

Berlin

**Imperial Germany to
the end of the Cold War
1871-1989**





**ANGLIA
TOURS**





Key

- 1 Duchy of Anhalt
- 2 Brunswick
- 3 Grand Duchy of Hessen
- 4 Lippe-Detmold
- 5 Mecklenburg-Schwerin
- 6 Mecklenburg-Strelitz
- 7 Part of the Grand Duchy Oldenburg
- 8 Part of the Kingdom of Bayern
- 9 Principality of Schaumburg-Lippe
- 10 Principality of Waldeck
- 11 Principality of Reuß older Linie
- 12 Principality of Reuß younger Linie
- 13 Duchy of Sachsen-Altenburg
- 14 Duchy of Sachsen-Coburg und Gotha
- 15 Duchy of Sachsen-Meiningen
- 16 Principality of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt
- 17 Grand Duchy of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach
- 18 Principality of Waldeck and Pyrmont

-  Kingdom of Prussia, 1866
-  German Empire, 1817-1918

0 50 100 150 200km

Unification of Germany



Siegessäule (Victory Column).

The new nation state of Germany was forged by warfare: victories over Denmark (1864), Austria (1866) and France (1870) allowed the dominant Kingdom of Prussia to unite the disparate kingdoms, principalities and duchies of the former Holy Roman Empire into a powerful new entity. The crucial aspect of its inception was Prussian militarism, which would shape the character of this new state.

1871

Democracy and Foreign Policy under Bismarck and Wilhelm II

Bismarck, first and foremost a soldier, distrusted democracy. Despite giving the German people a parliament, 'the Iron Chancellor' ruled through a strong, well-trained bureaucracy with power in the hands of the traditional landed nobility.

Kaiser Wilhelm II was different: his Germany was run as a functioning monarchy with power concentrated in the hands of one man, claiming legitimacy by Divine Right one hundred years after the French Revolution. This was in direct conflict with the growth of socialism at the very same time.

Wilhelm's Foreign Policy also differed from that of Bismarck: gone was the pragmatic policy of isolating France whilst maintaining good relations with Austria and Russia. The Kaiser's Weltpolitik sought to increase Germany's influence in the world, and was aggressive and reckless – for example the Naval Laws from 1898. It was this approach that would lead eventually to war.



Reichstag building 1884-1894.

1880s

The First World War



1914

June 28th
Archduke Franz Ferdinand assassinated at Sarajevo

July 5th
Kaiser Wilhelm II promised German support for Austria against Serbia

July 28th
Austria declared war on Serbia

August 1st
Germany declared war on Russia

August 3rd
Germany declared war on France

August 4th
Britain declared war on Germany



1918

October 4th
Germany asked the Allies for an armistice

October 29th
Germany's navy mutinied

October 30th
Turkey made peace

November 3rd
Austria made peace

November 9th
Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated. Declaration of the Republic

November 11th
Germany signed an armistice with the Allies – War ends

1914

Versailles Treaty

No study of modern Germany makes sense without an understanding of German attitudes towards the hated peace settlement. The sense of humiliation, betrayal and unfairness would create an atmosphere in which radical views could find an audience and an angry people would follow extremists who appeared to offer them salvation.

The Versailles Treaty set out 440 Articles detailing Germany's punishment. These are ones relating to Germany's military power:

B Blame



R Reparations

Article 231:
War Guilt Clause – pay reparations

6,600 Million



A Army

Article 160:
Army restricted to 100,000 men

100,000



Article 171:
No tanks

0



Article 181:
Navy restricted to 6 battleships and no submarines

6



0



Article 198:
No air force

0



T Territory

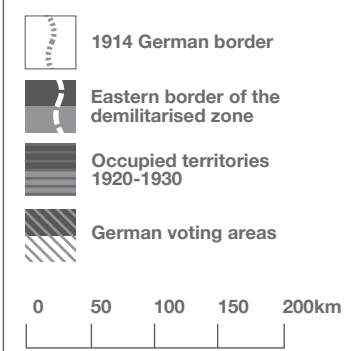


1919

Imperial Germany



Key



Weimar Germany

Post 1919

Creation of the Weimar Republic

Few regimes in history have experienced such a chaotic beginning: as the German armies on the Western Front fell back in full retreat, a revolution broke out amongst sailors, spreading quickly amongst soldiers and workers throughout Germany. This raised the spectre of a communist revolution along Russian lines. In Bavaria this actually came into being with the declaration of a Soviet Republic in April 1919. In desperation the traditional landed classes and conservative politicians of the establishment had forced the Kaiser's abdication the previous November, leaving a political void in Berlin. Several groups were poised to step forward – communist Spartacists, moderate left wing socialists, centrist politicians and right wing Freikorps all vying for power. Violence erupted on the streets of the capital over the following weeks, so that by the time a fledgling democracy was established the city was too unstable and dangerous and the National Assembly was forced to relocate to the relative safety of the provincial town of Weimar, two hundred miles to the southeast. It would remain there for six months until order was restored.

1919

Threats to the Weimar Republic



Karl Liebknecht



Rosa Luxemburg.

