly a melting-pot in which a genuinely new human product had been brewed? Perhaps, on the other hand, the incoming groups had simply assimilated to a single dominant culture, presumably British. Or had there, in fact, been very little real melting and acculturizing, only a more or less tolerant co-existence of unintegrated groups stubbornly refusing to merge their identities with others except at the pragmatic margins? More recently, the major questions have shifted again, away from the exterior characteristics of groups and the patterns of the nation as a whole to the interior, subjective experience of people uprooted from their origins, tossed about in a tumult of disorienting transitions, and settled into awkward, bewildering, often despairing communities in which hope was transferred from the present to future generations. We are now, I believe, in the midst of still another shift to yet another realm of scholarship in migration studies, partly demographic and statistical, partly micro-analytic—that is, exhaustive examinations of representative small-scale communities which together may form a general pattern—and partly anthropological—analyses of the conflicts and adaptations of disparate cultures thrown randomly together.

Through all these shifts in the mode of grappling with American ethnic history, considerable attention has always focused on the Germans—and that was so long before there was a consolidated German nation state and long before Americans could properly distinguish southern Germans from Swiss, Palatines from Alsacians, or northern Germans from Dutch. (One of the nice ironies of the early German migration is that among the first Pennsylvania "Dutch"—the local rendering of *Deutsch*—were groups of actual Dutch-speaking Dutch, which may have been confusing but could not have been so unsettling as the discovery by a New Englander, Samuel Waldo, that some of the so-called "Germans" he imported from the Pfalz in the 1750s to settle his lands on the coast of Maine

spoke only French, having joined the migration of the Pfälzer from a tiny Württemberg dependency, Montbeliard, in southeastern France, near Bern and Besancon—a discovery so shocking in its implication for border relations with the French Canadian enemy that Waldo forced his recruits to declare themselves Germans and to change their names from French to German, so that Pierre became Peter, Jean became Johann. I wonder what the genealogists have made of this.)

The importance accorded the German-speaking migrants in American population history is hardly surprising. On the eve of independence, people of German birth or their children comprised 9 or 10 percent of the entire American population, and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries over seven million more arrived from German territory—15 percent of all immigrants in the century and a half between 1820 and 1970. In 1972 12 percent of all Americans identified themselves as of German descent, a proportion exceeded only by that of those who claimed British ancestry. And these are self-identifications. How many other respondents, who chose not to, or who could not, so identify themselves, had in fact some degree of German ancestry we will never know. Not every descendant of a certain Andreas Huber of Ellerstadt in the Palatinate knows that that adventurous soul resettled in Pennsylvania in 1738, changed his name to Andrew Hoover and became a Quaker—even though one of his descendants became President of the United States. And that has been so for millions of other Americans whose families derived from German roots.

But that, or any other, similarity among the Germans in America is deceptive. The German migration to America was not a singular phenomenon. It developed in phases—three major phases—which were entirely distinct.

The first phase was the eighteenth-century migration of farm and small village workers, peasants for the most part, all of them Protestant. They came principally from the Kurpfalz, the Electoral Palatinate, and, within that principality, from the region south of the Mosel and west of the Rhine. A relatively small group in absolute numbers—perhaps 100,000 in all—it was large in proportion to the receiving population, which in 1770 totaled only just over two million. The second phase, which itself had important subdivisions, was the mass migration of the nineteenth century, which peaked in terms of absolute numbers in the 1880s, a decade in which one and a half million Germans entered, but also peaked in terms of percentages of the total immigration in the 1850s and '60s

when Germans constituted over a third of the total influx. Drawn now from all over Germany, involving at the start small farmers and artisans and at the end, later in the nineteenth century, industrial workers from the cities, this vast wave also included urban professionals and committed politicians; one-third of the total were Catholic. The third wave was the 130,000 or so refugees of the Nazi regime, most of them middle-class Jews—that fragment of the pre-Nazi German-Jewish population that managed to get through what has been called the paper walls of American bureaucratic inertia, indifference, and xenophobia of the 1930s and early '40s.

Perhaps the most intriguing and most perplexing aspect of the distinctions among these phases of the German migration is the different relationships these migrants had to their parent culture and to the American culture in which they settled.

The Protestant peasants of the earliest migration were unselfconscious in their "Germanism," continued their familiar ways as long as they conveniently could but worked hard to secure themselves in the alien world in which they had resettled, and kept up ties with kinsfolk and neighbors left behind mainly to protect their interests at home and to re-assemble family and neighborhood groups in the New World. In no way aggressively or selfconsciously protective of their ethnic distinctions, they assimilated with surprising speed. No one could have anticipated that this alien population would merge with the Anglo-American population as they did. They looked different from the Anglo-Americans, they spoke a different language, their religion was different, and they brought with them a peasant culture so incongruous with the North American that, in Pennsylvania—where they constituted one-third of the population—it was reasonable to think that they threatened the survival of Anglian culture. Certainly Benjamin Franklin, probably the best informed American, thought so, when he wrote of the Germans in 1753 that

those who come hither are generally of the most ignorant, stupid sort of their own nation, and, as ignorance is often attended with credulity when knavery would mislead it... 'tis almost impossible to remove any prejudices they once entertain. Their own clergy have very little influence over the people ... thus they are under no restraint of ecclesiastical government... [And] now they come in droves.... Few of their children in the country[side] learn English; they import many books from Germany; and of the six printing houses in the province, two are entirely German, two half German half English, and but two entirely English.... Advertisements intended to be general are now printed in

Dutch [that is, German] and English; the signs in our streets have inscriptions in both languages, and in some places only German ... there is a continual need of interpreters; and I suppose in a few years they will also be necessary in the Assembly, to tell one half of our legislators what the other half say. In short, unless the stream of their importation could be turned from this to other colonies ... they will soon so outnumber us that all the advantages we have will not in my opinion be able to preserve our language, and even our government will become precarious.

