Understanding the bewildering events of one’s own lifetime is a challenge, because this is a history whose embers still smolder, as the cliché would have it. Contemporary commentators struggle with incomplete access to documents, must evaluate developments before their full consequences are known and have to navigate in a highly politicized terrain. But there are also compensatory advantages to temporal proximity, such as a greater sense of urgency, a chance to interview key actors, and a deeper understanding due to personal experience.¹ Media presentations on television, in films and in sound bites, the testimonies of eye-witnesses, and the memorialization in museums and historic sites guarantee a strong public interest in recent events. But intense attention also requires students of the recent past to make special efforts to maintain standards of scholarly objectivity.²

Contemporary German history is especially contested, since it has to deal with the “double burden” of two dictatorships in which Germans were materially involved – the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic (GDR).³ While leftist intellectuals primarily emphasize Hitler’s atrocities in order to legitimize their anti-Fascist stance, conservative commentators instead stress Communist depredations so as to justify their credo of anti-Communism. A normative anti-totalitarianism tends to equate both dictatorships abstractly, but it would be more useful to compare dictatorial regimes concretely to establish their similarities and differences – the two regimes employed similar tools of repression, but the Nazis were more inclined to murder, and the East German secret police managed a much deeper penetration into citizens’ daily lives.⁴

Historians of postwar Germany also confront the difficult question of narrative structure. The division into two rivaling states militates in favor of a separate presentation of the Western Federal Republic of Germany, integrated into the NATO alliance as well as the European Community, and the Eastern German Democratic Republic, tied to the Warsaw Pact and COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance). Since their developments were largely conditioned by their membership in opposite ideological blocs during the Cold War, most of the literature treats them as distinctive political systems largely without reference to each other.⁵ Yet this division fails to reflect the many rivalries and interconnections between
the Federal Republic and the GDR that dominated their asymmetrical relationship. A more productive approach would follow an integrated perspective that centers on the shared challenges and different responses in East and West.  

A final difficulty in dealing with postwar German history is the selection of an appropriate thematic focus that highlights some of its central developments. Should a historian stress the post-catastrophic learning processes that gradually "Westernized" the Federal Republic, Americanized its popular culture and consumption patterns, and helped it to reestablish a vibrant civil society? Such a focus would leave out the GDR's failed "Sovietization" effort, which remained superficial and was rejected as soon as the East German population had a chance to do so. Or should a historian instead stress newer transnational developments like the ebbing of the Cold War, the transition to post-industrial economic structures, and the emergence of postmodernism as a cultural trend? While the former contributed to the economic collapse of the GDR, the latter hardly managed to penetrate the Iron Curtain.  

The subsequent documents should allow students to make up their own mind about the fundamental issues raised above. Instead of sticking rigidly to predetermined categories, these sources focus on sixteen major clusters of developments, which are roughly arranged in chronological order, beginning with the aftermath of building the Berlin Wall in August 1961 and ending with its undermining during the summer of 1989. To counteract the danger of ideological bias, this volume includes statements of contradictory viewpoints on especially contested questions. Within each cluster, the selections include East and West German examples so as to highlight their similarities and differences; but due to the eventual success of the Western model, more space is allotted to events in the Federal Republic than the GDR. Finally, this volume seeks to present a broad picture of events and commentary, starting with international and domestic politics, but extending to the economy, society, and culture, easing the challenge of thematic focus by offering a plurality of materials.

1. The Deepening of Division

The building of the Wall on August 13, 1961, sealed the division between the two German states by creating a virtually insurmountable barrier in Berlin. Since the Socialist Unity Party (SED) had been unable to stop an increasing number of its citizens from deserting, this desperate measure, rationalized as "anti-Fascist protection," sought to plug the last hole in the approximately 1,200 kilometer long border between East and West. After its construction, Easterners could no longer leave, and Westerners could no longer visit; family
ties and other personal relationships were thereby ruptured. Those desperate souls who tried to cross the "death-strip" of electric fences, guard dogs, automatic rifles, and concrete blocks often paid with their lives. Though a trickle of inter-German trade continued and Allied soldiers still moved through Checkpoint Charlie, the building of the Wall ruptured the remaining institutional links, such as the joint Olympic team and the Protestant Church. The Wall therefore became the symbol of the Cold War division of the European continent.