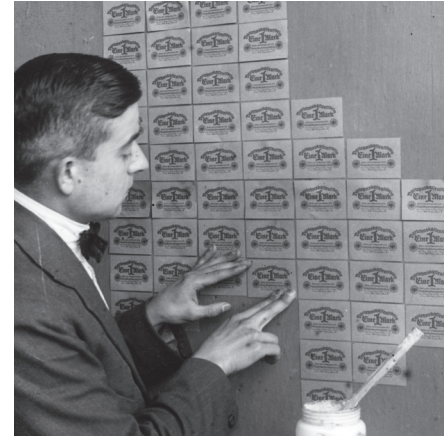


Creation of Freikorps.

Even as an independent Bavarian State was declared, the political left fragmented. A split between the moderate socialists of the SPD, their more militant comrades the Independent Socialists and most radical of all, the communist Spartacist League, launched a revolution on the streets of Berlin. Led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, they had already proclaimed a socialist republic on the same day the Kaiser abdicated and the Weimar Republic was proclaimed. Now they attempted an armed uprising: only the right wing paramilitaries of the Freikorps – former soldiers – could prevent the Republic failing. Whilst fighting would continue for months, the murders of Liebknecht and Luxemburg in January 1919 effectively marked the end of any realistic possibility of a German communist revolution. Now the threat came from the right: in March 1920, 12,000 Freikorps soldiers occupied Berlin and installed Wolfgang Kapp, a right-wing journalist, as Chancellor. The national government fled to Stuttgart and called for a general strike and the Putsch collapsed after four days.

1919-20

Hyperinflation



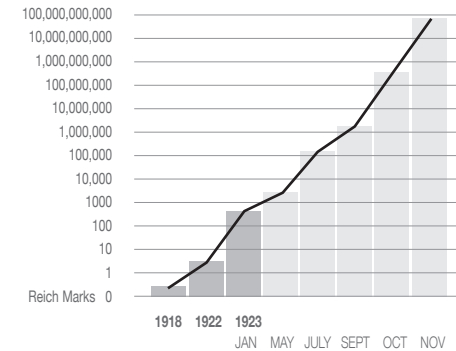
1923: banknotes had lost so much value that they were used as wallpaper.

Despite the political turmoil of the early years, the biggest challenges the Weimar Republic faced were economic. There was a massive war debt it could not afford, it had lost valuable economic resources and reparations had to be paid in gold bullion or foreign currency. The decision was made to print endless amounts of marks with which to purchase gold and dollars, thus devaluing the mark. In 1918 4.2 marks would buy one US dollar: by 1919 this was 48. By November 1923, the US dollar was worth 4,210,500,000,000 German marks (four trillion, two hundred and ten billion, five hundred million).

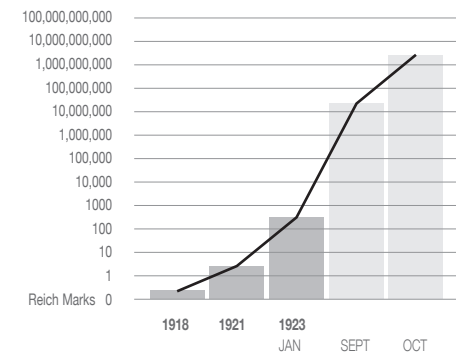
The crisis came to a head after the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923, following regular defaults of reparations by the Germans. The combination of hyperinflation and passive resistance to the French occupation brought the German economy to the point of collapse.

1923

Cost of a loaf of bread



Cost of a dozen eggs



Munich Putsch



Nazi members.

In November 1923, supported by war hero General Erich Ludendorff, Hitler attempted to coerce the leaders of Bavaria's government, army and police into forming a new, Nazi-led regime.

After initial attempts to seize power failed, around two thousand Nazis marched to the centre of Munich: a confrontation with police resulted in the deaths of sixteen Nazis and four police officers. Hitler escaped immediate arrest before being rushed out of the city to safety. Having been arrested two days later he was charged with treason and subsequently sentenced to five years in prison, of which he would serve nine months.

Although it failed the Putsch brought Hitler to the attention of the German people and generated publicity around the world. His trial gave Hitler a platform to air his political creed and he used his time in prison to produce his political testimony *Mein Kampf*. The realisation that the path to power would be through legitimate means rather than force changed NSDAP tactics with an increasing reliance on the development of Nazi propaganda.

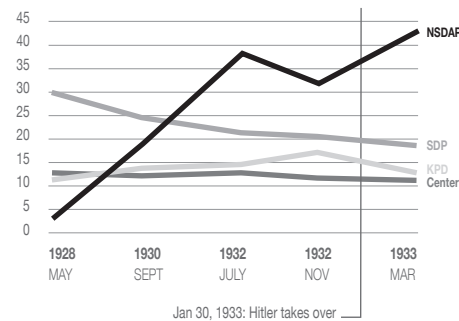
1923

How did the Nazis come to power?

