The advent of Nazism in the 1920s and 1930s shocked many Europeans who believed that World War I had been fought to make the “world safe for democracy.” Indeed, Nazism was only one, although the most important, of a number of similar-looking fascist movements in Europe between World War I and World War II. While Nazism, like the others, owed much to the impact of World War I, it also needs to be viewed in the context of developments in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

EUROPE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Many Europeans perceived the nineteenth century as an age of progress based on the growth of rationalism, secularism, and materialism. One English social philosopher claimed that progress was not an “accident, but a necessity,” which would enable humans to “become perfect.” By the end of the nineteenth century, however, there were voices who challenged these optimistic assumptions. They spoke of human irrationality and the need for violence to solve human problems. Nazism would later draw heavily upon this antirational mood and reject the rationalist and materialist views of progress.

The major ideas that dominated European political life in the nineteenth century seemed to support the notion of progress. Liberalism professed belief in a constitutional state and the basic civil rights of every individual. Nazism would later reject liberalism and assert the rights of the state over individuals. Nationalism, predicated on the nation as the focus of people’s loyalty, became virtually a new religion for Europeans in the nineteenth century. Although nationalism was a liberalizing force in the first half of the nineteenth century because of its stress on the freedom and right of separate peoples to have their own nations, in the second half of the century it became a chauvinistic force that encouraged the right of some nationalities to dominate others. Tied to the new mass politics, popular nationalism came to destroy nineteenth-century liberal values, fostering fanaticism and violence at the expense of reasoned debate and compromise. Along with this extreme nationalism came a virulent racism, commonly in the form of anti-Semitism, that insisted on the right of a race to maintain its purity.
by excluding the Jews. Nazism would champion nationalism and place anti-Semitism at the heart of its own ideology. Advocating leadership and hierarchy, Nazism would also react against the nineteenth- and twentieth-century development of political democracy with its practice of universal manhood suffrage. The granting of political rights to the masses by the upper- and middle-class leaders of society had been intended to prevent the radicalization of the masses from below. But the advent of new demagogues who knew how to manipulate mass sentiment created the potential for strong antidemocratic movements. Another nineteenth-century political ideology, conservatism, played only a moderate role in the development of Nazism, which generally allied itself with conservative forces for purely opportunistic reasons.

Nineteenth-century European civilization underwent a tremendous transformation as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Industrialization led to increased urbanization, a new class structure, and new values. By the end of the nineteenth century, 50 percent of Europeans lived in cities, which were seen by many as places of alienation and depersonalization. A new industrial middle class emerged and soon allied itself with the traditional conservative landed aristocratic classes. Moreover, the industrial factory system created a huge urban working class. Many workers were eventually attracted to the Marxian socialist movement in the hope of bettering their condition. It is no accident that Nazism would try to win over workers by appealing to both nationalism and socialism (Nazi = National Socialist German Workers’ Party), even though its brand of socialism was far removed from Marxian socialist doctrines. Finally, the products of industrialism dazzled Europeans and led to an increased faith in science and technological achievements, further reinforcing the feeling of progress. The Industrial Revolution, however, led to social discontent as well. The workers had their socialist trade unions and parties to work for better conditions, but often members of the middle class, and especially the lower middle class, felt threatened by the rapid changes in society. Their fear of economic decline and loss in social status to the proletariat would lead many of them to support the Nazis as champions of a hierarchical social order that would preserve traditional class positions. The lower middle class would be one source of support for Nazism, although ultimately they would draw support from all strata of society.

Internationally, Europeans saw themselves as experiencing an age of progress in the nineteenth century. Since 1815, wars had been localized or contained by agreement of the great powers. Europe developed a balance-of-power politics based on alliances that kept the peace but at the same time increased rivalry among the states. After 1870, imperialism added to the competition. European technological progress enabled Europeans to carve up almost all of Africa and dominate the Middle East and Asia. Militarism, expressed especially in the formation of large armies, increased dramatically. Imperialistic adventures led to new rivalries, culminating in World War I. It was the results of World War I that spurred the rise of Nazism in Germany.

