

Germany Between the Wars

With the conclusion of World War I in 1918, Germany entered a period of relative destabilization. The Treaty of Versailles, which ended the Great War, imposed a harsh peace on Germany. The government of Germany was then reorganized into a democracy which became known as the Weimar Republic.

Germany struggled economically following the end of WWI. Many people were without work, and the newly formed democracy appeared inadequate to the people as their situation did not improve. Depression struck Germany, causing wide spread poverty, hyper inflation, and unemployment. During this period of desperation, the National Socialist German Workers Party (the Nazi Party) was formed, primarily by unemployed WWI veterans. Nazi ideology was anti-Communist, antisemitic, racist, nationalistic, imperialistic, and militaristic. In a short time, the Nazis gained strength and influence and began to revolutionize German society.

Throughout this tumultuous time, Germany maintained its position as one of the most cultured countries of Europe, home to many renowned artists, musicians and writers. Germany was at the cutting edge in science and medicine. Because of the Jewish commitment to education and Germany's integration throughout the generations, Jews played a large role in the cultural life of the country. Unfortunately, this situation would radically change as the Nazis grew in power.



Cecil Gelbart at work in his chemistry lab in Hamburg, Germany. 1933-38
USHMM, Courtesy of Peter Gelbart

Vocabulary

Antisemitism: discriminating against or persecuting Jews.

Communism: a system of common ownership of property.

Imperialism: the policy of seeking to dominate the affairs of a weaker country.

Militarism: a policy of aggressive military preparedness.

Nationalism: extreme devotion to one's nation.

Racism: the practice of racial discrimination.

Reparations: compensation, as for war damage.

The Treaty of Versailles June 28, 1919

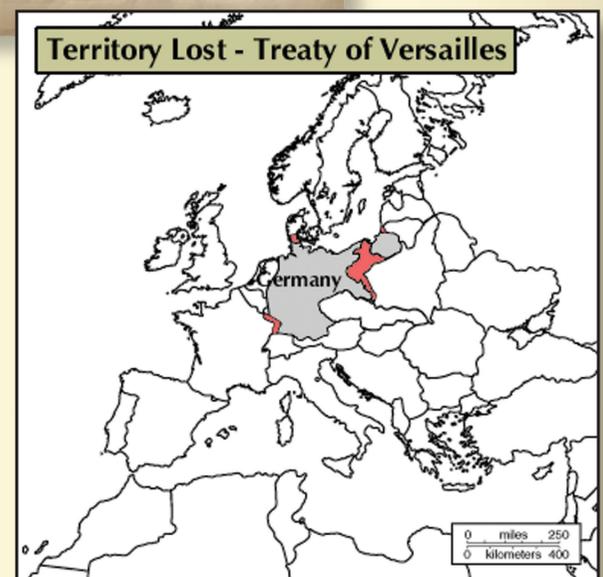
Article 119 *Germany renounces...all her rights and titles over her overseas possessions.*

Article 160 *The German army must not exceed 100,000...and shall be devoted exclusively to the maintenance of order within the territory and to control of the frontiers.*

Article 231 *Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage...as a consequence of the war imposed by the aggression of Germany and her allies.*

Article 232 *Germany will make compensation for all the damage done to the civilian population and to their property.*

Germany also gave up control of land in Europe, including Alsace-Lorraine, the Saar Basin, and parts of Belgium and Luxembourg.



A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust. The Florida Center for Instructional Technology
College of Education, University of South Florida.



Ernst Flatau, German-Jewish soldier in WWI, received the Iron Cross. Courtesy of Fred Flatau

“We had deep roots in Germany. For hundreds of years my family had settled here. Both of my grandfathers had been soldiers in the Prussian army and my father...was a conscript during the First World War and served from the beginning to the end.

Berlin, before the Hitler time, was a wonderful city, one of the centers of so-called ‘European Civilization.’ There was music, opera houses, theaters, literature. Jews participated in all of it. Jewish life was very active in our community; there were Jewish organizations for your care from the cradle to the grave.”

Norbert Wollheim
Berlin, Germany
Into the Arms of Strangers

