

## Two Germanies (1961-1989)

### Introduction

*The texts, images, and audiovisual materials included in this volume focus on similarities and differences between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) during approximately three decades of political, cultural, social, and physical division. While the approach is largely comparative, emphasis is placed not only on divergence but also on convergence, and on the ways in which developments in East and West were often intertwined. To guard against ideological bias, this volume introduces contradictory viewpoints on contentious questions. Each of the sixteen chapters includes examples or case studies from East and West, with each system being presented on its own terms. Due to the eventual success of the Western model, however, more space is allotted to events in the Federal Republic than the GDR. Finally, the volume seeks to introduce a broad range of topics through a diversity of both genres and voices. The featured sources include not only official decrees, political speeches, and newspaper commentaries, but also eyewitness and other personal accounts, as well as the occasional academic reflection.*

The three decades between the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 and its unexpected fall in November 1989 represent a paradoxical era in German history, one that eludes simple characterization.<sup>[1]</sup> On the one hand, the closing of the East German border deepened the division of the country because it ruptured communication and trade with the West. The physical impassability of the barrier implied a permanence that set the two German states onto separate paths of development. With rising socialism in the East and reviving capitalism in the West, daily life in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) diverged ever more sharply, and two different societies began to emerge. At the same time, however, the de facto recognition of East Germany's existence by the bigger and wealthier West (as part of a policy of rapprochement) softened the border by increasing travel, resuscitating commerce, and revitalizing cultural exchange. Just when it seemed that German division might become permanent, policy changes in the Soviet Union and its Eastern European client states gave rise to various points of connection, including debates between the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Socialist Unity Party (SED), city partnerships, and academic discussions.<sup>[2]</sup> Ironically, the very wall that once separated East and West Germans inspired the opposition that reunited them in the end.

Accounts of the lengthy division are especially contested because the ideological lessons drawn from it are anything but clear. The triumphalist narrative of Western victory in the Cold War tends to understate the challenges to political and economic consolidation in the FRG.<sup>[3]</sup> The Eastern story of failure is likewise too teleological, since it focuses on the endpoint of collapse and ignores intervening periods of stabilization and modernization. Moreover, narratives of both states need to address the “double burden” of two dictatorships in which Germans were materially involved—the Third Reich and the GDR.<sup>[4]</sup> Whereas leftist intellectuals primarily emphasize Hitler's atrocities in order to legitimize their anti-fascist stance, conservative commentators instead stress communist crimes so as to justify their anti-communist credo. A normative anti-totalitarianism equates both regimes abstractly as modern dictatorships that relied on mass mobilization, repression, and uncontrolled rule by a select elite. But instead of focusing on general commonalities, it is more useful to contrast the two regimes more precisely: the Nazis, for example, exhibited a much higher propensity to mass murder, whereas the GDR

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secret police achieved a deeper level of societal penetration.[5]

Historians of postwar Germany also confront the difficult choice of narrative structure. The division of Germany into two rival states makes it easy to frame the Western Federal Republic as part of NATO and the European Community, and the Eastern GDR as part of the Warsaw Pact and COMECON. Since their foreign and many of their domestic affairs during the Cold War were largely conditioned by their membership in these opposing ideological blocs, most of the literature treats the two German states as distinctive. Often, scholarship on one state tends to ignore the other almost entirely. Yet this approach fails to consider the numerous intersections and interconnections that existed in the two states' asymmetrical relationship.[6] The present text employs an integrated perspective that centers on shared challenges and varying responses in East and West.[7] Only where developments occurred primarily in one German state, e.g. the youth rebellion of 1968 in the West (Chapter 6) or Stasi repression in the East (Chapter 15), do the sources deal with one side alone.

The featured documents, images, and audiovisual sources touch on selected themes that characterize some of the major historical developments between the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and its fall in 1989.[8] Since this barrier literally cemented the division between the GDR and FRG, the first topic introduced in this volume is the relationship between the two states, which is discussed in Chapters 1, 2, and 8. A closely related theme, the competition between the communist and capitalist systems, informs the entire twenty-eight-year period and is treated in Chapters 7, 13, and 15. [9] Because global competition threatened prosperity on both sides of the Iron Curtain, both the free market and the planned economy needed to respond to changes in the international economy and migration in the years under consideration. These responses are taken up in Chapters 3 and 9.[10] Similarly, social conflicts such as the youth rebellion (Chapter 6) in the West, and new social movements, including environmentalism, feminism, and pacifism (Chapters 10 to 12), constitute another topic of inquiry. These trends and movements also gained a foothold in the East (Chapter 15).[11] Developments in popular culture, education, and historical and collective memory are also addressed in separate sections, specifically Chapters 3, 5, and 16.[12] Finally, the role of the two rival German states in Europe and the world is discussed in Chapters 4, 8, and 14.[13]