Franklin's fears were reasonable—in fact, more reasonable than he knew. For the eighteenth-century migrants, unlike their successors, did not concentrate in towns and cities. Farm workers and village people, they lived in America, as they had in Germany, on the land—they spent their lives working the land, claiming the land, owning the land, renting the land, and bequeathing the land. But nothing could have been more different than the German and the British-American ways of relating to the land. In the territories from which these peasants had come, as we know from recent research, land possession was bound into a network of rights, procedures, and laws of literally four-fold complexity—a cluster of customary laws reflecting the rights of kinship groups in cases of intestacy, local village practices (modified by feudal obligations), Roman law redacted by academic jurists, and aspects of biblical law that had seeped into everyday practice. None of this extraordinarily complex integument of laws and rights existed in America. There was only the English common law, alien to the Germans, and complex enough even to English lawyers, further complicated by colonial variations. For years there was no guidance for the Germans to help them accommodate their ancient customs and laws to Anglo-Saxon practices, and when a handbook of instructions, *Des Landsmans Advocat* was finally published in 1761, there is no indication that it was widely read or understood by a farming population whose literacy was at best elementary. So one would have assumed that in the fundamental business of relating to the land the Germans would have remained aliens, helpless victims of a bewildering legal system. But they did not. Somehow—we do not yet know how—and quickly, the German settlers made the shift to Anglian practices and became American landowners, American tenants, American leaseholders, every bit as adept in maintaining their legal rights of possession as their English, Scotch, and Anglo-Irish neighbors.

Even more mysterious was the fusion that took place in political thought. Nothing in the background of these German peasants

prepared them for participation in Anglo-American politics, and in fact many of them—perhaps a majority—remained politically inert through the squabbles of provincial politics in the mid eighteenth century and the struggle with Britain that culminated in Independence. That this should have happened is not at all surprising. What *is* surprising is that many of them were *not* politically inert and, led by the politically sensitive and active printer Johann Heinrich Möller and his weekly newspaper *Der Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote*, they participated actively, and apparently with some kind of understanding of what the issues were, in the resistance movement of the 1760s and '70s.

It was mainly to investigate this development that, as editor of a volume of essays on the press and the American Revolution,\* I invited Dr. Willi Adams, now at the Free University of Berlin, to investigate the German press in the eighteenth century. His findings, which he incorporated in an excellent paper that appeared in the book in 1980, compounded the mystery. I assumed that Henry Miller—as Möller became known—in an effort to reach his German audience would have made a strenuous attempt to explain British political terminology, to gloss the key phrases and concepts at issue, and to relate all of this quite technical vocabulary to the different background and experiences of his readers. But he did not. In the large array of political news items, commentary and documents that Miller published in his *Staatsbote* Dr. Adams found only one attempt, early in 1776, to relate German and British political experience, and that simply by tacking on to a litany of American grievances a series of abuses *in Germany* from which he said the emigrés had escaped: the masters' control over the marriages of *Leibeigene*, the evils of *Fronddienst*, princely taxes, and the rules against poaching—none of which, of course, existed in America nor were threatened by Parliament. Otherwise Miller simply translated the news items, the debates, and the prolific commentary as literally as possible, ignoring his readers' complete unfamiliarity with the issues and the vocabulary. The results are strange and puzzling. What could a farm worker from, say, the now famous Hunsrück make of Miller's translation of the important phrase "virtual representation" as "wesentlich, obwohl nicht förmlich Parlament vorgestellt"—especially since such an immigrant

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\* Willi Paul Adams, "The colonial German-Language Press and the American Revolution," in *The Press and the American Revolution*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hench (Worcester, Mass., 1980), pp. 51–228.

would have had no tradition of *Vorstellung*, *förmlich*, *wesentlich*, or otherwise. As Dr. Adams writes: the non-religious texts that the German-American printers turned out "show almost no connection with the intellectual life in Germany."

What is one to make of this? Perhaps Miller did not care whether or not his readers understood the political pieces he published. Like all the printers of his day, and after, he was in business to sell papers, mainly by their service functions in advertising and the publication of timely information and legal notices. The rest may simply have been a goodwill gesture to the British establishment and a public declaration of his own political views. But possibly the meaning did get through, not directly but through undocumented discussions of Miller's publications in farmsteads scattered through the countryside and in innumerable kitchens and shops in Philadelphia, Germantown, and other German communities, and through sermons by German preachers who could use the language of the Bible to mediate between the Whig political theory that Miller presented and the experiences of German farmers. Possibly—but we don't know.

What we do know is that somehow the Protestant German immigrants of the pre-Revolutionary period quickly adapted to the utterly different life of British North America, and their children, if not they themselves, rapidly became part of the mainstream population. Their assimilation moved forward so rapidly in the later years of the eighteenth century that it created a strange anomaly in the history of German ethnicity. For the majority of the Germans were affiliated with the Lutheran or Reformed churches which, like their members, quickly acquired American characteristics and became part of the general drift in organized religion in America toward a universal pattern of denominationalism. But 25 to 30 percent of the Germans were not church people but sectarians, involved with one or another of the various sects—Amish, Mennonites, Dunkards, Schwenkfelders—which flourished as the major churches lost their hold on their parishioners. The sects reached out, successfully, for recruits among the church Germans, and developed a series of fiercely self-protective devices that would help perpetuate their group identity over succeeding generations. They developed strict rules for the conduct of religious life—*Ordnungen*—which regulated the major rites of everyday life (baptism, courtship, marriage, burial). They used a complex language system as a barrier against the world and as a protector of group solidarity, insisting on High German for worship, local dialect for everyday

discourse, and English only for marginal contacts with the outside world. They restricted education to the elementary levels, viewing higher learning as improper for poor farming families and as dangerous conduits to a corrupt world. And they imposed regimes of strict austerity and self-denial in all the processes of everyday life, a form of ascetic unworldliness which became a badge of moral superiority, discarded only with extreme shame when once experienced in childhood. So it was that the sects, frozen in their peculiar, saintly unworldliness, grew strong and flourished while the major churches, moving inexorably toward assimilation, lost their distinctiveness in the tolerant atmosphere of the early Republic. The result was that in time German ethnicity among the descendants of the eighteenth-century immigration survived in the form of sectarianism, and remained identified with that peculiar form until the later nineteenth-century immigration introduced new elements into the German-American scene.