Having decided to pursue a legitimate route to power, the Nazis took advantage of every opportunity circumstance and the political situation afforded them. Employing modern technology, the Party exploited propaganda to an unprecedented degree. This included phonograph recordings, radio and cine film and the possibility of air transport to rallies. Hitler was able to speak in as many as five cities in a single day during the 1932 Presidential election campaign. This became one of the key features of Hitlerism, helping create a cult of personality. The economic hardships suffered by many during the Great Depression meant there was an audience for a strong leader who could deliver them from despair, a people increasingly disillusioned with their leaders and willing to turn to an extremist who seemed to promise salvation.

This was not enough to win an election, however: it took the failure of successive governments during the Weimar era and a group of naïve politicians who believed they could tame and control Hitler, to finally allow him into a position of power.

General election results
In percent



1928-33

Reichstag Fire

A mere four weeks after Hitler was appointed Chancellor, and only days before the scheduled Reichstag elections, the Reichstag building burned down in mysterious and controversial circumstances. A young Dutch Communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, was arrested at the scene; he would subsequently be tried and executed.

The Nazis exploited the fire, blaming their Communist Party rivals and using it as the excuse to arrest many KPD leaders and introduce emergency powers: this was the beginning of a process that would lead to a single party state and dictatorship within a few months: the question asked ever since... who was really behind the fire?



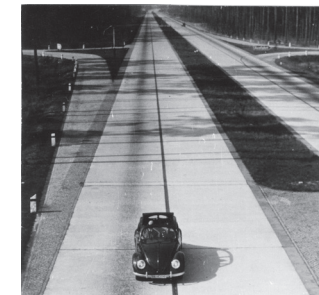
Reichstag on fire.

1933

Why did National Socialism appeal to many Germans?

At their peak over seventeen million Germans voted for the NSDAP in free elections. Over the following decade the German people swore loyalty to the Führer and followed him to war and genocide. What made a regime such as this so popular?

Hitler offered what were perceived to be solutions to the problems facing different groups in German society. Farmers and urban workers, industrialists and landowners, men and women, children and youths, all were promised what they wanted to hear – an end to the misery that followed defeat, humiliation and the economic disasters of the 1920s. Quality of life – for some – and the standard of living would improve. Public work schemes – most obviously the autobahn system – provided employment and a visible sign of progress. Perhaps most controversially, the Nazis also offered a target for the people's anger – someone to blame. Socialists, foreign enemies and above all Jews became the scapegoats for Germany's problems as Hitler encouraged the German people to feel good about themselves, building patriotism and a sense of national identity.



The pride of Germany: the Autobahn and the Volkswagen (VW).

1933-36

Weimar Germany

Nazi Germany

Use of Terror by NSDAP

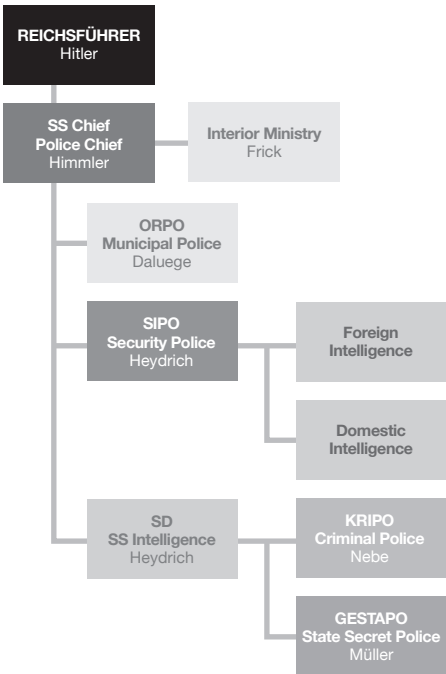
A common theme of the totalitarian regimes of the mid-twentieth century was their use of terror and oppressive organisations to maintain control over their people. The use of these by the Nazis essentially had two objectives: to eliminate any opposition or resistance to the regime and to marginalise and then remove those elements of the German population the Nazis deemed undesirable, antisocial or subhuman.

Soon after gaining power the Nazis' thuggish Stormtroopers, the Brownshirts of the SA, were replaced as the main weapon of terror in Germany by the black-clad elite, the SS. SS and Police leader Heinrich Himmler's tentacles of fearsome control spread across Germany, giving him and his deputies the power of life and death over every single German citizen.

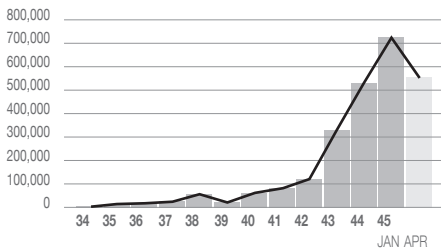
Alongside civil courts and criminal prisons, Himmler and Göring introduced a new feature to 1930s Germany, one that would become synonymous with the regime: the concentration camp. In twelve years perhaps as many as 2.3 million people were sent to Nazi concentration camps.