The primary sources were selected to allow students to make up their own minds about the fundamental issues raised above. Instead of being rigidly sorted into predetermined categories, the texts, images, and audiovisual materials are grouped into sixteen chapters, which, in turn, are arranged in rough chronological order, beginning with the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 and ending with its undermining during the summer and fall of 1989. To counteract the danger of ideological bias, the volume introduces contradictory viewpoints on especially contentious questions. Each chapter includes East and West German examples, with the goal being to highlight both similarity and difference. Due to the eventual success of the Western model, however, more space is allotted to events in the Federal Republic than the GDR. Finally, the volume seeks to introduce a broad range of topics through a diversity of materials, including official decrees, political speeches, newspaper commentaries, eyewitness and other personal accounts, and the occasional academic reflection.

## 1. Deepening Division

The building of the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961, sealed the division between the two German states by creating a virtually insurmountable barrier in Berlin. After the SED proved unable to stop growing numbers of East German citizens from fleeing to the FRG via West Berlin, the party took this desperate step—rationalized as “anti-Fascist protection”—to plug the last hole in the approximately 1,200-kilometer-long border between East and West Germany. After the Wall’s construction, Easterners could no longer leave, and Westerners could no longer visit; as a result, family ties and other personal relationships were ruptured. Those desperate souls who tried to cross the “death strip” of electrified fences, guard dogs, automatic rifles, and concrete blocks often paid with their lives, since GDR border

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guards were under an “order to shoot” on escapees. Although a trickle of inter-German trade continued thereafter, and Allied soldiers still moved through Checkpoint Charlie, the Wall severed other remaining inter-German institutional ties, such as the joint Olympic team and the Protestant Church.<sup>[14]</sup> It became the symbol of the Cold War division of the European continent.

Almost overnight, the Wall turned into a despised but pragmatically accepted border, suggesting to the East German population and Western observers that the SED dictatorship was there to stay. Some commentators therefore called it “the second founding of the GDR,” compelling both supporters and enemies to live with it. In order to strengthen existing cross-border ties, the FRG government in Bonn declared June 17th an official holiday in commemoration of the repression of their Eastern cousins. As another expression of solidarity, private citizens sent gift packages with sought-after consumer goods to their relatives in the East. In West Berlin, the Wall reinforced an island mentality of being an “outpost of freedom” in a communist sea.<sup>[15]</sup> Furthermore, the ugly façade inspired artists on the Western side to paint graffiti on its concrete slabs; among other types of imagery, the Wall featured calls for liberation and caricatures of Soviet-East German friendship, including a picture of the iconic kiss between Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker. Over time, the edifice lost some of its monstrosity, and ordinary Westerners began to camp in its shadow and plant gardens that were eventually populated by rabbits. Despite ongoing efforts to communicate in a shared language, the physical barrier alienated East Germans from West Germans, and vice versa, and succeeded in creating “a wall in the head.”<sup>[16]</sup>

It was only in the early 1970s, with the introduction of *Ostpolitik*, the SPD/FDP government’s more conciliatory policy toward East Germany and the communist bloc, that the border was softened enough to make it passable for larger numbers of people. As mayor of West Berlin (1957–1966), Willy Brandt (SPD) realized that the GDR would not disappear any time soon. Also clear was that the Western powers were unwilling to risk World War III to roll back the communist regime. After becoming chancellor in 1969, Brandt tapped into the growing interest among West German elites and the public alike for détente with the Soviet Union and East European neighbors such as Poland; in the process, he managed to isolate the staunchly anti-Western GDR government within its own camp. Under the premise, “two states in one nation,” the Basic Treaty of 1972 between the two German states recognized East Germany *de facto*, but maintained a *de jure* reservation in favor of the option of future reunification. This “policy of small steps” basically offered West German financial rewards in exchange for East German “humanitarian concessions,” so as to render the border more porous. As a result, some political prisoners were released, Western relatives were once again allowed to visit, and Eastern retirees were permitted to travel westward. Some human ties were thereby restored despite SED demarcation efforts.<sup>[17]</sup>