That wave—the millions of Germans who migrated to this country in the nineteenth century, and their children—unlike that of the eighteenth century, proved to be highly selfconscious in their Germanness, deliberately perpetuated German culture in this country, identified themselves aggressively as Germans, and promoted the *increase* of their group distinctions. Concentrated in the midwestern states, especially Wisconsin and Missouri, in port cities such as New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, and scattered along transit routes such as the Erie canal, the German immigrants of this era created distinctive clusters of German culture centering on the German language, on separate newspapers, churches, and schools, mutual benefit associations, *Turnvereine*, lodges, political reform groups, dramatic societies, and to an astonishing degree musical assemblies. Chicago had four or five German theaters in the late nineteenth century, and in 1900 6,000 singers, representing 174 German music societies, came together in a nation-wide German-American musical competition.

Only such a high visibility of a distinctive and self-conscious ethnic group closely and deliberately identified with its homeland, can explain the ferocity of suppression of all things German during the First World War. In the course of less than two years anti-Germanism, fanned by the patriotic propaganda of the Creel Committee and the American Protective League, led to book burnings, banning of German music and language instruction, Anglicization of names, vandalism, and the censorship of the German press.

But while such intimidation may have speeded up the assimilative

process it did not create it or essentially shape it. Far more powerful forces were at work: some obvious, such as intermarriage, the diversification of residential patterns, and the loss of leadership in the German community; some far subtler, such as the sense that ethnic identification, beyond a certain point, ceased being an advantage and became an impediment to further security and upward mobility. By the 1930s, when yet another wave of German immigrants arrived, the forms of German ethnic identity that had been so aggressively developed in the late nineteenth century had faded almost completely, and the German-American communities that had formed in those years followed the eighteenth-century community into the mainstream of American life. In 1972, a close student of immigration in American life recently wrote, most Americans who thought of themselves as in some sense German in background, "differed little from national norms demographically or economically. Only their slightly greater tendencies toward marriage, male-headed households, higher education, lower unemployment, and greater than average proportions of farmers in their ranks suggested the last remnants of historically distinctive values and behavior.\*

But by 1972 an entirely new element had been introduced, the refugees of Hitler's Germany, whose prominence in American life is vastly out of proportion to their numbers and whose relationship to their roots and to American culture is far more complex than that of their predecessors and extremely difficult to analyze and describe. Some day, perhaps, someone will manage to digest the vast *Exilliteratur* and convey to generations who did not know the quality of their lives, how painfully and in many cases reluctantly they adjusted to life—here, will explain their achievements and also their disappointments. But I suspect that it will not be a historian who will do this but a novelist, who, like Thomas Mann in his wonderful book *Dr Faustus*, will convey in symbolic terms the stresses and the accomplishments of an entire people.

We are only beginning to assess the history of this group, predominantly Jews, urbanites, and middle-class professionals. In recent years interest has grown enormously. When, twenty years ago, my colleague Donald Fleming and I published a collection of essays and memoirs by and about some of the major intellectual figures, a

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\* Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Germans," in *The Harvard Encyclopaedia of American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Stephan Thernstrom (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 405–25 (quotation p. 406).

volume we called *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930–1960*,\* nothing substantial had been published on the subject. There is now an entire library of books and papers on this migration, and in addition a three-volume *International Biographical Dictionary of Central European Emigrés, 1933–45*, edited in New York and Munich and funded jointly by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. It contains biographies of less than 2 percent of the more than 500,000 people forced out of central Europe by the Nazis, but these eight or nine thousand detailed entries, concentrated on the Jews who left Germany and resettled in the United States, identify an astonishingly creative group.

No other single group of immigrants to this country has had such an impact on American life. It is not only the flamboyantly famous—Hannah Arendt, Hans Bethe, Rudolf Carnap, Erik Erikson, Erich Fromm, Paul Tillich—who had astonishingly influential careers here (others of equal or greater fame such as Einstein, Gropius, Panovsky, and Schoenberg were international figures before they arrived). At least as important was the large second range of talents who, re-establishing themselves in major institutions, kept up a flow of influence whose quiet ramifications are beyond measure: Hajo Holborn, Carl Hempel, and Erich Auerbach at Yale; Albert Hirschman, Felix Gilbert, Ernst Kantorowicz, and Hermann Weyl at the Institute for Advanced Study; Hans Morgenthau and Leo Strauss at the University of Chicago; Konrad Bloch and Ernst Kitzinger at Harvard; Max Delbrück at Caltech; Karen Horney at the New School; Richard Krautheimer at Vassar and New York University; Paul Kristeller and Franz Neumann at Columbia; Kurt Lewin at Iowa and MIT; Herbert Marcuse at Brandeis and San Diego; Oskar Morgenstern at Princeton; Karl Wittfogel at the University of Washington—the list seems endless; but even an enormous list would be limiting and invidious. Literally hundreds of immigrants of the Hitler years have left decisive imprints on American life—and not only the academics. Any proper list would include photographers such as Alfred Eisenstadt, publishers such as Kurt Wolff, film writers and directors such as Billy Wilder, film critics such as Siegfried Kracauer, and a galaxy of businessmen, bankers, economists, designers, and government officials whose names are less familiar.