In 1933, most inmates were political prisoners, above all German Communists. Abuse and violence were normal – the objective of the Nazis was to break the inmates, mentally and physically, before their release back into society as 'reformed citizens'. Deaths were still rare, however, and most prisoners were released after a few weeks or months. Fear of the camps helped to break resistance to the Nazis, to the extent that by late 1934 there were only around 2,400 inmates in the existing camps. Despite this, Hitler and Himmler wanted to keep the camps: they saw the benefits of lawless terror, without courts and judges. By the outbreak of war in 1939 this SS system included six purpose-built camps holding 21,400 prisoners. The SS ruled the concentration camps with an iron fist.

(Source: Birkbeck College, University of London)

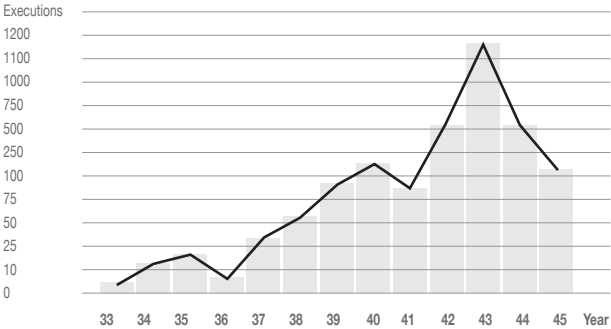


Daily Inmate numbers in the SS Concentration Camps, 1934-45.



1933-36

Resistance to the regime



Number of executions at Plotensee 1933-39.

It is very difficult to judge the level of resistance to the Nazis, especially in the pre-war years, since by necessity such resistance very quickly had to be conducted in secret. Such was the Nazis' ruthlessness in dealing with opposition that open criticism or resistance soon disappeared.

Organised resistance prior to 1939 tended to concentrate around the churches – in particular the Confessing Church – and the political left. After the outbreak of war resistance to the Nazis appeared to grow significantly. Small cells of resistance continued to exist. Groups such as the Red Orchestra, White Rose, Edelweiss Pirates and European Union all posed a threat and were dealt with ruthlessly, as were individuals such as Georg Elser and Otto and Elise Hampel.

Only once the course of the war had turned against Germany did significant numbers of the armed forces turn against Hitler, and the number of plots against his life rose dramatically. This culminated in the most famous act of resistance of all, the July 20 1944 Plot. The failed attempt to assassinate Hitler with a bomb was intended to be the trigger for a coup to overthrow the Nazi leadership and reach a settlement with the Western Allies: the appalling reprisals, leading to nearly 5,000 deaths, merely forced subsequent resistance even further underground.

1933

Berlin Olympics

The 1936 Summer Olympic Games are probably the most notorious of all: an event inherited by the Nazis when they came to power in 1933 was soon transformed into an extraordinary propaganda spectacle, displaying to a watching world the 'achievements' of National Socialism. In a sinister foretelling of racial policies to emerge over the next decade, the Games also provided Hitler and Goebbels with a platform on which to demonstrate 'Aryan Supremacy'.

These hopes were undone, however, by the unprecedented achievements of a small group of black American athletes: led by the legendary Jesse Owens they won back the Olympics from Hitler and ensured the Games would be remembered for the right reasons.



Jesse Owens winning gold for the USA.

1936

Development of anti-Semitic policies

Hitler had made clear his attitude to the Jews in *Mein Kampf*, and the Nazis' anti-Semitic policies had been a crucial strand of their position during the election campaigns of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Within weeks of coming to power they demonstrated their view of the future of Germany: on April 10th 1933 the SA led a one-day boycott of Jewish-owned shops. A month later Goebbels orchestrated an even more sinister display: across the Reich, stormtroopers and students publicly burned hundreds of thousands of books they considered 'unGerman' or degenerate: many of the authors were Jewish.

As early as 1933 Jews were banned from belonging to sporting clubs and in 1935 the Nuremberg Laws redefined what it was to be Jewish: in particular, citizenship was to be denied to those defined as Jews – no longer could they serve in the civil service or armed forces, work as lawyers, or doctors in non-Jewish hospitals or teachers in non-Jewish schools.

The marginalisation of Germany's Jews turned violent in 1938 with the destruction of property in Kristallnacht, a precursor to the first Jews being sent to Concentration Camps simply because they were Jews. By 1941 German Jews were being deported to ghettos in the east and the first extermination centres were operating: it had taken a mere eight years to move from burning books to burning bodies, as the poet Heinrich Heine had foretold in one of those works burned in May 1933.



Jews being persecuted on the streets in 1933.

1933-41

Kindertransport



Children getting ready to depart on the Kindertransport.

In November 1938 Jews were first sent to concentration camps just for being Jews. Following Kristallnacht attempts were made to save some of their children: within a year around 10,000 Jewish children would board trains in Berlin and Vienna, most bound for ports in the Netherlands and ships to Britain.

Initially intended as a temporary measure until their parents were released, the great tragedy of the Kindertransport was that the vast majority of the children involved never saw their parents again. Most would be adopted by families in Britain and spend the rest of their lives in their adoptive country.

Tragically, some who remained in Belgium, France and the Netherlands would find themselves in German hands again once war began in the West in 1940.

Dec 1938

The Wannsee Conference

Hitler had decided upon the extermination of the Jewish race in Europe in 1941, following the invasion of the Soviet Union. The fifteen men listed below were charged with identifying the difficulties and solutions, and met to discuss this on January 20th 1942 at a villa on the shores of the Wannsee.