IMPERIAL GERMANY

Germany entered the nineteenth century as a divided state and did not become united until 1871. An earlier attempt at unification in the revolution of 1848, when the forces of liberalism and nationalism were combined, failed miserably. Unification was finally accomplished under the militaristic north German state of Prussia, whose policies were dominated by its strong and confident minister-president, Otto von Bismarck.
Bismarck and the New Germany

Bismarck unified Germany by force, using the methods of Realpolitik—a policy of realism. One of the great practitioners of Realpolitik, he gave a compelling explanation of the term in his famous address to the Prussian parliament in 1862: “The great questions of the day will not be settled by speeches and majority decisions—that was the great mistake of 1848 and 1849—but by blood and iron.” After isolating each of them, Bismarck and Prussia successively defeated Denmark, Austria, and France to achieve a united German state in 1871, with the Prussian king as the new German emperor. Bismarck managed to separate nationalism from liberalism and wed it to his own conservatism, but even German liberals were not unhappy because of his success. One old liberal proclaimed:

I cannot shake off the impression of this hour. I am no devotee of Mars; I feel more attached to the goddess of beauty and the mother of graces than to the powerful god of war, but the trophies of war exercise a magic charm even upon the child of peace. One’s view is involuntarily chained and one’s spirit goes along with the boundless row of men who acclaim the god of the moment—success.

Prussian leadership also meant the victory of authoritarian over liberal–democratic, constitutional sentiments in the creation of the German state.

The new German state established in 1871 began with a constitution that provided for a federal system with a bicameral legislature. The upper house, or Bundesrat, contained representatives from the twenty-five states that made up the German Empire. Individual states, such as Prussia and Bavaria, kept their own kings, post offices, and armies in peacetime. The lower house, known as the Reichstag, was elected on the basis of universal manhood suffrage, which created the potential for the growth of political democracy. This potential remained unfulfilled, however, until Germany’s defeat in World War I. Ministerial responsibility, an important component part of political democracy, was excluded from the German system. Ministers of government, among whom the chancellor (a position held by Bismarck until 1890) was the most important, were held accountable not to the Reichstag but to the German emperor. The emperor also controlled the armed forces, foreign policy, and internal administration. As chancellor, Bismarck worked to maintain the strong position of the emperor and to prevent the growth of a functional parliamentary system and responsible political parties. The German army, a powerful institution, supported the traditional monarchical and aristocratic institutions and operated under a general staff responsible only to the emperor. Thus, the army was independent of the chancellor and the Reichstag, virtually a state within the state and a hindrance to the evolution of German democracy.

The Reign of Wilhelm II

The new imperial German state established by Bismarck continued as an authoritarian, conservative, “military–bureaucratic power state” during the reign of Kaiser (Emperor) Willhelm II (1888–1918). The young emperor, who cashiered Bismarck in

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2Ibid, p. 327.
1890, was politically unskilled, intellectually unstable, and prone to verbal aggressiveness and tactless remarks, as evidenced in his rejoinder to young recruits that they must shoot at their parents when their emperor commanded them to do so. The emperor was joined by a small group (about twenty) of powerful men who determined government policy.

During Wilhelm’s reign, Germany became the greatest industrial and military power on the Continent. Its population rose dramatically from 41 million in 1871 to almost 68 million in 1914. New social configurations emerged rapidly. By 1910, over 50 percent of German workers were employed in industry; only one-third of the workforce remained in agriculture. As large numbers of workers fled from rural to urban areas in search of jobs, cities mushroomed in size and number. But rapid changes in Wilhelmine Germany led to serious strains, producing a society torn between modernization and traditionalism.

With industrial and urban expansion came demands for more political participation and a noticeable shift to the left politically. Two of the major parliamentary groups of imperial Germany, the liberals and conservatives, experienced a decline in Reichstag seats from 1890 to 1912. While the Center Party, dedicated to Catholic interests, maintained a steady 20 percent of Reichstag delegates, it was the Social Democratic Party (SPD) that experienced the most rapid growth to become the largest party by 1912. The SPD claimed the allegiance of many workers and managed to maintain unity despite an ideological split between those Social Democrats who favored Marxist revolutionary activity and those who believed in cooperating with the parliamentary system to gain reforms. The growing strength of the Socialists frightened the elites of imperial Germany, who blamed organized labor for their own problems. Under Wilhelm, the role of the Reichstag and political parties was expanded, as the emperor and his chancellors attempted to gain a parliamentary coalition on crucial issues. But parliamentary authoritarianism did not come easily. There was considerable underlying sentiment for reforms that would lead to greater democratization. Conservative forces were unwilling, however, to permit it, and imperialistic adventures came to be seen as an avenue to maintain their position.

During the reign of Emperor Wilhelm II, Germany pursued Weltpolitik (world policy), an activist foreign policy aimed at finding Germany’s “place in the sun.” Germany felt a need to catch up with other world powers and assumed a natural right to hegemony over central Europe and a share in the colonial, economic, and political division of the world. Imperialism was favored by both the landowning nobility and the representatives of heavy industry, two of the powerful ruling groups in Wilhelmine Germany. For both groups, expansionism would stabilize domestic politics by creating less need for further democratization. However, for underrepresented groups, such as German Jews, further democratization was exactly what was needed.