It would be pretentious of me even to attempt to analyze the

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\* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.

relation of this group to its parent culture and to the culture in which they resettled. That is far too difficult a problem for me to penetrate. But some things, I think, are palpable, unmistakable, beyond dispute. The most important is the fact that these were exiles, not emigrants. They did not wish to leave Germany but were forced out by the most murderously brutal regime that has ever existed, many of them barely escaping with their lives. They therefore viewed their native world—not only the leadership of the Nazi regime but the entire population whose acquiescence made the horror possible—with loathing. Yet they were themselves products of German culture, and they continued, always, to cherish its achievements, in literature, music, philosophy, science, and technology. Only someone who has lived in their households (as I have, though only through marriage) can appreciate their pride in the German language, their enjoyment of German literature and music, which was almost atavistic, their assumption that their personal culture, however aborted, was of a higher status than that of their adopted land. They were therefore torn in their instinctive loyalties, despising and fearing the brutality that had overtaken their native land yet proud of its historic accomplishments. During the frantic war years this represented no problem, but thereafter it was the source of moral dilemmas for which there was no evident resolution. Thus they would, I think, have resented someone like me listing their accomplishments—and those of their distinguished children: a Henry Kissinger, a Hanna Holborn Gray—as part of the German contribution to America. They did what they did despite the efforts of the German people to destroy them, and it would, to them, be a tragic irony if their achievements were classified as German or German-American. Yet their sophistication and energies were in fact shaped and impelled by their origins, as were the style and power of so many of the extraordinarily distinguished German-speaking Austrian, Hungarian, and Czech emigrés — von Neumann, Teller, Bettelheim, Sziland, Moholy-Nagy, Polanyi, Breuer, Lazarsfeld.

Beyond this, which is speculative enough, one can hardly venture. Still, perhaps I might suggest a final point, on the tensions of their double world, which is based on nothing other than my own personal contacts with a few members of this generation of exiles, a generation that is, unfortunately, now beginning to pass into history. For all their remarkable adaptability, their intellectual stance remained based in German-speaking Central Europe, which was the core from which they viewed the rest of the world. The far outer

Anglo-American periphery always struck them as slightly exotic, a culture that never ceased to surprise them, and which they examined at times like anthropologists studying the native rituals of Bali. Instinctively they brought new perspectives to old problems, fresh ideas sparked off, often, by the jarring of disparate cultures within them. They were the least parochial people I have known, and they taught my generation, without intending to do so, to understand the parochialism of our own views, and they thereby encouraged us to shift our orientations, broaden them, or somehow transcend them. It was not only that in unmeasurable ways, through innumerable institutions, forums, publications, and personal contacts they themselves brought new ideas, new approaches, and floods of sheer energy that helped empower the growth of countless endeavors in this country. More than that, they propelled many of us without their background to move ahead in directions that we would otherwise not have taken and to transcend the limits of our naturally parochial perspective.

But, as I say, all of this is speculation. What is certain is that their experiences constitute a unique phase in the peopling of America, somehow part of, yet quite distinct from, the rest of the three-century history of the Germans in America. That story will be told anew in the years ahead, constructed on the firm foundations of the older immigration, demographic, and ethnic history of the American people. In that work of scholarship the German Historical Institute is destined to play an important role.

Let me conclude as I began, with my thanks for the opportunity to contribute these few words, and to wish this Institute every possible success.

## Causes and Consequences of the German Catastrophe

*Heinrich August Winkler*

Few nations have worried themselves and others so much with the question of their identity as have the Germans. Since 1945 the German question has been inextricably bound to Auschwitz. Why was the greatest crime of the twentieth century—the Holocaust—committed in the name of Germany and by Germans? The question is the thorn in German self-understanding, and it will remain so. Historians cannot get rid of it, but they can help us to live with it. That demands two things: firstly, the origins of the German catastrophe must be further researched, but secondly we must also ask what consequences Hitler's rule still has for Germans today. This question is much more directly political than the first, but that should not stop historians from asking it.

The first part of my lecture today concerns the historical legacy which Germany took with her on the road to democracy in 1918; the second part considers the democratic experiment of Weimar and its failure, and in the third and final part I shall turn to the question of what consequences the Germans have drawn from their experiences between 1933 and 1945—and of those which are still to be drawn.

### I

The Germans are, as the sociologist Helmut Plessner put it, "a belated nation". While the modern nation-state took shape in England and France during the middle-ages, it first appeared in Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century. The *Bürgertum* (liberal middle classes) saw the political and territorial fragmentation of Germany as a feudal remnant, and identified themselves with the nation as a whole. The dream of national unity was thus no less an expression of the *bürgerlich* desire for emancipation than a demand for political freedom. Both goals found their place on the agenda of the Revolution in 1848. Neither was attained.

Their dual aim over-taxed the German liberals and democrats and, not least on this point, the Revolution failed.

The response to the failure of revolution from below was Bismarck's revolution from above. The founder of the Reich was certainly aware that the popular demand for national unity could not simply be suppressed without the danger, sooner or later, of new revolutionary upheavals. What mattered was that German unity should take on a form which was compatible with the interests of the Prussian state and its aristocratic and military leadership. Unity should not, therefore, mean freedom in the liberal sense. Instead, the *Bürgertum* should accept that their national goals could only be realized in alliance with the historical state and not against it.

Not without reason. After Prussia's victory over Austria in the war of 1866 the right wing of the Prussian liberals was prepared to give Bismarck absolution for having governed for four years without a budget from Parliament, thereby violating the constitution. The National Liberals, who had split off from the opposing Progressive Party, did not want to capitulate to Bismarck, but they were none the less prepared to work together with him and, for the first time, to set aside their own demands for a parliamentary system. Bismarck the Junker now appeared to execute the liberal program of 1848, or at least its national half. For many liberals that was reason enough to approve the revolutionary elements of Bismarck's policy. Some of his conservative opponents took a similar position, and years later the far left agreed among themselves. "1866 was a complete revolution", Friedrich Engels wrote in November 1884 to August Bebel. After its victory Prussia had wrenched three crowns from God's graces and annexed their territory along with that of the free city Frankfurt. "If that was not a revolution, then I don't know what the word means".