It was first with Deutschland- und Ostpolitik (the conciliatory policy of the Social Democratic Party/Free Democratic Party [SPD/FDP] government toward East Germany and the Communist East) that the border was softened enough to make it passable for larger numbers of people. As mayor of West Berlin, Willy Brandt had realized that the GDR would not disintegrate any time soon and that the Western powers were unwilling to risk a third World War to roll back the Communist regime. When he became Chancellor in 1969, he built on growing sentiment among elites and the wider public to pursue a policy of détente with the Soviet Union and East Central European neighbor states, so as to isolate the GDR within its own camp. Though the Basic Treaty (1972) between the two German states recognized East Germany de facto, it maintained a de jure reservation in favor of the option of future reunification. This "policy of small steps" basically offered various West German financial rewards in exchange for East German humanitarian concessions so as to render the border more porous. As a result, political prisoners were released, Western relatives once again allowed to visit, and Eastern retirees permitted to travel westward. Some human ties were thereby reestablished despite the SED's demarcation efforts.

Until the summer of 1989, the division of Germany seemed to deepen, even if some remaining connections kept it from becoming final. The West German commemoration of the June 17, 1953, uprising in East Berlin was supposed to maintain a sense of unity, but the trend toward "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 Christian Democratic Union/Free Democratic Party (CDU/FDP) coalition led by Helmut Kohl clung rhetorically to the imperative of unification; the all-German ministry continued to mount propaganda for this goal; and the Federal Constitutional Court upheld the constitutional mandate of reunification against challenges. Erich Honecker's 1987 visit to Bonn symbolized both trends: the SED leader was received with all the honors of a head of state, while his host stressed German unity.
2. The Conflict between Democracy and Dictatorship

After the construction of the Berlin Wall both German states had a chance to consolidate their political systems. Whereas the Bonn government gained in international respectability and democratic credentials, the East Berlin regime continued its dictatorial reign, even though its concrete policies also evolved. In 1961, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer refused to relinquish power in spite of his advanced age, but he ultimately faltered over the "Spiegel-Affair" of 1962, which involved a violation of freedom of the press that ended his political career a year later. Though his successor, Ludwig Erhard, was still chosen from the Christian Democratic Union, the Free Democrats eventually withdrew support for this successful economist but less adept politician, and a grand coalition under Kurt-Georg Kiesinger (CDU) and Willy Brandt (SPD) ensued in 1966. When SED leader Walter Ulbricht experimented with economic reforms, a permissive cultural policy, and a rapprochement with West Germany, the more orthodox Erich Honecker overthrew him with Soviet help. The ascent of this anti-Fascist resistance fighter reinforced the dictatorial character of the Communist regime.

In contrast, the formation of the Brandt-Scheel government affected a complete transfer of power to the opposition two decades after the founding of the Federal Republic. After a close election in 1969, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Free Democrats (FDP) agreed to form the first social-liberal coalition at the federal level. Willy Brandt's domestic counterpart to his reconciliation with the East was a thorough reform policy under the slogan "dare more democracy," which appealed especially to younger voters. As part of this policy, the SPD/FDP government expanded the welfare state, permitted generous wage increases, widened educational opportunities, and founded new universities. At the same time, Honecker promoted a communist form of consumerism in the East under the slogan "the unity of economic and social policy." The implicit social contract with the citizenry was supposed to deliver material benefits in return for political acquiescence, but it raised expectations that could not be maintained in the long run. In addition, favoring consumer goods over capital investments cost a good deal of money, requiring foreign loans that ultimately helped bankrupt the GDR.

As a result of economic stagnation and ideological erosion, Marxism-Leninism in the East lost much of its ideological credibility during the 1970s and 1980s. While the lagging economic performance frustrated workers, the repression of Alexander Dubček's "socialism with a human face" in Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in the summer of 1968 showed GDR intellectuals that the Communist regimes rested more on coercion than popular consent. Even convinced Communists thereby lost faith in the superiority 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 as well as an artistic community began to develop. Ironically, massive Stasi repression forced opposition groups to realize the importance of Western-style civil rights. In contrast, the Social Democrats in the West managed to reconcile the incentives of market competition with the provision of social security in an expanded welfare state.