SS-Obergruppenführer

Reinhard Heydrich

Chief of the RSHA, Deputy Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, Presiding

SS-Gruppenführer

Otto Hofmann

Head of the SS Race and Settlement Main Office (RuSHA)

SS-Gruppenführer

Heinrich Müller

Chief of Amt IV (Gestapo), Reich Main Security Office (RSHA), Schutzstaffel

SS-Oberführer

Dr. Karl Eberhard Schöngarth

Commander of the SiPo and the SD in the General Government

SS-Oberführer

Dr. Gerhard Klopfer

Permanent Secretary, Nazi Party Chancellery

SS-Obersturmbannführer

Adolf Eichmann

Head of Referat IV B4 of the Gestapo Recording Secretary

SS-Sturmbannführer

Dr. Rudolf Lange

Commander of the SiPo and the SD for Latvia; Deputy Commander of the SiPo and the SD for the RKO. Head of Einsatzkommando 2

Jan 1942

Dr. Georg Leibbrandt

Reichsamtleiter, Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories

Dr. Alfred Meyer

Gauleiter, Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories

Dr. Josef Bühler

State Secretary, General Government (Polish Occupation Authority)

Dr. Roland Freisler

State Secretary, Reich Ministry of Justice

SS-Brigadeführer

Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart

State Secretary, Reich Interior Ministry

SS-Oberführer

Erich Neumann

State Secretary, Office of the Plenipotentiary for the Four Year Plan

Friedrich Wilhelm Kritzinger

Permanent Secretary, Reich Chancellery

Martin Luther

Under-Secretary, Reich Foreign Ministry

The Battle for Berlin

April 1945: with German armies on the point of collapse, Berlin was virtually encircled by the Soviet Red army. The city was already damaged – Allied bombing campaigns had made a mockery of Göring's boast that no bomber would ever reach Berlin. Iconic buildings such as the Anhalter Bahnhof had been all but destroyed. What followed during the final weeks of war was cataclysmic.

Beginning on April 16th an intense artillery bombardment preceded an assault by three Soviet Armies, heading for the government quarter. The Third Reich played out its death rites amidst the ruins of the capital. Desperate scenes unfolded amongst the rubble of the Reichstag building as a few determined SS men made their defiant last stand. A few metres away the final act occurred in the Führer Bunker below the Reich Chancellery.



The aftermath of the battle around the Brandenburg Gate.

Apr 1945

What was Berlin like in the aftermath of National Socialism and War?

Describe the key features of the city in the spaces below. What other key features can you think of?