Bismarck himself had nothing against being called a revolutionary. "Only kings make revolutions in Prussia", he once remarked to Napoleon III. There was a grain of truth in it. The Prussian *ancien régime* was far more dynamic than the French. It neutralized the political energies of the *Bürgertum* by fulfilling their economic demands, and it also adopted those political demands which did not endanger the privileges of the aristocracy. German unification under Prussia's leadership was, looked at from this position, a shrewd piece of forward defense: between 1862 and 1871 the landed aristocracy in Prussia laid the foundations for their self-assertion against a middle class that increasingly overshadowed them.

Europe, too, found Bismarck's solution to the German Question

more acceptable than the Frankfurt Parliament's. In 1848 the liberals had to come to terms with the fact that Austria did not want to be part of a German national state. Their long-term ambitions were for a "Greater Germany" (Großdeutschland) and ultimately German hegemony in continental Europe. Bismarck by contrast declared the German Reich of 1871 saturated (*saturiert*) and wanted no more hegemony for Germany than he already had through the French defeat and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.

But the strengths and weaknesses of the Reich lay side by side. An irreconcilable opposition to France made Germany dependent, as never before, on secure alliances. Bismarck's much praised alliance-policy was in reality a "system of expedients"\* that threatened to fall apart through its contradictions. By the end of 1887 the Reichskanzler already suspected that his balance of power policy would have no lasting success. As Bismarck himself said: "In the circumstances of European politics it is probable that in the not-too-distant future, we will have a war with Russia and France at the same time".

Internal contradictions also characterized the domestic politics of the Kaiserreich. Bismarck had given the Germans universal male suffrage in 1867 in the North German Federation, and in 1871 in the German Reich. But he refused to allow their elected representatives in Parliament to participate in government. The result was a sometimes concealed, sometimes open conflict between Chancellor and Reichstag—a constellation laden with crisis which drove Bismarck repeatedly to look for more or less dangerous expedients.

These were meant to keep the majority of the population behind the government—to make possible then, that kind of political integration that was achieved, more or less effectively, in most western and northern European nations by parliamentary systems. Since Bismarck wanted to keep the liberals at a distance from state power, he tried to divert their energies toward a changing set of opponents. These consisted of the Political Catholics against whom he led the *Kulturkampf*, and the Social Democrats, whom he tried to destroy with the Law against the Socialists (*Sozialistengesetz*). The historian Wolfgang Sauer aptly called the campaign against the black and red "foes" of the Reich (*Reichsfeinde*) a "secondary integration".† It was, in part, successful. Toward the end of the

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\* Lothar Gall, *Bismarck. Der Weiße Revolutionär* (Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein, 1980).

† "Das Problem des Deutschen Nationalstaates," in *Moderne Deutsche Sozialgeschichte*, ed. Hans U. Wehler (Köln/Berlin, 1966), p. 431.

1870s the right wing of the liberal middle class, represented by the National Liberal Party, renounced its demands for a parliamentary government in the Reich. Fear that the *Reichsfeinde* might derive more benefit from a parliamentary system than the National Liberals, contributed much to the latter's reconciliation with the authoritarian state.

Contemporaries already spoke of the emergence of a second or "internal Reich foundation" in 1878–9. The Law against the Socialists was followed shortly after by the transition from free trade to protective tariffs. This law was advanced by the alliance between *Rittergut und Hochofen*—East Elbian agriculture and heavy industry—and became the real backbone of a "cartel" of National Liberals and Conservatives. A functional transformation of nationalism went hand in hand with the regrouping of social and political power: the nationalist slogans, once a weapon of the *Bürgertum* against the left of all colors. To be national no longer meant being liberal, but primarily, anti-international and often, too, anti-semitic.

Left-liberals were not content to have their national rallying cry taken away by the right. But though they felt in harmony with historical progress, they still thought it impossible to assert themselves against the old regime with purely domestic political means. Many of them believed that a German "world-politics" was necessary if they were to break out of the encrusted structures of an authoritarian state dominated by Junkers. In his Freiburg inaugural lecture in 1895 Max Weber gave expression to what most progressive liberals of his generation felt: "We have to understand that the unification of Germany was a youthful prank, done in the nation's old age, which it should have left undone if it were not to be the beginning, but the end, of a German world-politics".

With the new phase of industrial development that began in the mid-1890s, the self-awareness of the *Bürgertum* grew. In the meantime Germany had become the leading industrial nation of Europe. Its universities, its scientists and technicians enjoyed an international reputation; literature and music, art and architecture blossomed anew and contributed to the feeling among many contemporaries that Germany personified cultural progress. Should such a modern land still have an authoritarian government, or was it not high time that Bismarck's system was recognized as an anachronism and reformed from the ground up?

Many historians believe that in the years before the First World War this reform actually took place in the form of a "silent parliamentarization". Personally, I cannot agree. It is true that the

Social Democrats, already the largest party since 1890, were able to increase their votes from election to election, that the left-liberals overcame their notorious fragmentation and that young influences, who wanted no reliance on the conservatives, won more ground with the National Liberals. But all of that still does not mean that the Kaiserreich was on its way to democracy. Gains on the left provoked new attempts at consolidation from the right. Open polarization rather than silent parliamentarization was a more accurate description of Germany's political situation on the eve of the First World War. The outcome of possible challenges was uncertain; the stalemate led to domestic political stagnation.