Until the summer of 1989, the division of Germany continued to deepen, even if the restoration of some connections kept it from becoming final. The commemoration of the June 17, 1953 uprising in the West became increasingly hollow, and the trend towards “bi-nationalism” strengthened during the 1980s. On both sides of the Wall, young people saw partition as the natural state of things; the peace movement considered the prevention of nuclear war more important than reunification, and the Western Left agitated for the recognition of a separate East German citizenship. Nonetheless, the CDU/FDP coalition led by Chancellor Helmut Kohl clung rhetorically to the imperative of unification; the all-German ministry continued to issue propaganda in support of this goal; and the Federal Constitutional Court upheld the constitutional mandate of reunification against all challenges. Erich Honecker’s 1987 visit to Bonn encapsulated this paradox: although the GDR leader was received by the FRG government with all honors of a separate head of state, Kohl stressed his hope of reestablishing German unity someday.<sup>[18]</sup>

## 2. System Competition

After the construction of the Berlin Wall, both German states managed to consolidate their opposing political systems, cementing the division. While the Bonn government used its democratic credentials to

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gain greater international respectability, the communist East Berlin regime continued with its dictatorial reign, even though its concrete policies had evolved somewhat. In the West, the rising prosperity of the “Economic Miracle” and the coming of age of the postwar generation gradually led to an “inner democratization” that adopted both the outer form and inner attitudes and values of a democratic political culture.<sup>[19]</sup> After refusing to relinquish power despite his advanced age, West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer (CDU) was ultimately tarnished by the 1962 *Spiegel* Affair, a violation of freedom of the press that ended his political career a year later. Though his successor, the market advocate Ludwig Erhard, was chosen from the Christian Democratic Party, the Liberal Party (FDP) eventually withdrew its support for Erhard, a successful economist but less than adept politician. As a result, in 1966, a grand coalition formed under Kurt-Georg Kiesinger (CDU) and Willy Brandt (SPD) and began to introduce changes in foreign and domestic policy.<sup>[20]</sup>

In East Germany, the Wall created a sense of normalization, since it precluded the alternative of escape. While opportunists flocked to the SED, many people withdrew into their private niches, and a few even dared to oppose the regime. In the early 1970s, SED leader Walter Ulbricht lost power because he experimented with economic reforms, rapprochement with West Germany, and an East German path to socialism, thereby alienating the Soviet leadership. Resenting these departures from the party line, the more orthodox Erich Honecker overthrew Ulbricht with Moscow’s help, promising a socialist form of consumerism under the slogan “the unity of social and economic policy.”<sup>[21]</sup> Under his leadership, the GDR achieved the highest standard of living in the Eastern bloc: pensions and child allowances increased, better housing became available, and a wider assortment of consumer goods appeared in stores. But his implicit social contract with the citizenry—that material benefits would arise from political acquiescence—raised expectations that could not be fulfilled in the long run. Emphasizing consumer goods over capital investments cost money and did nothing to address lagging productivity and outdated technology, the modernization of which required foreign loans that ultimately bankrupted the GDR.<sup>[22]</sup> Despite his relatively benign image, Honecker actually reinforced the dictatorial character of the communist regime by expanding the secret police. But unfulfilled political and economic promises, and greater exposure to the West ultimately led to cultural criticism and dissatisfaction among the working class.

In contrast, the formation of the Brandt-Scheel government in the West transferred power to the opposition two decades after the founding of the Federal Republic. After together winning a bare majority in the 1969 election, the Social Democrats and Free Democrats agreed to form the first social-liberal coalition government at the federal level. At home, the new chancellor Willy Brandt embarked upon an audacious reform policy under a slogan—“Dare More Democracy”—that appealed especially to rebellious younger voters. As part of this policy, the SPD/FDP government expanded the welfare state, permitted generous wage increases, widened educational opportunities, and founded numerous new universities. Abroad, the social-liberal coalition promoted reconciliation with the Soviet Union and its Eastern neighbors through a new policy based on non-aggression treaties, *de facto* recognition of the GDR, and the extraction of humanitarian concessions through the application of economic leverage. Even though a spy scandal forced Brandt to resign in 1974, these departures from Cold War anti-communism showed that the FRG’s parliamentary system was capable of inaugurating more fundamental changes than the rigid GDR regime.<sup>[23]</sup> Moreover, the gradual rise in prosperity seemed to confirm the superiority of democracy.