Currency reform

Refugees

Espionage

Denazification

Zones

Black Market

Occupation Forces

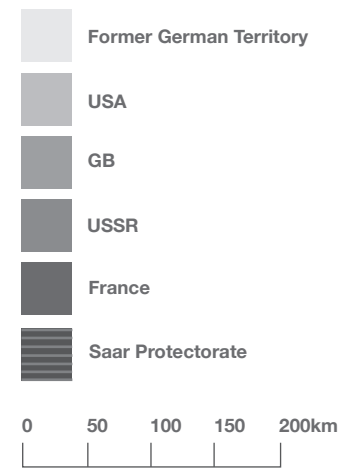
Devastated city / ruins



Post-war Berlin



Key



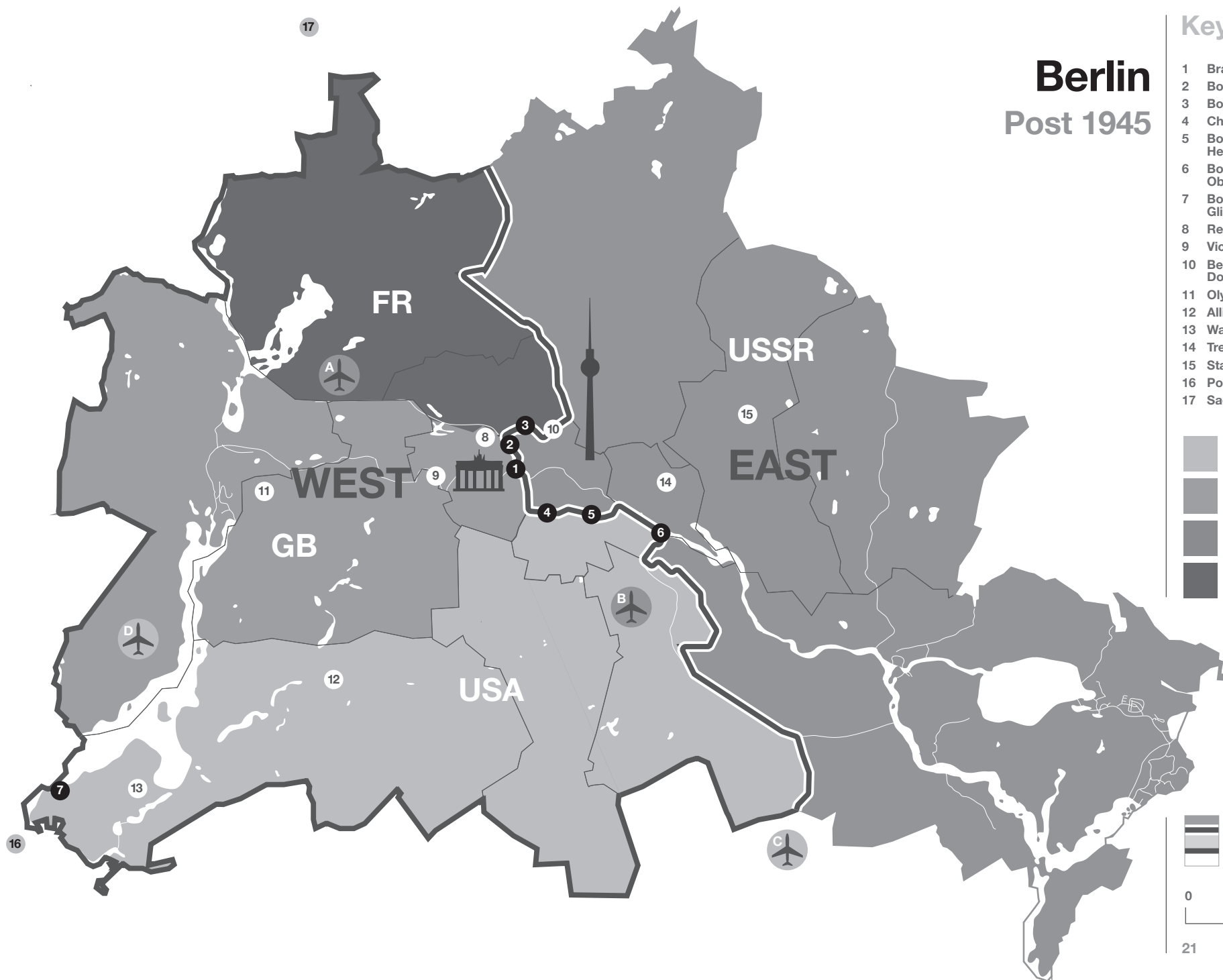
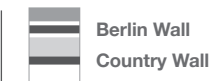
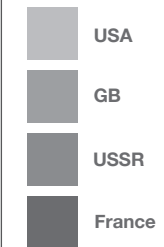
Allied-occupied Germany Post 1945