**German Anti-Semitism: Religious, Political, and Racial**

In Germany, there were three primary variants of anti-Semitism. One was rooted in medieval Christian opinion, which held the Jews responsible for the death of Christ. This belief developed into what may be characterized as a religious anti-Semitism, or more precisely, anti-Judaism. Medieval Christian policy emphasized converting the Jews to save these unbelievers from eternal damnation. Conversion attempts gradually used more force, especially to separate Jews from Christians. However, the failure of conversion resulted in greater fear of Jews and after the thirteenth century led to the ultimatum to either convert or face expulsion.
In Germany this Christian anti-Semitism was especially virulent in the works of Martin Luther, the sixteenth-century Protestant reformer and national hero. In his earlier years Luther had urged mutual tolerance and brotherly love between Christians and Jews. He came to feel that many Jews would willingly convert to Christianity once the worst abuses in Christianity had been corrected by the Reformation. When they refused to do so, Luther became increasingly impatient. In 1543 he published a bitter tract against them entitled *The Jews and Their Lies*, in which he characterized the Jews as criminals desiring world rule, killers of Christ and Christendom, and a plague to Germany. To smother this "pestilence," he advocated burning Jews' synagogues and schools, destroying their houses, removing their "cash and treasure of gold and silver," eliminating their prayer books and Talmudic writings, abolishing safe conduct for Jews on the highways, and, "if this be not enough, let them be driven like mad dogs out of the land...." Luther's vehement attacks on the Jews were frequently recalled and widely publicized by the Nazis. The original edition of *The Jews and Their Lies* would be exhibited in a special glass case at Nuremberg party rallies.

Another source of anti-Semitism was the powerful ideology of German nationalism, which was awakened by the Napoleonic conquests and which led to a movement in the nineteenth century for the unification of the separate German states. The new imperial German state, created in 1871, tended to view Jews as outsiders, constituting a state within a state. Heinrich von Treitschke, the distinguished professor of history at the University of Berlin, expressed this political anti-Semitism in a phrase coined in 1879, "the Jews are our misfortune," thus assisting the growth of the anti-Semitic movement. The years 1875–1895 saw the formation of German political anti-Semitism. This anti-Semitism had a new foundation. As Hermann Ahlwardt, a member of the anti-Semitic faction in the Reichstag, pointed out, they were fighting the Jews because of race, not religion, "A Jew who was born in Germany does not thereby become a German; he is still a Jew." His solution was to separate the Jews from the Germans. This type of racial anti-Semitism meant that conversion to Christianity could no longer provide a solution to the so-called Jewish Question, as they were seen as being racially Jewish. Therefore, neither conversion nor assimilation could ever make Jews true Germans.

During the two decades prior to World War I, when German imperialism was at its height, political anti-Semitism began to decline and lost its mass appeal. It was revived, however, during World War I. After the war, as we will see, although the constitution of the new Weimar Republic granted complete legal equality to all Jews, anti-Semitism continued to flourish. It would be especially strong among the representatives of the conservative German National People’s Party (DNVP) and other right-wing parties such as the National Socialists.

Religious, political, and racial anti-Semitism, then, were prominent features of modern German life. It is, of course, difficult to ascertain how deep and how widespread anti-Semitism was in Germany. It was surely not unique to Germany, as its presence in other countries well demonstrates.

Another related development during the reign of Wilhelm II was Germany's confrontation with new, radicalized, right-wing politics. National Socialism would arise

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from the right-wing, völkisch-nationalist groups that had established themselves in imperial Germany at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The concept of the Volk (nation, people, or race) had been an underlying idea in German history since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Inherent in it was a feeling of the superiority of German culture and the idea of a universal mission for the German people. This meant that individuals must be willing to sacrifice themselves for the higher claims of the Volk. Völkisch ideology consequently emphasized the idea of a Völksgemeinschaft, a people’s community that would unite all Germans in a racially pure community. The Jews—portrayed as an alien people harmful to the community—would be excluded.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, völkisch ideology began to stress anti-Semitism in racial–biological terms. The writings of Julius Langbehn, who affirmed that race, or the “power of the blood,” was more important than state were especially popular in this respect. He advocated a German elitist state based on race that would exclude the Jews. Biological racism stemmed from a pseudoscientific interpretation of the concepts of Charles Darwin. Races, like species of animals, had evolved through time. Some were superior, others were inferior. Like the struggle for existence in the natural world, racial conflict was considered a part of human societies. The works of the Frenchman Arthur de Gobineau and the Englishman Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who chose to become a German citizen, popularized the idea of race as the crucial factor in human history. Through his book The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century (1900), Chamberlain made a special impact on Germany. He argued that the Aryans (a term borrowed from linguists, who used it to identify people speaking a common set of languages known as Indo-European), of which the Germans were the foremost element, were the true creators of culture, whereas the Jews were simply parasites who destroyed culture. The Aryan race must be prepared to fight for civilization itself. Because of such biological arguments, the Jews were now viewed in racial terms: All Jews supposedly had immutable characteristics harmful to the völkisch state that bore Aryan culture. This identification of nation with race, and the subsequent belief that Jews were therefore not members of the new German nation, occasionally led to acts of extreme anti-Jewish violence. A blend of socioeconomic crisis, radical anti-Semitic agitation, and rumor mongering by scurrilous newspapers generated spasmodic episodes of anti-Jewish violence throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Germany.