3. Strains in the Social Market Economy

In the West, the Economic Miracle of the 1950s had rested on a steady supply of labor, mostly from ethnic kin from the East. When the building of the Wall closed off this influx, the Federal Republic started to recruit foreign laborers in order to keep women out of the workforce and tied to traditional roles. Because migrants were supposed to be only temporary, they were euphemistically called "guest workers" [Gastarbeiter]. This rotating contract system brought several million Italians, Spaniards, Yugoslavs, and eventually also Turks to the Federal Republic to do the heavy and unpleasant tasks that local workers disliked. Although many Gastarbeiter went home, others brought their families and thereby turned West Germany into an inadvertent immigration country. When the economic boom ended and unemployment grew, xenophobic attitudes gained ground; throughout the 1980s, immigration and integration remained unresolved issues. Eventually, even East Germany recruited some foreign laborers, mostly from developing countries such as Vietnam, but their numbers always remained severely restricted and their impact on society and the economy was marginal.

The oil shocks of the 1970s ended the long growth period. Already the slowdown in the mid-1960s put a dent in the "social market economy," but the "concerted action" of government stimulation and labor peace, orchestrated by Economics Minister Karl Schiller, restarted the expansion. The overheated 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 more than ten times in 1973. The result was a steep recession. 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 growth, the second oil price increase of 1979 created structural unemployment that would persist. Soviet energy prices (which were below the world market) initially
helped prolong the GDR's survival, but cuts in Soviet oil deliveries and price increases threatened the basis of East German exports of refined derivatives to the West.\(^\text{19}\)

For West Germany, one way out of the economic impasse was European integration, since the expansion of the domestic market was supposed to produce economies of scale. The lifting of internal tariffs in the European Economic Community in the 1960s was a boon to German industry which increased its trade with France, Italy, and the Benelux countries. But the preference of French President Charles de Gaulle for a "Europe of the fatherlands" stalled progress on integration, and his veto delayed the entry of Great Britain, Ireland, and Denmark until 1973. In the 1980s, the renamed European Community further expanded into the Mediterranean so as to shore up post-dictatorial democracies in Greece, Spain, and Portugal. The friendship between French President Valerie Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt also succeeded in dampening the effects of monetary speculation through the creation of the European Monetary System in 1978. But it was not until the 1980s that integration resumed its momentum with the Single European Act. In contrast, the benefits of the COMECON for the GDR were much smaller, since trade between its members was less extensive and interactions based on Soviet dominance.\(^\text{20}\)

### 4. Responses to Social Conflicts

In the late 1960s, both German states faced the outbreak of unanticipated social conflicts, centering 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, the 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 forms of protest, such as the sit-in and teach-in, from the American civil rights movement and excelled in non-violent provocation of the authorities. The police brutality that caused the death of Benno Ohnesorg in 1967 created a mass following, but extraparliamentary opposition failed to prevent the extension of controversial emergency powers to the executive. As a result, some radicals turned to the terrorism of the Red Army Faction, which produced a massive state response. The East German counterpart was the fascination with efforts to create reform socialism in neighboring Czechoslovakia, which ended with the suppression of the Prague Spring.\(^\text{21}\)
One important consequence of the change in values [Wertewandel] introduced by the cultural revolution 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 equality, which included controlling 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 feminists created their own organizations and started radical magazines like Emma, sometimes flaunting their lesbianism in public. Eventually they succeeded in gaining political concessions, which included homes for battered women, Frauenbeauftragte [affirmative action officers for women] in government, quota systems in political parties, and equal hiring mandates. The GDR also took much pride in female equality, because the SED provided universal childcare, easier access to divorce, abortion, and the like. However, this policy sought to bring women into the workforce so as to compensate for the losses of manpower to the West and created the dual burden of work and family duties.  