Berlin

Post 1945

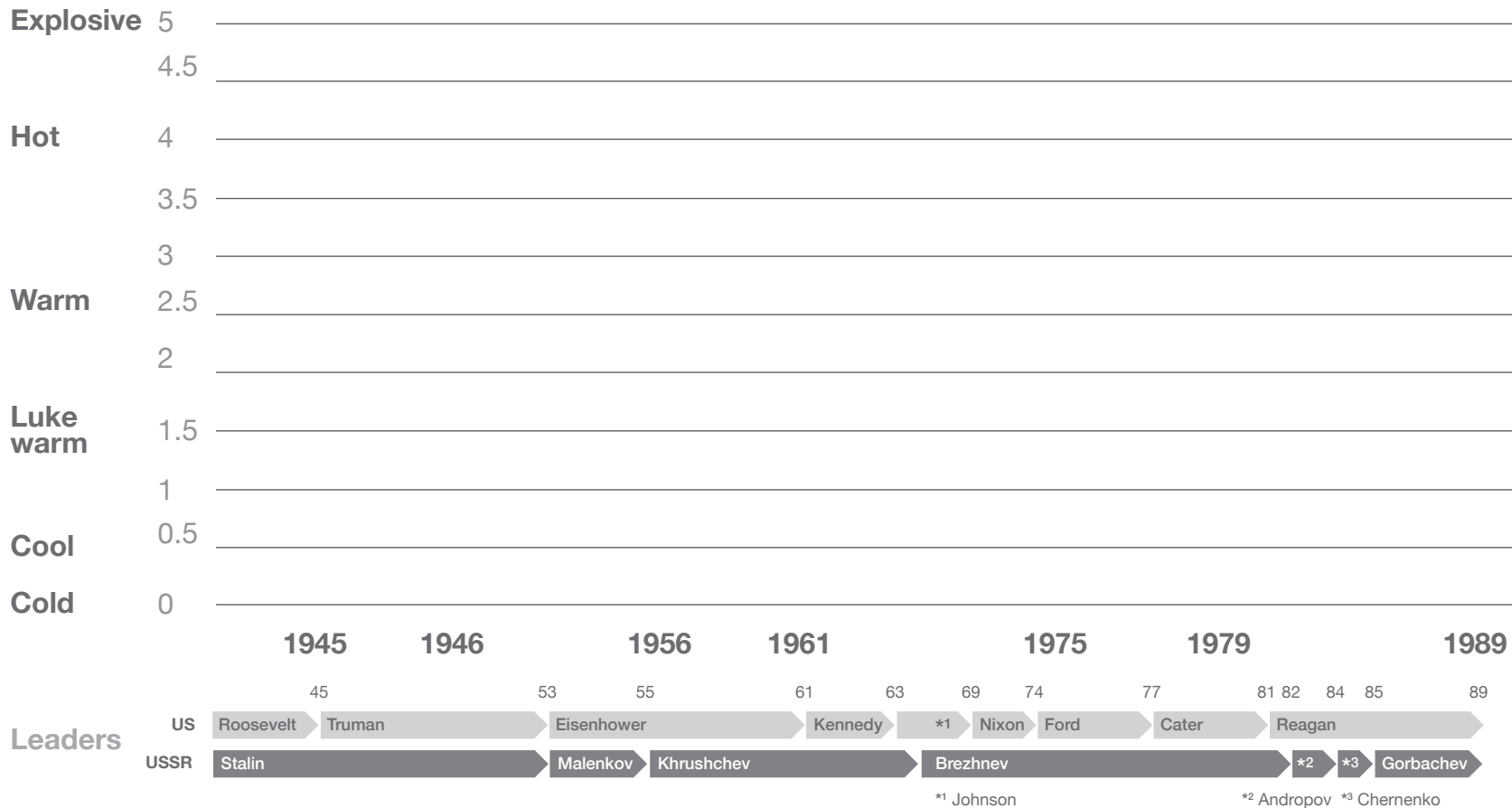
Key

- 1 Brandenburg Gate
- 2 Border Checkpoint Invalidstr.
- 3 Border Checkpoint Chausseestr.
- 4 Checkpoint Charlie
- 5 Border Checkpoint Heinrich-Heine-Str.
- 6 Border Checkpoint Oberbaumbrücke
- 7 Border Checkpoint Glienickerbrücke
- 8 Reichstag
- 9 Victory Column Siegestsäule
- 10 Berlin Wall / Documentation Centre
- 11 Olympic Stadium
- 12 Allied Forces Museum
- 13 Wannsee
- 14 Treptow
- 15 Stasi Museum
- 16 Potsdam
- 17 Sachsenhausen



Plot the key events of the Cold War on the graph below and decide just how hot it got...

How significant were the events in Berlin within the context of the global Cold War?



BERLIN

- A 1945 Potsdam Conference
- B 1948 Berlin Blockade and Airlift
- C 1953 Berlin Uprising
- D 1961 Berlin Wall

GLOBAL

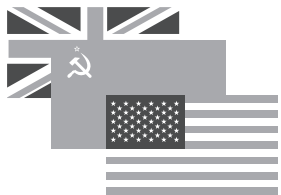
- E 1946 Churchill's Iron Curtain speech
- F 1949 NATO formed
- G 1949 China Communist
- H 1949 Soviet Atomic bomb
- I 1952 US H-Bomb
- J 1954 Soviet H-Bomb
- K 1955 Warsaw Pact formed
- L 1956 Suez Crisis
- M 1956 Hungarian Uprising
- N 1957 Soviet Sputnik
- O 1960 U2 spy plane
- P 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis
- Q 1968 Prague Spring
- R 1969 SALT
- S 1972 Détente
- T 1980 Olympic boycott
- U 1983 Star Wars
- V 1984 Olympic boycott
- W 1985 Glasnost & Perestroika
- X 1987 INF

Were there any other moments when there was real danger of global war breaking out?

How hot was the Cold War?

Potsdam Conference

The fate of post-war Europe was determined through a series of meetings between the leaders of the Allied Powers – the Big Three – culminating with a two-week summit held at the Cecilienhof Palace in Potsdam, 30 km from Berlin. Following meetings at Tehran and Yalta the division of Germany – and Berlin – the spheres of influence and the rights of European peoples were finally agreed and a new political map drawn. Perhaps more importantly, here too were the first visible divisions between the victorious allies, as suspicion, distrust and rivalry replaced the common goal of defeating Hitler's Germany. The revelation of the first successful atomic test by the United States might be regarded as the beginning of what would become known as the Cold War.



1945

Berlin Blockade



Flights arrived in Berlin approximately every ninety seconds.

Stalin's determination to force the Western Allies out of Berlin – deep within his sphere of influence – led to the Blockade of West Berlin from May 1948. Road, rail and canal links were cut, and power switched off. Refusing to give up their toehold behind the Iron Curtain, the Americans and British launched the Airlift. Over the next 15 months, supplies were flown in to keep West Berlin free.

Total Tonnage by Commodity

US 1,783,573

Coal
Food
Miscellaneous

Britain 542,236

Coal
Food
Military Supplies
Miscellaneous
Wet Fuel

1948-49

Berlin Uprising



Communist era mural at the former 'House of the Ministries' in Berlin.

In the summer of 1953 things were not calm in the recently-formed GDR. A catastrophic economic situation led the ruling SED party to increase work quotas by 10% - 'more work for the same salary'. As a result, 300 construction workers in East Berlin went on strike. By the following day over 40,000 workers had joined a general strike and marched to the House of Ministries in Leipziger Strasse to protest. The government decided to end the uprising by force. 20,000 Soviet troops and 8,000 Volkspolizei were sent onto the streets. Dozens of workers were killed, many more arrested and imprisoned.