It would of course be all too simple to interpret German politics in July 1914 simply from this perspective. If the German government pressed Austria-Hungary to a hard line against Serbia after the assassination in Sarajewo, then this was principally for reasons of foreign policy: Germany wanted to keep its last ally and press its claim to world power before the international political situation turned against it. But the responsible leaders of German politics only succeeded in doing this because the political right had already prepared the ground for a major war. There could be no doubt that the "nationalist" groups with their war propaganda pursued a domestic goal as well: all those who had proclaimed peace among nations and democracy should be left behind at the call to arms.

Four years after the outbreak of war, in September 1918, the strong man of the German military, General Ludendorff, gave a very different signal: political responsibility should now be given to those who bore the guilt for Germany's defeat. He was referring to those parties which had spoken in the Reichstag for a compromise peace and international reconciliation. That is, the Social Democrats, the Catholic Center party and the left-liberal Progressive People's Party.

These three parties, who could claim a broad majority in parliament, were prepared to leap into the breach. They regarded the parliamentarization of Germany, which was achieved formally in October 1918 through a constitutional change, to be the precondition of a bearable peace. Why Ludendorff wanted to see them in power they did not know: the introduction of parliamentary government was, so far as the Generalquartiermeister was concerned, merely the vehicle for a "stab-in-the-back" legend (*Dolchstoßlegende*).

## II

Now to my second question, that of the first German democracy and its failure. When we look back at it today, the Weimar Republic seems a futile attempt to resolve the fundamental contradictions of the Reich of 1871—the contrast between economic modernity and political backwardness. Whether this attempt *had* to fail is still disputed today. But most historians would agree that the end of the first German Republic had much to do with its beginning. As a motto for its history, we might take the remark from Aristotle's *Politics* that "the beginning is already half of the whole".

West German historiography long held to the view that there was a simple alternative after the collapse of the monarchy in 1918: either "a social revolution in combination with forces committed to 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', or a parliamentary republic in alliance with conservative forces such as the officers' corps" (so Karl Dietrich Erdmann in 1955). The policy of the Majority Social Democrats around Friedrich Ebert, the leading figure of the Council of Peoples' Deputies (Rat der Volksbeauftragten) was fully justified: the pact Ebert entered into with the old elites was, according to this view, the necessary precondition which enabled the Weimar Republic to come into existence at all.

Today a different view predominates. It maintains, in essence, the following: the governing Social Democrats could not, without provoking chaos, avoid an arrangement with the representatives of the old regime. But the extent of this cooperation and thus the social and political continuity between monarchy and republic, was much greater than the situation called for. In other words: with more political will, the Social Democrats could have changed more and conserved less.

The thesis is *not* that the Social Democrats failed to carry out a "classic" revolution. It was too late for that. First of all it was too late because Germany was already a highly industrialized nation with all the requirements of such a society for administrative continuity and an existential fear of a collapse of the economy and public services. The radical social transformation that was possible in a largely agricultural Russia in 1917, was no longer possible in industrialized Germany. Secondly it was too late because universal male suffrage had existed in Germany for half a century, and with it a secure right to participation for the broad masses. A "dictatorship of the proletariat" on the Bolshevik model would not have meant a gain, but a dramatic loss of liberty for the vast majority. For that

reason then, if no other, the slogan fell on fallow ground in 1918 in Germany.

By contrast, reforms to give parliamentary democracy a more solid social foundation, would have been possible. For example, a democratization of the military and bureaucracy as well as the socialization of coal mines demanded by many workers. A political calculation spoke for them: the important thing was to take power away from the sworn opponents of the democratic Republic so that they could not use their position against it.

But none of these interventions took place. Not least to blame was the received ideology of the Social Democrats. Socialism for them was an historical necessity. However, it could only be realized if economic conditions were ripe and if the majority of voters favored the construction of a new society. Since the Social Democrats believed that neither precondition had been met in November 1918 no social reforms were undertaken. The Social Democratic People's Deputies (Volksbeauftragte) did not feel themselves to be the founding fathers of a new democracy. They acted, as Friedrich Ebert said on February 6, 1919 in the newly-elected National Assembly, simply as the "executors of the old régime".

The Social Democrats not only declined to break with the social foundations of the Kaiserreich, they also failed to break with it morally. After they too had approved war-credits for four years in the Reichstag, the Social Democrats shied away from an open declaration of war-guilt on the part of the former German government, as facts which had become known in the meantime indicated. Fear that the Allies would impose punitive conditions for peace, should they admit German guilt, was stronger than the hope that sympathy for the new Germany could be awakened by honesty. The beneficiary of this omission was the anti-Republican right. The legend of Germany's War Innocence, twin-sister of the stab-in-the-back legend, became the breeding ground of agitation against the *Diktat of Versailles*.

The legacy of the Kaiserreich, which one might also call an excessive continuity, soon proved to be a mortgage on the Weimar Republic. The opponents of democracy, in the first instance dissatisfied military, leaders of the Free Corps, and East Elbian Junkers, quickly gained ground after 1919. The parties which had accepted the Weimar constitution with a large majority in August 1919, fell back in the minority at the first Reichstag election in June 1920. From now on only two combinations could form a majority parliamentary government: the Große Koalition or Great Coalition,

which ranged from the Social Democrats to the originally monarchical German People's Party of Gustav Stresemann, and the Bürgerblock, or Bourgeois Block, which included the far-right German National People's Party. The continual crisis of parliamentary democracy had already been signaled.

The end of parliamentary democracy came in the spring of 1930. On March 27th the last majority government collapsed. The Große Koalition—led by the Social Democrat Hermann Müller—was apparently unable to agree on unemployment insurance. The Social Democrats certainly made a serious mistake when they threw away the last chance of a compromise on the issue. But the primary responsibility for the end of the Müller government lies with the forces of the right, which wanted to see an end to parliamentary government and more power in the hands of the Reichspräsident. They deliberately provoked the break-up of the Große Koalition; the SPD reluctantly took that into the bargain.