As a result of economic stagnation and ideological erosion, Marxism-Leninism in the East lost much of its political attraction during the 1970s and 1980s. It was one thing for workers to find it difficult to live in a “scarcity economy.” But it was another thing entirely when Warsaw Pact troops rolled into Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968 to put down Alexander Dubček’s “socialism with a human face.” At that point, it became clear to GDR intellectuals that the communist regimes behind the Iron Curtain rested more on coercion than popular consent.<sup>[24]</sup> Even convinced Marxists lost faith in the superiority

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of their socialist utopia. Increasingly, dissidents like Robert Havemann criticized the SED; an independent peace movement sprang up in the shadow of the Protestant Church, and a counter-cultural youth scene emerged as well as a community of engaged artists. For communist leaders, including the GDR leadership, signing the Helsinki Accords in 1975 meant that citizens could point to their governments' agreement to more porous borders and respect for human rights. Massive Stasi repression forced oppositional groups to realize the importance of Western-style civil rights.<sup>[25]</sup> In contrast, the Social Democrats in the West, led by chancellor Helmut Schmidt, managed to reconcile the incentives of market competition with the provision of social security in a reined-in welfare state.<sup>[26]</sup>

### 3. Economic Strains

During the 1960s, the "Economic Miracle" of rapid growth above and beyond postwar reconstruction propelled most West Germans into a full-fledged consumer society. Pressure from the trade union movement meant that wages gradually increased and that working hours shrank to about forty per week, freeing Saturdays for leisure. As a result of rising prosperity, people indulged in culinary delicacies, purchased new clothes, upgraded their furniture, and traveled abroad, gratifying desires that had gone unsatisfied during the long years of war and postwar privation. Moreover, West Germans were finally able to purchase new durables such as vacuum cleaners, water heaters, gas stoves, washing machines, radio consoles, television sets, and other goods that either eased housework or provided home entertainment. With incomes rising, more and more consumers could afford motor vehicles, starting with mopeds. The pinnacle of mobility was represented by automobiles such as the VW beetle, which became the icon of the so-called miracle years. After strenuous saving efforts, many West Germans even managed to build a house of their own, sometimes with a garden as a green oasis. Limited by their less productive economy, East Germans followed the same consumer patterns, albeit with considerable delay and on a smaller scale.<sup>[27]</sup>

In the West, economic expansion had rested on a steady supply of cheap labor, mostly from ethnic kin from the East. When the building of the Wall stemmed this influx, the Federal Republic started recruiting foreign laborers, not least to keep women out of the workforce and tied to traditional homemaking roles. Because these migrant laborers were supposed to be only temporary, they were euphemistically called "guest workers." A rotating contract system brought several million Italians, Spaniards, Yugoslavs and eventually Turks to the Federal Republic to do the heavy and unpleasant tasks that local workers disliked and to help support the expanding economy. Although many *Gastarbeiter* eventually went back home, others brought their families and turned West Germany into an inadvertent immigration country. When the economic boom ended and unemployment grew in the 1970s, xenophobic attitudes gained ground, leaving immigration and integration issues—which were further complicated by asylum seekers and ethnic German remigrants [*Spätaussiedler*—unresolved throughout the 1980s.<sup>[28]</sup> Eventually even East Germany recruited foreign laborers, mostly from developing countries such as Vietnam, but their lives remained severely restricted and their impact on society and the economy was marginal.<sup>[29]</sup>

The oil shocks of the 1970s ended the long growth period by dramatically raising the price of energy. Whereas the slowdown in the mid-1960s had already put a dent in the "social market economy," the "concerted action" of government stimulation and labor peace, orchestrated by Economics Minister Karl Schiller, restarted the expansion. But the over-heated public spending and double-digit wage increases of the early 1970s came to a sudden stop when the cartel of oil-producing countries (OPEC) raised the price of fossil fuel over ten times in 1973. The result was a steep recession, rising unemployment, and vexing stagflation. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, an astute economic manager, froze the expansion of welfare benefits and halted wage increases. Although Keynesian counter-cyclical public spending managed to reignite modest expansion, the second oil price increase of 1979 further stalled economic growth. Decision-makers failed to understand that the intractable problems were also a result of a structural transformation to a service economy and of sharpening competition from the Far East, leading to the collapse of traditional major industries such as textiles, steel production, shipbuilding, and the



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like.[\[30\]](#)

One way out of the structural impasse was economic integration, since the expansion of the domestic market was supposed to produce economies of scale. The successive lifting of internal tariffs and the erection of a common external tariff in the European Economic Community in the 1960s was a boon to West German industry, which increased its trade with France, Italy, and the Benelux countries. The lavish food subsidies also helped cushion the difficult transition of agriculture to larger scale production. Moreover, the friendship between Valéry Giscard d'Éstaing and Helmut Schmidt dampened the effects of the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system and the subsequent monetary speculation through the creation of the European Monetary System in 1979. Compared to other Western countries, the FRG therefore managed the dual challenges of energy scarcity and global competition relatively successfully. Even if below world market Soviet energy prices initially helped prolong the GDR's survival, cuts in Russian oil deliveries and price increases eventually threatened the basis of East German exports of refined derivatives to the West. Moreover, the benefits of the COMECON for the GDR were much smaller, since trade between its members was less extensive and interactions were based on Soviet dominance.[\[31\]](#)