Völkisch ideology, grounded in racial anti-Semitism, experienced new life during the period of depression and economic upheaval from the 1870s to the 1890s. To a great extent, Jews were scapegoats for the new economic and social problems created by industrialization and urbanization. Especially affected were elements of the traditional lower middle class—the farmers, artisans, and shopkeepers—who felt threatened by the new economic forces, which they identified largely with the Jews. Reared on preindustrial social ideals, many members of the traditional lower middle class blamed Jewish capitalists for all the problems of modern urban-industrial life.

In the 1890s, völkisch ideology combined with militant German nationalism to give rise to various nationalist pressure groups that tried to establish mass support for national goals. Groups such as the Pan-German League and the Navy League were strongly antisocialist and antiliberal. Despite large membership lists, they did not have direct political influence. They did provide an outlet for a considerable minority that was unwilling to participate in the regular political parties. This minority preferred a moral crusade for nationalist ideals to participation in electoral politics, and in the process they radicalized
right-wing politics. The Pan-German League was perhaps the best-known pressure group. It was antidemocratic and stressed extreme nationalism and the use of social imperialism to overcome social divisions and unite all classes. The Pan-German League attacked Socialists and especially the Jews as the destroyers of national community. The traditional conservative right, fearing the tremendous growth of the Socialists and unable to gain a mass following, found itself making common cause with these radical right-wing groups, giving them respectability and keeping anti-Semitism alive in German politics. During the war, radical right-wing groups, a new force in themselves, pushed for territorial annexations. Nazism would emerge as one among a number of radical, right-wing, anti-Semitic völkisch groups motivated by Germany’s defeat in the war to struggle even further for expansion and against “pernicious world Jewry.”

THE IMPACT OF WORLD WAR I

The imperial Germany of Wilhelm II came to an end with its defeat in World War I (1914–1918). The war had caused a declining standard of living for the Germans, although there were noticeable gaps between rich and poor. While defense industries and the skilled laborers who worked in them prospered, price controls hurt both farmers and producers of consumer goods. Civil servants also suffered noticeably. Because the value of the mark fell by 50 percent during the war, middle-class plans for postwar financial security from lifetime savings and the purchase of war bonds were dashed, adding to the growing insecurity of middle-class individuals. National Socialism would make vigorous appeals to these groups adversely affected by the war.

World War I shattered the liberal, rational, democratic society of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. The enormous suffering and the death of almost 10 million people shook traditional society to its foundations and destroyed, for many, the whole idea of progress. New propaganda techniques manipulated entire populations into maintaining involvement in a senseless slaughter. The suffering of the masses in turn intensified their demands for greater material and political rewards, which evoked a fear of social revolution on the part of the established classes. This anxiety manifested itself in the red scare, or the fear of communist revolution. Nazism would appeal to these fears and project itself as the savior of the German nation from the evil force of communism.

World War I was a total war, the first of its kind. Total war meant complete mobilization of resources and populations and increased government centralization of power over the lives of citizens. The need for quick decision making seemed to necessitate an authoritarian system unhindered by democratic debate, and political rights became limited. World War I made the idea of strong central authority a way of life and certainly one that the Nazis would later advocate. Civil liberties, such as the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and movement, were restricted in the name of national security. Military censorship of war news often kept the German populace ignorant of the true course of the war, and the sudden capitulation in 1918 shocked many, feeding into the myth that the war had not been lost, but that victory had been stolen. Lack of knowledge of atrocities committed by the German army in both the Western- and Eastern-occupied territories also made the harshness of the Versailles Treaty difficult for most Germans to comprehend. Economic freedom was curtailed by the desire of governments to plan production and distribution, allocate raw materials, and ration consumer goods. Food
shortages became rampant toward the end of the war. Twelve-year-old Elfriede Kuhr of Schneidemühl, Germany, wrote in her journal on September 10, 1917:

Everyone is talking about food at the moment—and about the need to stock up. No one wants to go through another winter like the last one, the “turnip winter.” Fortunately they have a cellar full of potatoes at Alte Bahnhofstrasse 17 (they bought a whole load off Herr Kenzler), as well as turnips. They have almost no bread, however, nor cooking fat. Their diet is utterly drab and monotonous.