With the transition to a presidential system of government based on the emergency powers in Art. 48 during the summer of 1930, came the beginning of the end of the Weimar Republic. The return to a bureaucratic authoritarian state under Heinrich Brüning provoked protest from the masses. No one articulated this protest more effectively than the National Socialists. Hitler's Party benefitted additionally from the fact that since the September 1930 elections the Social Democrats had been unable to pursue an open oppositional strategy: they tolerated Brüning because they wanted to hinder a clear government of the right in the Reich and maintain the coalition with Brüning's Center Party in Prussia, the most important Social Democratic stronghold. As a result the National Socialists were effectively able to present themselves as the only real opposition party to the right of the Communists and an alternative to "Marxism" in its bolshevist as well as its social democratic form.

That does not, however, explain the rise of National Socialism as a mass movement. Without the national trauma of defeat in 1918 Hitler's extreme nationalism would not have had a chance; without the weaknesses of the parliamentary system in Weimar anti-democratic slogans would not have been so popular; without the mass unemployment after 1929 there would not have been the mood of desperation which Hitler needed in order to present himself as "the last hope" to the masses. The NSDAP won 37.4 percent of the votes in the Reichstag election of July 1932, at the worst point of the economic crisis. Only once before had a party been able to achieve a greater electoral success, when the SPD won

37.9 percent of votes in the election for the National Assembly in January 1919.

Of course Hitler did not become Chancellor on January 30, 1933 on the basis of an electoral victory. In the elections on November 6, 1932 the NSDAP actually lost more than two million votes compared with the previous Reichstag elections of July 31, 1932. But Hitler still had more people behind him than any other party leader, and the fact that the Communists had won over a considerable number of votes in the November elections helped no other party so much as the National Socialists. They could again pose as the last barrier against the threat of Bolshevism.

Decisive responsibility for giving power to Hitler lay with those who thought it possible, under his chancellorship, to "engage" and thus "tame" the National Socialists as junior partners for a conservative élite. Among those who took this risk were the East Elbian landowners, some leaders of heavy industry, a few top Reichswehr officers, and above all, the clique around Reichspräsident von Hindenburg with the former Chancellor von Papen as its most influential member. At the last moment, the largest military organization of the nationalist right, the Stahlhelm, and the monarchist German National People's Party were added to that constellation. None of those who brought about the transfer of power to Hitler could maintain that he did not know what the core of Hitler's program was: the conquest of "Lebensraum" in Eastern Europe—and therefore war—and a radical campaign against "international Jewry". Hitler became chancellor in the knowledge of what he stood for and *because* the architects of his chancellorship needed a mass basis for their interests and against those of the "Marxists" of all colors.

Let's take another look back at the beginning of the Republic from the standpoint of its end. The power-élite that was most determined and successful in bringing about the liquidation of Weimar—the class of insolvent East Elbian landowners—was never seriously threatened in 1918. There was neither a mass-movement which demanded their expropriation nor Social Democratic plans for solving the agrarian problem. Fixated on the Marxist theory of a basic contradiction between industrial capital and industrial workers, as they were, for most Social Democrats the agrarian world of East Elbia remained a book with seven seals. In the final phase of the Weimar Republic economic weakness did not necessarily denote political impotence. The Junkers had one important advantage over Germany's economically much more power-

ful industry: access to the holder of power—the Imperial Field-marshal von Hindenburg who, with their help in 1925, had risen to the top of the German Republic.

The 30th of January points back, then, not only to the half-hearted revolution of 1918, but also to the failed Revolution of 1848 and Bismarck's "revolution from above". All three events symbolize the self-assertion of the established Prussian leadership. No other group in German society incarnated the German deviation from the West, or the German "Sonderweg" so much as the East Elbian landowners. Throughout the Industrial Revolution and into the twentieth century, they exercised a political influence which large landowners in other developed western countries no longer possessed.

The failure of liberal revolution and the success of "revolution from above" overshadows Weimar in another way. Because the Germans were not accustomed to parliamentary democracy they adapted poorly to it after 1918. Because the new system had been introduced in the wake of military defeat it could also be defamed as the octroi of the victors and therefore un-German. German, by contrast, was the long tradition of universal and equal suffrage. Hitler's success is only explicable in terms of this uneven development in the process of democratization. He could appeal to both: the right of the masses to political participation, away from which the presidential cabinets moved steadily after 1930, and resentment against the parliamentary system. The contradictions that mark out the German road to modernity were reflected in the pseudo-democratic nature of National Socialism.

The 30th January 1933 did not just mean the definitive end of the Weimar Republic. Hitler's accession to power also meant the end of the German Reich: a state governed by a constitution and the rule of law. National Socialist tyranny began which plunged Europe and the world into the most terrible of wars and the Reich into the abyss. Entwined with the "Third Reich" are memories of the most inhuman regime in history, of the mass murder of races and nations, and the regression of a civilized people into barbarism. The collapse of 1945 appears in retrospect as a piece of historical necessity. The destructive policy of National Socialism ended with the internal logic of self-destruction.

### III

Finally I turn to the consequences of the German catastrophe. The year 1945 bears witness to one of the deepest ruptures in German history—perhaps the deepest since the religious schism of the sixteenth century. Unlike the end of the First World War, after the Second there was a deep break of continuity. The whole territory of the Reich was occupied by the victors; Germany lost its east; the Reich ceased to exist; for more than four years there was no German state.

With Hitler's death political leadership disappeared from the scene. Not only all National-Socialist organizations, but also the Wehrmacht was dissolved. Dissolved too—by order of the Allied Control Council—was the state of Prussia. The leading class of old Prussia, the landowners east of the Elbe River, saw the ground literally torn from under their feet. They were expropriated in the Soviet Occupation Zone, and as German territory east of the Oder and Neisse was given over to Polish administration or, in the case of the north of East Prussia, to Soviet administration, the German inhabitants were driven out.