Another result of the Wertewandel of the generational revolt was the formation of a broad environmental movement in the Federal Republic. Traditional concerns with nature deepened in the 1960s as a result of urban sprawl and the massive spread of automobiles, which seemed to bear out the warnings of the Club of Rome about the limits of growth. Local citizens’ groups 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 accidents at nuclear power plants, and they confronted the construction efforts in a series of sometimes violent clashes. By the end of the 1970s, these diverse initiatives converged in the founding of a new political party, eventually called the Green Party. In the GDR, it was first in the 1980s that environmental groups emerged and protested the devastation wrought by strip-mining and chemical plants. SED repression left them little choice but to adopt a dissident stance.  

A final aspect of civic mobilization was the emergence of a strong 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 amount of troops and weaponry, including nuclear bombs, on German soil. NATO’s dual-track decision of 1979 therefore triggered broad public agitation in West Germany, as part of which trade unions, churches, and intellectuals spoke out against the stationing of additional missiles. The trauma of World War II had produced widespread opposition to rearmament and led to
lenient treatment of conscientious objection to military service by instituting an alternative
civilian service. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, the GDR leadership cloaked itself in
the mantle of peace as it militarized 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, which criticized the ballistic
nuclear arms race.  

5. Uncertainties of Modernist Culture

In the cultural realm, the 1960s witnessed the sweeping triumph of modernism in both
German states. Publicly supported elite institutions, such as museums, theaters, and concert
halls in the West were now dominated by an internationally oriented avant garde that
promoted Abstract Expressionism, the theater of the absurd, and experimental music –
tastes that only sophisticates could follow. Since the 1950s, the masses turned to popular
culture, purveyed by better radios, color television sets, long playing records, tape decks,
and the like. These devices promoted imports, such as rock and roll music and Hollywood
movies, which made American lifestyles, pictured in glossy magazines, synonymous with the
modern version of the good life. With rising prosperity, the implements of mass consumption,
such as telephones, refrigerators, washing machines, and automobiles spread throughout
the West German population. The GDR was hard pressed to offer a copy of this attractive
consumerism with its own socialist version, but could not compete.

Cultural and attitudinal change was partly fuelled by the massive expansion of secondary
schooling and higher education. In the West, Georg Picht criticized the "educational deficit"
and Ralf Dahrendorf called education a "civil right," demanding an increase in higher
schooling and more equal opportunities for disadvantaged students. By the 1970s, massive
investment in teacher training and hiring and the construction of new buildings allowed about
half of an age cohort to enter high school and one-quarter to attend university. Educational
reformers also created comprehensive schools [Gesamtschulen], integrated post-secondary
institutions [Gesamthochschulen], and offered more choice in curricula. But by the 1980s,
the impetus was spent, lack of funding had renewed overcrowding, and the participation of
students in decisions was rolled back by the Federal Constitutional Court. In the GDR,
socialists created a polytechnical education, closer to vocational training, which favored
children from workers' and peasants' families. But the third university reform was a curious
mixture of overdue modernization and politicization that increased SED control.
The rapid pace of social and cultural modernization eventually provoked a series of identity debates about what it meant to be German in a divided country. In the Western state, they began with the rediscovery of *Heimat*, a somewhat mystical notion of one's home and regional rootedness, whose popularity extended well beyond the ranks of the Greens. Another discussion revolved around the conundrum of which traits remained “German” after a thorough internationalization of culture, outlook, and habits that even shifted food preferences to Italian cuisine. A third debate, called the *Historikerstreit* [the Historians' Debate] focused on the issue of German guilt and the singularity of the Holocaust, which critical intellectuals asserted, but conservative members of the older generation continued to reject.27 In the GDR, the Honecker regime tried to broaden its popular base by accepting some previously criticized figures from the German past, including the reformer Martin Luther, the Prussian king Frederick the Great, and the German unifier Otto von Bismarck. Although they rejected nationalism, some writers on both sides used the term *Kultnation* [cultural nation] to express a lingering sense of Germanness.28