## 4. New Social Movements

In the late 1960s, both German states faced the outbreak of unanticipated social conflicts, which centered on the generational revolt in the West and the reform of socialism in the East. In the Federal Republic, students rebelled against the authoritarian control of their elders, educational overcrowding, society's failure to confront the Nazi past, and American atrocities in Vietnam. Restless youths drew their inspiration from dissident Marxists of the New Left, anarchistic provocateurs, and radical democrats. They imported many protest methods, such as sit-ins or teach-ins, from the U.S. civil rights movement and excelled in the non-violent provocation of authorities. After police brutality caused the death of student Benno Ohnesorg during a 1967 demonstration against the Persian Shah's visit to West Berlin, a mass student protest movement sprang up in the FRG. But even vigorous extra-parliamentary opposition [*Außerparlamentarische Opposition* or APO] failed to prevent the extension of controversial emergency powers to the executive. When mass protest failed, some radicals opted to follow Che Guevara's urban guerilla example and engaged in the terrorism of the Red Army Faction, prompting a massive state response. The East German counterpart was a fascination with efforts to reform socialism in neighboring Czechoslovakia (the Prague Spring) and the subsequent suppression of that movement in August 1968.[\[32\]](#)

One important result of this generational revolt was the rise of a new feminism in the West. During a controversial meeting of the Socialist Student Union (SDS), some women, no longer content to make coffee, demanded to participate in their own right. They called for full gender equality, which included the ability to control their own sexuality through easy access to oral contraception and legal abortion, and equal treatment in educational institutions and the workplace. Encouraged by theorists in the U.S., these new West German feminists created their own organizations, founded radical magazines such as *Emma*, and sometimes made their lesbianism apparent in public. Eventually they succeeded gaining political concessions such as shelters for battered women, *Frauenbeauftragte* (women's representatives) in public institutions, quota systems in political parties, and equal-hiring mandates. The GDR took pride in offering even more support for women, since the SED provided universal childcare, and eased restrictions on divorce, abortion, and the like. However, Eastern policy sought to bring women into the workforce to compensate for losses of manpower to the West and did little to ease the dual burden of work and family duties.[\[33\]](#)

Another result of the youth rebellion was the formation of a broad environmental movement in the Federal Republic. The traditional concern for nature deepened in the 1960s in response to urban sprawl and mass motorization, both of which seemed to bear out the Club of Rome's warnings about the limits

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of growth. Local citizen initiatives began to agitate for the preservation of particularly scenic spots, such as the Wutach gorge in the Black Forest, which was threatened by a new power dam. With the support of farmers, leftist youths started to voice apocalyptic fears about potential nuclear power plant accidents. Subsequently, they began to oppose nuclear plant construction and engaged in a series of sometimes violent clashes in places like Wyhl in Baden. By the end of the 1970s, these local initiatives converged in the foundation of a new political party, eventually called the Green Party, which loved to provoke the staid FRG establishment. Despite early legislation, it took until the 1980s for environmental groups to emerge in the GDR and to protest the devastation wrought by strip-mining, lignite burning, and chemical plants in regions around Bitterfeld. The repressive response of the SED to their complaints left them little choice but to adopt a dissident stance.<sup>[34]</sup>

A final aspect of civic mobilization was the emergence of a robust peace movement that eventually spilled across the German-German border. In both German states, the fear of war was particularly strong, because the Cold War had concentrated an enormous number of troops and weaponry, including tactical nuclear bombs, on both sides of the Iron Curtain. NATO's Dual-Track Decision of 1979 responded to the stationing of Soviet ballistic missiles with the two-pronged approach of deploying Western counterparts and offering negotiations. This new phase in the arms race triggered broad public agitation in West Germany: trade unions, churches, and intellectuals spoke out against the stationing of additional rockets, with the protests culminating in a 1981 demonstration of 300,000 citizens in Bonn. The trauma of World War II had produced widespread public opposition to rearmament and led to leniency toward conscientious objection to military service, in response to which an alternative civil service was instituted. On the other side of the border, the GDR leadership cloaked itself in the mantle of peace, while militarizing its own society through mandatory paramilitary training in schools. Under the slogan "swords into plowshares," an independent East German peace movement formed in the shadow of the Protestant Church and criticized the ballistic nuclear arms race.<sup>[35]</sup>