The legend that spread after 1918 claiming that Germans bore no guilt for the war was not repeated after 1945. For most Germans there could be little doubt that the National-Socialist regime had started the Second World War. If Germany were to have any sort of future, there had to be a clear moral break with the past. Although for many this only meant the repression of the past, renunciation of National Socialism became the keystone of German self-understanding, and remains so today.

What spoke against National Socialism spoke then and speaks today for Western democracy. After 1918 the democratic state was resisted because to many it seemed only the product of military defeat. After 1945 the defeat of the Third Reich became the most powerful argument for a liberal constitution that could be imagined. Contempt for democracy had led to catastrophe: this lesson was too painful to be easily forgotten.

At the same time there was a chance to learn from the failure of the first attempt at democracy. If Bonn is not Weimar, this is not least because there had been a Weimar. The *Grundgesetz* of 1949 drew systematic consequences from the weaknesses of the Weimar Constitution of 1919 which had revealed themselves completely in the last phase of the Republic. If the constitution of the first Republic had been, in the words of the political theorist Carl

Schmitt, "neutral unto suicide", the *Grundgesetz* announced the Federal Republic's will to hold its ground against its domestic opponents. "Chancellor-democracy" was the answer to the experience which the Weimar Republic had with its "reserve constitution" of presidential power. Democracy should be prepared to defend itself and be able to function in times of crisis: that was the double imperative which impelled the constitutional fathers of 1949 as they set to work.

To the most fundamental distinctions between the first and the second Republic belongs the exchange of roles between "left" and "right" which Fritz René Allemann pointed out in 1956 in his book *Bonn ist nicht Weimar*. Since the Bismarck period the right had counted as "national" and the left as "international". After 1949 these were reversed: the moderate right, represented by the convinced anti-nationalist Konrad Adenauer, pursued a policy of European and Atlantic integration, while the moderate left, the Social Democrats under Kurt Schumacher and Erich Ollenhauer, appeared as the party of German unity.

Adenauer asserted constantly what the Social Democrats denied: that the policy of integration into the West would finally lead to reunification. But only most recently, with the erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, did the broad mass of the German public realize that the *Deutschlandpolitik* of the first Chancellor had failed. The division had become deeper and deeper; the "policy of strength" had led, measured by its own promises, to a dead end.

The realisation that things would not change of themselves began in Berlin and only gradually became accepted throughout the Federal Republic. But a direct road led from the first visitors' agreement of 1963 for the inhabitants of West Berlin through the cautious correction of policy by the Große Koalition between 1966 and 1969 to the *Ostpolitik* of the Social-Liberal coalition under Willy Brandt. The Social Democrats could only open the way to the East because they had already declared the Federal Republic of Germany's ties to the West as binding for them as well. In the meantime the West too had set course for detente instead of confrontation and found "Germany's special conflict with the East"\* an irritation. The Treaties with the Eastern nations (*Ostverträge*) were thus a means to overcome the isolation into which the Federal Republic, at least for periods in the last phase of the Adenauer era, had fallen.

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\* Richard Löwenthal, *Weltpolitische Betrachtungen*, ed. and intro. Heinrich A. Winkler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), p. 153.

With the far-reaching recognition of the other German state that was included in the Fundamental Treaty (*Grundlagenvertrag*) between the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic of December 1972, the Federal Republic finally ceased to be the provisional arrangement which it had understood itself, until then, to be. By accepting the boundaries of post-war Europe as inviolable, the Federal Republic confirmed, in spite of continuing legal reservations, the territorial status quo which had taken shape between 1945 and 1949. In this respect the post-war period only really came to an end with the *Ostverträge* of the Brandt-Scheel government.

But discussion of the German Question has, by comparison, not come to an end. For the founding generation of the Federal Republic there was, at least officially, no doubt that the solving of this question could only mean reunification in peace and freedom. Today there is this doubt—and I think rightly so.

Given the share Germany had in the outbreak of both world wars, *one* answer to the German Question can be permanently excluded: the restoration of the German Reich. The fear of a new concentration of power in Central Europe is too great in both the East and the West for the Germans themselves to want another sovereign German nation state. Whoever calls for the reunification of Germany today usually does so with the caveat that it could only be attained if the division of Europe as a whole is overcome, and only under a "European umbrella". If this formula has any meaning at all, it means the readiness to renounce German sovereignty in favour of a unified Europe. It follows then, that not only the Germans, but also the other Europeans must be prepared to make such a sacrifice. Already by this point it must be clear that the goal of a "European umbrella" is, for the time being, no more than wishful thinking.

To relinquish illusions about reunification does not mean, however, declaring the German Question to be solved. So long as human and civil rights are secure only in the Federal Republic, and not in the German Democratic Republic, the burden of German history will be unequally and unjustly distributed. From this comes the duty of Germans in the Federal Republic to form national solidarity with those Germans who are still denied democratic self-determination even today. Therefore, not the restoration of the German Reich, but the democratization of the German Democratic Republic, belongs on the agenda. The same applies to what we today call "Eastern Europe": democratization is the demand of our time.

At the beginning of this lecture I spoke of the difficulty which the Germans have with their identity. For the most part this difficulty springs from the fact that the concept of identity is still seen from the perspective of the German unification in 1871. The building of a German nation state was so much part of the spirit of the age that it was finally unavoidable. But Bismarck's "revolution from above" was purchased with a high mortgage: the delay of German political maturity. Not least because of *this* inheritance from 1871 did the German nation state fail.

From this a lesson for German identity follows. We should free it from the narrow perspective which the Bismarckian solution brings with it. The history of Germany does not begin with the history of the German nation state. To it belong the German contributions to world culture. These are achievements of which the Germans can be more proud than of their political history in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. We cannot step out of the shadow which Hitler throws onto German history. But it will be easier to live with this shadow, if we, the Germans, find the courage to leave Bismarck's shadow behind us.