6. Western Success and Eastern Failure

The period between 1961 and 1989 followed a paradoxical course: the deepening of hostility led to a rapprochement that prepared for later unification. In international affairs, the building of the Wall, the membership of both states in the United Nations after 1973, and the international recognition of the GDR seemed to have sealed the division of the continent into two hostile blocs. Nonetheless, West Germany's *Deutschland- und Ostpolitik* managed to soften the barrier by increasing human contacts, and West German payments made the SED dependent upon Western credits. Though the GDR embarked on a deliberate policy of distancing itself from the West, both states eventually embraced a "community of responsibility" for peace. The recognition of European borders decreased fears of German revanchism, and the Helsinki Accords of 1975 also protected those human rights that allowed Eastern dissidents vital breathing space. The very acceptance of the Cold War order by the Federal Republic therefore restored the communication and cooperation between East and West that paved the way for its eventual demise.29

Domestic affairs also developed in surprising directions, since the embattled Federal Republic 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 Republic in Bonn weathered the generational revolt and the onslaught of terrorism
through a mixture of reforms and police action; eventually parliamentary democracy was even strengthened by civic protest. In contrast, the military repression of reform efforts in Czechoslovakia dashed hopes for Marxist self-renewal among East German Communists, thereby undercutting the utopian attraction of the ideology. The ensuing welfare dictatorship proved economically stagnant in the long run. The denial of basic freedoms, such as expression, assembly, and travel, aroused a growing number of dissidents, while the majority of the population lost faith in the material promises of the SED.  

In the economic realm, the West also managed to cope better with the unexpected challenges of technological and structural modernization than the East. The afterglow of the economic boom period in the Federal Republic allowed the SPD to campaign under the proud slogan of the "German model" of labor peace and corporate co-determination in the 1972 election. But soon thereafter, the oil shocks, the shift of basic manufacturing to the Asian tiger states, and the move to the service sector devastated traditional industries and triggered rising structural unemployment. In the GDR, the creation of huge industrial enterprises, called Kombinate, proved unable to adapt to a changing international economic environment, and the extension of welfare benefits and the shift to consumer goods overtaxed the system. While regulated competition allowed the Federal Republic to make a painful transition from a high-industrial to a post-industrial economy, GDR planning failed in the transformation to high technology.  

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, the elites in the West eventually managed to tolerate rock music and Hollywood films, while the censors in the East reacted repressively, thereby politicizing lifestyle choices. Regardless of ideology, patriarchal males resented women's attempts to gain equal rights, but in the West feminists were able to organize, whereas in the East paternalist support was designed to control and direct the political influence of women. In both states, managers and workers were not exactly overjoyed to be criticized by environmentalists, but in the Federal Republic the courts protected protesters against police brutality whereas in the GDR they were criminalized. Similarly, most politicians and soldiers thought the peace movement too idealistic, but in the West pacifists were able to protest openly, while in the East they were repressed.  

For all of its commercialization, the Westernized culture finally generated a more attractive modern version of German identity than the Sovietized educational dictatorship of the GDR.
In the long run, Western self-questioning initiated by the charge of insufficient confrontation with the Nazi past proved more thorough in establishing respect for human rights than the mandated anti-Fascism of the East. Even if openness to international influences at times threatened to submerge German traits, receptiveness to American, British, or French ideas and styles managed to break with the tradition of German separateness and to anchor the Federal Republic culturally in the West. In contrast, Marxist internationalism, promoted by the Soviet Union, went only skin deep and did not manage to eradicate a feeling of German superiority in the Eastern bloc. In the end, the long-term learning processes, initiated 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.34

Konrad H. Jarausch and Helga A. Welsh

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5 For recent examples, see Manfred Görtemaker, Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Von der Gründung bis zur Gegenwart (Munich, 1999); and Klaus Schroeder, Der SED-Staat. Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft 1949-1990 (Munich, 1998).
7 Heinrich-August Winkler, Der lange Weg nach Westen. 2 vols. (Munich, 2000); Konrad H. Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, eds., Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945-1970 (Frankfurt am Main, 1997).
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30 Görtemaker, Geschichte der Bundesrepublik; and Jarausch, ed., Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR (New York, 1999).


33 Görtemaker, Geschichte der Bundesrepublik; Wolle, Heile Welt der Diktatur.