## 5. Modernist Uncertainties

In the cultural realm, the 1960s witnessed the sweeping triumph of modernism in high culture in the West and eventually in East Germany as well. Rejecting the petit bourgeois taste of the Nazis, West German intellectuals fully embraced modernity, in terms of both style and content, as they sought to reclaim their standing in the international community. Publicly supported "high-brow" institutions, such as museums, theatres, and concert halls, were dominated by a cosmopolitan avant-garde that promoted Abstract Expressionism, the theatre of the absurd, and experimental music—tastes that only sophisticates could appreciate. Every five years, the massive art exhibition *Documenta* assembled the exponents of cutting-edge innovation in painting and sculpture, experimenting with non-representational forms. At the same time, the émigrés of the Frankfurt School of philosophy and criticism returned to the FRG and introduced Western social science methods so as to advance democracy.<sup>[36]</sup> In contrast, the GDR initially chose the populist representational style of Socialist Realism, rejecting abstraction as bourgeois decadence. Only after a considerable struggle did modernist forms also prevail behind the Iron Curtain in furniture, home design, and apartment building.<sup>[37]</sup>

During the 1960s, the general public made a pronounced turn toward popular culture, disseminated by transistor radios, color television sets, long-playing records, tape decks, and the like. These devices promoted Western imports, such as rock-and-roll music, Hollywood movies, and soap operas, and in the process made American lifestyles, as pictured in glossy magazines, synonymous with the modern version of the good life. While public radio and government-sponsored television continued to broadcast educational programs, most audience members favored uncomplicated entertainment in the form of crime series, rock music, or sports coverage. In the West, conservative elites were ambivalent about what they perceived as "Americanization," though most youths embraced these styles as liberating and cosmopolitan. A more provincial GDR leadership tried to resist the blandishments of the "class enemy" by offering its own version of popular culture with socialist ideological content. In order to slow the

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incursion of Western rock music and blue jeans, the SED promoted anti-imperialist liberation songs and put forth its own sports heroes as role models. [38]

Cultural and attitudinal change was partly fueled by the massive expansion of secondary schooling and higher education. In the Federal Republic, educator and philosopher Georg Picht criticized the “educational deficit,” and social scientist and liberal politician Ralf Dahrendorf called education a “civic right,” demanding an increase in secondary schooling and fairer opportunities for disadvantaged students. A move away from discipline toward open and critical engagement left a lasting imprint on classroom instruction. By the 1970s, massive investment in teacher recruitment and school construction meant that about half of an age cohort could enter high school [*Gymnasium*] and one-quarter could attend a university. Educational reformers also created comprehensive schools [*Gesamtschulen*], all-day schools [*Ganztagsschulen*], and offered more choice in curricula. But by the 1980s, the impetus was spent; a lack of funding signaled a return to overcrowding, and student participation in decision-making processes was rolled back by the Federal Constitutional Court. In the GDR, socialists instead preferred polytechnical education, incorporating elements of vocational training that favored children from workers’ and peasants’ families. The third university reform of the late 1960s was a curious mixture of overdue modernization and politicization that increased SED control. [39]

The rapid pace of social and cultural modernization eventually provoked a series of identity debates about the German past, present, and future. In the Federal Republic, writers such as Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass authored short stories and picaresque novels that explored popular participation in Nazi crimes. Moreover, social scientists such as Theodor Adorno and Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich warned of a tendency to gloss over an unpleasant past and called for moral renewal. Media broadcasts such as the American mini-series “Holocaust” continued to remind a reluctant populace of the horrific crimes of the Third Reich. At the same time, President Richard von Weizsäcker called for greater sympathy for Nazi victims and less emphasis on German suffering. An academic debate, called the *Historikerstreit*, tackled the issue of German guilt and emphasized the singularity of the Holocaust. Critical intellectuals embraced these ideas, but conservative members of the older generation continued to reject them. [40] In the GDR, the Honecker regime tried to broaden its popular base beyond anti-fascism by embracing some previously criticized figures, such as the sixteenth-century religious reformer Martin Luther, the Prussian king Frederick the Great, and the unifier of Germany Otto von Bismarck. Although they rejected nationalism, writers on both sides of the Iron Curtain used the term “cultural nation” to express a shared sense of Germanness, based on language, traditions, and culture. [41]