1953

Berlin Wall

1961

Aug 13th
Border between East and West Berlin closed

Aug 14th
Brandenburg Gate closed

Aug 15th
East German Guard Conrad Schumann escapes

Aug 16th
Barbed wire replaced with concrete blocks

Aug 26th
All crossing points closed for West Berliners

1962

June
A second wall is built to prevent escape to the West

Aug 17th
East German Peter Fechter, 18, is shot and left to bleed to death whilst trying to escape in full view of the Western media

1963

June 26th
President JF Kennedy gives his "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech

Dec 17
Agreement signed allowing West Berliners to visit their relatives in East Berlin on a limited basis

1964

Oct 3-4
Tunnel 57 – the most successful mass escape sees 57 people reach the West through a tunnel dug under the Wall

1961-64

Cold War Crisis in Berlin

4th3rd2nd1st

Berlin Wall

1961–1989

Key

1st Generation Wall – 1961

Between 12 and 13 August 1961 the East German army began construction of the 156km long wall around the Western sector with barbed wire

2nd Generation Wall – 1962-1965

In June 1962, a second parallel fence was built 100 metres farther into Eastern German territory, creating the so called 'death strip'

3rd Generation Wall – 1966-1974

In June 1966 a new generation wall was introduced replacing the previous wall

4th Generation Wall – 1975-1989

The 'fourth generation wall' was the final, most sophisticated and expensive version off the wall. It was started in 1975 and was completed in 1980

- 1 Wire fence
- 2 GDR Border Guards
- 3 Sand Strip
- 4 Wall topped with wire
- 5 Anti-vehicle obstacles
- 6 Concrete wall with anti grip top
- 7 Lamppost
- 8 Anti-vehicle ditch
- 9 Guard dogs
- 10 Bunker
- 11 Watch tower

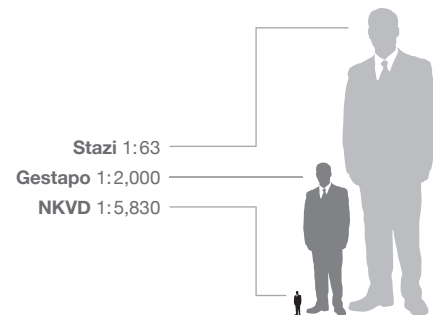
The role of the Stasi



Modelled on the Soviet NKVD (later KGB) the Ministry for State Security was formed in 1950 following the creation of a new country – the German Democratic Republic, or East Germany. Its role was to protect the East German state and people – although from whom and

what was not necessarily obvious. What were initially labelled Fascists or Nazis were soon clearly all who expressed criticism, dissent or opposition to the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED).

Originally brutal and violent, the methods adopted by the Stasi became more sophisticated over time, turning more to psychological methods of interrogation and incarceration. Eventually the Stasi would become the most all-pervasive security organisation in the world: for every 63 GDR citizens there was one Stasi operative – the Soviet version under Stalin never had more than 1:5830 and the Gestapo 1:2000. Of a maximum 17 million East Germans, it is thought as many as 6 million were under surveillance at one time or another.



1949-90

Life in the GDR

It wasn't all bad!

Despite propaganda in the West, life for those East German citizens who were not politically active was surprisingly good. Under Socialism education was free for all – including university – as was health care. A huge programme of state-run housing meant that the ubiquitous 'Plattenbau' – prefabricated apartment blocks – were also cheaply available. Public transport systems – especially trams – were cheap and reliable, whilst officially everyone had a job: unemployment did not exist in the GDR! Citizens could enjoy holidays on the Baltic and at Black Sea resorts. As long as people accepted their lot and did not criticise their leaders, life could be tolerated.



The Trabant, often referred to simply as the Trabi.

1970

Détente and Rapprochement



Willy Brandt's election campaign poster for the German Bundestag.

Following the SALT I talks from 1969 the Cold War began to thaw a little during the early 1970s, as the leaders of all three Superpowers began to reevaluate their relations. The US was embroiled in an increasingly unpopular and costly war in Vietnam, the Soviet Union feared being isolated as relations between China and the US improved, and the Soviets were also concerned at the cost of the Arms Race.

At this moment a change occurred in Germany: in October 1969 a Social-Liberal coalition came to power in West Germany, led by Willy Brandt. He brought a new approach to European relations: Ostpolitik, the normalisation of relations with the East. This began with formal treaties with the USSR but the crucial step came in 1972 with the Basic Treaty in which the two German states recognised each other for the first time and began the process for establishing normal political and trade relations.

Whilst relations would worsen dramatically after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, this period proved that Détente was possible, and once Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the Soviet Union his policies of Perestroika and Glasnost would bring the Superpowers back to the negotiating table.

1972-87

Fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War



No one expected the Berlin Wall to come down. For twenty-eight years it had not merely stood, but had become an increasingly formidable and seemingly permanent structure. Despite protests throughout eastern Europe during 1989 there seemed little likelihood of the Wall falling or East German communism ending as November began.

When the end came it was both sudden and spectacular.

The East Side Gallery on the 25th Anniversary of the Fall of the Wall in 2014.

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