## 6. Europe and the World

Under the protective umbrella of the U.S., West Germany gradually reemerged on the world stage as the democratic successor to the Third Reich. The GDR, for its part, wanted nothing to do with the barbarous Nazi past. In the first decade of its existence, the FRG often behaved like a “star pupil,” striving to become a carbon copy of America. Yet as early as the 1960s serious conflicts arose during the dollar crisis, when President Lyndon Johnson insisted that Bonn pay more for the stationing of U.S. troops. President Richard Nixon was rather suspicious of the FRG’s efforts to resume an independent course with *Ostpolitik*, its own version of détente. Despite German gratitude for American support in the postwar period, relations deteriorated further under Jimmy Carter, when Helmut Schmidt lectured the U.S. president on how to deal with the economic upheaval of the energy crisis. Only when Helmut Kohl became chancellor did the climate improve again, since his soft neoliberal turn evoked sympathy among President Ronald Reagan’s neo-conservatives. Aided by the establishment of a U.S. embassy in East Berlin in 1974, SED leader Erich Honecker tried to improve relations with Washington in the 1980s by inviting an American rabbi to work in East Berlin in the hopes of having the GDR symbolically recognized by a state visit. [42]

Regardless of political party, every West German government strongly supported European integration,



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since close cooperation with Western neighbors allowed for the pursuit economic growth, an escape from the shadow of the Nazi past, and membership in the international community. Though some critics of the Common Market objected to having to pay too much and to playing second fiddle to France, most businesses profited in practice from the creation of a larger market, and the cloak of multilateralism made the pursuit of German economic interests more acceptable. Protected by the security guarantee of NATO, Bonn could become an “economic giant” while maintaining its international image as a “political dwarf.” Conflicts arose only when French President Charles de Gaulle’s preference for a “Europe of the fatherlands” stalled progress on integration and his veto delayed the entry of Great Britain, Ireland, and Denmark into the Common Market until 1973. Hence, Bonn supported the further expansion of the renamed European Community into the Mediterranean, so as to shore up post-dictatorial democracies in Greece, Spain, and Portugal. But it took until the late 1980s for integration to resume its momentum with the Single European Act.<sup>[43]</sup> Though the GDR was a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), it derived fewer benefits from it.

Compared with integration, reconciliation with Eastern neighbors was more complicated and contentious, since memories of wartime suffering ran deep and the GDR eschewed any rapprochement. As a precondition of improved relations, Bonn had to distance itself from the agitation of millions of expellees from Central and Eastern Europe who demanded a return to their lost homelands. The FRG also had to abandon the Hallstein Doctrine, which stipulated that West Germany would sever ties with any state that recognized the GDR because its government was not based on free elections. The admission of both West and East Germany into the United Nations in 1973 was the logical extension of the new policy of rapprochement, though it did not put a stop to ideological competition by both states in developing countries. By accepting the postwar frontiers as immutable in the Helsinki Agreement of 1975, the West German government signaled to Soviet client states in Eastern Europe that the Soviet propaganda claim of “revanchism” was fallacious. However, adherence to the belief that only “change through rapprochement” could soften the Iron Curtain ran the risk of temporarily stabilizing the GDR and cementing German territorial losses without a quid pro quo. Still hoping for a roll back of communism by force, the conservative opposition in Bonn was therefore unwilling to gamble on such an improvement of relations. Nonetheless, in the long run, the social-liberal *Ostpolitik* was a resounding success since its “aggression in slippers” [*Aggression auf Filzlatschen*] destabilized the GDR internally, while reassuring Eastern neighbors that reconciliation with Germany would open their path to returning to Western Europe.<sup>[44]</sup>

The result of Western integration and Eastern reconciliation was the re-emergence of West Germany as the legitimate German state on the global stage. By the end of the 1980s, the GDR had earned its place as world’s tenth-largest industrial nation and could boast of recognition by well over one hundred countries. Nonetheless, it always remained in the shadow of its larger Western cousin. In some leftist regimes in developing countries, East Berlin was more popular, since it sent civilian helpers and military advisors who shared the same ideology. But for most economic and political partners, Bonn had deeper pockets for aid and a less intrusive ideology. Due to the limited size and “citizen in uniform” character of the Bundeswehr, West Germany acted as a “civilian power” and opted to advance its interests without resorting to military force. Instead, Bonn operated within the multilateral settings of the European Union, NATO, and the U.N., preferring negotiation and financial incentives to get its way. In international conferences on a range of issues, West Germany was increasingly consulted. By presenting a self-critical image of the FRG, the Goethe-Institute, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Humboldt Foundation, and other West German organizations operating abroad promoted a cultural policy that was more credible than the ideological propaganda of the East.<sup>[45]</sup>

## 7. Stability or Decline

The period between 1961 and 1989 was marked by a paradoxical reversal of fortunes from deepening hostilities to a rapprochement that prepared for eventual unification. In international affairs, the

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building of the Wall, the entry of both German states into the United Nations in 1973, and the international recognition of the GDR seemed to seal the division of the continent into two hostile blocs. At the same time, however, West German *Deutschland- und Ostpolitik* softened the barrier by increasing human contacts, while making the SED dependent on generous Western credits. Though the GDR embarked on a deliberate policy of demarcation [*Abgrenzung*]*—i.e., distancing its citizens from the subversive influences of the West—both states sought to counteract superpower tensions by embracing a “community of responsibility” for peace. The recognition of European borders diminished fears of German revanchism, and the Helsinki Accords of 1975 protected those human rights that allowed Eastern dissidents vital breathing space. The very acceptance of the Cold War order by the Federal Republic restored the forms of East-West communication and cooperation that paved the way for its peaceful overthrow.*[\[46\]](#)

Domestic affairs also developed in surprising directions as the embattled Federal Republic of the 1960s reinforced its legitimacy, while the seemingly solid GDR started to crumble. During the 1960s, the New Left mounted a vigorous critique of West German authoritarianism, calling for more participatory democracy as well as economic equality and social security. Yet the Bonn Republic managed to confront the generational revolt and the onslaught of Red Army Faction (RAF) terrorism with a mixture of reforms and police action. As a result, civic protest actually strengthened parliamentary democracy by making it more responsive. In contrast, the military repression of reform efforts in Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact dashed hopes for Marxist self-renewal among East German communists, thereby undercutting the utopian attraction of the ideology. Moreover, Honecker’s subsequent “welfare dictatorship” proved economically stagnant in the long run, and the majority of East Germans eventually lost faith in the material promises of the SED.[\[47\]](#) Although citizens found ways to accommodate and circumvent the unbridled control of the state, the denial of basic freedoms such as expression, assembly, and travel provoked more and more dissidents to action.

In the economic realm, the West was also more successful than the East in addressing the unexpected challenges of technological innovation and structural transformation. During the 1976 election, the lingering afterglow of the FRG’s postwar boom meant that the SPD could still campaign under the “German model” of labor peace and corporate co-determination. But the oil shocks of 1973 and 1979, the shift of basic manufacturing to the Asian tiger states, and the transition to a service economy devastated the traditional industries of textiles, coal mining, steel production, and ship building while triggering rising structural unemployment. In the GDR, huge industrial enterprises, called *Kombinate*, failed to adapt to a changing international economic environment; additionally, the extension of welfare benefits and the shift to consumer goods overtaxed the system. Through regulated competition the FRG managed to make a painful transition from a high-industrial to a post-industrial economy, whereas GDR planning failed in the transformation to high technology.[\[48\]](#)

When confronted with unexpected social changes, the pluralist society of the West proved more adaptable than the tightly controlled SED system of the East. Although elders on both sides of the border were shocked by the perceived garishness of American popular culture, liberal elites in the West eventually managed to tolerate rock music and Hollywood films, whereas censors in the East reacted repressively, thereby creating never-ending conflicts over politicized lifestyle choices.[\[49\]](#) Regardless of place or ideology, patriarchal males resented women’s attempts to gain equal rights. In the West, however, feminists were able to articulate a theoretical critique and to organize. This was less true in the East, where paternalist support systems controlled and diverted the political influence of women. Although neither state relished criticism by environmentalists, their responses differed: FRG courts offered protesters at least some measure of protection against police brutality, whereas GDR protesters were criminalized. Similarly, most politicians and soldiers on both sides of the border regarded the peace movement as overly idealistic, but pacifists in the West were able to protest openly while those in the East were repressed.[\[50\]](#)

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For all of its commercialization, Westernized high and pop culture ultimately generated a more attractive version of modern German identity than the Sovietized educational dictatorship of the GDR. In the long run, Western self-questioning (prompted by calls for a more thorough reckoning with the Nazi past) proved more successful in establishing respect for human rights than the mandated anti-fascism of the East. Even if openness to international influences sometimes threatened to suppress “German” traits, receptivity to American, British, and French ideas and styles put an end to the notion of a separate German path [*Sonderweg*] and anchored the Federal Republic culturally and politically in the West. In contrast, Marxist internationalism, promoted by the Soviet Union, was only skin-deep and failed to eradicate a feeling of German superiority in the Eastern bloc. Ironically, Western observers such as Günter Gaus viewed the GDR as the more traditionally “German” state. In the end, long-term learning processes prompted by the horrors of the Third Reich and the Second World War restored a vibrant civil society in the West that contrasted favorably with the repressiveness of the socialist experiment in the East.[51]

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