A year later the monotony turned to tragedy for Elfriede. Writing in the third person on August 17, 1918:

A summer’s night. Warmth. He is dead now, that little boy of six months who had been Elfriede’s favourite. The emaciated child died in her arms yesterday: “He simply laid his head, which seemed much too big for his skeletal body, on my arm and died without as much as a rattle or a sigh.”

Thousands of other Germans would starve to death as the war sputtered to an end.

World War I created a lost generation, consisting of war veterans who had become accustomed to violence and a culture of mass killing. Military life had seemed exciting and offered a comradeship that gave meaning to life. Unable to adjust to peacetime conditions, some veterans joined paramilitary groups, such as the Nazi Stormtroopers, which seemed to offer the discipline, adventure, and camaraderie of their war years. These men and many of their countrymen were fiercely nationalistic and eager to restore the national interests they felt had been betrayed in the peace treaties. The myth of the war experience, which promoted the notion of German soldiers united at the front for defense of the nation, no longer divided by class, estate, and religion, later would be exploited by postwar nationalists, including the Nazis, as a vision of the coming new Germany.

Finally, World War I ended the age of European domination of world affairs. The transition point was 1917, when the Russian Revolution created the new Soviet Union and the United States entered the war. The termination of this European age was not apparent to all, however, for it was obscured by two developments—American isolationism and the Soviets’ withdrawal from world affairs and nurturance of their own socialist system. These developments were only temporary, but they created a political vacuum that was filled by Nazi Germany’s attempt to establish European and world hegemony. This attempt failed only with the reentry of the United States and the Soviet Union into European affairs.

Events moved quickly in the fall of 1918 to produce the end of the imperial German state. To avoid certain defeat as a result of the entry of fresh American troops into the war, army leaders Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff sought an armistice even though German armies were still fighting outside Germany. It was realized that the Allies would grant better terms if German imperial authoritarianism were eliminated, so democratic reforms designed to establish a liberal, democratic monarchy were instituted. Implicit among the Allied demands, however, was the abdication of the emperor. But Wilhelm II refused to abdicate, and it took a revolution of soldiers, sailors, and workers (November Revolution) to force him to do so. Workers’ and soldiers’ councils (German versions of the Soviets of the Russian Revolution) were formed throughout Germany and began to

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supervise civilian and military administrations. Wilhelm II finally agreed to abdicate, and
the Social Democrats under Friedrich Ebert took control and established a new republican
government on November 9, 1918. Two days later, an armistice was signed to end the war.
Unhappy with the course of the revolution, radical left-wing Socialists formed the German
Communist Party (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands or KPD) and staged a pitiful attempt at
revolution in January 1919. This “second revolution,” bloodily suppressed by the republican
authorities, created a deep fear of communism among many Germans. After decades of
authoritarian rule, Germany shakily embarked upon an experiment in democracy.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

The history of Europe in the nineteenth century can be pursued in three valuable surveys
and Robin W. Winks and Joan Neuberger, *Europe and the Making of Modernity, 1815–1914*
(Oxford, 2005). General surveys on modern Germany include Dietrich Orlow, *A History of
Modern Germany, 1871 to Present*, 7th ed. (Boston, 2012); Gordon Craig, *Germany, 1866–1945*
Century*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2003). Also useful are the essays found in Jonathan Sperber,

On the background to imperial Germany, see Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck and the
history of imperial Germany, see Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867–1918,
Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State* (New York, 1995); Volker Berghahn,
*Imperial Germany, 1871–1914, Economy, Society, Culture, and Politics*, Revised and Expanded
ed. (New York, 2005); Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871–1918* (New York,
1997); Michael Stürmer, *The German Empire 1870–1918* (New York, 2000); Edgar
Germany 1871–1918* (New York, 1998); David Blackbourn, *Class, Religion, and Local Politics
in Wilhelmine Germany* (New Haven, Conn., 1980); Thomas Rohkrämer, *A Single Communal
Faith? The German Right from Conservatism to National Socialism* (New York, 2007); and Geoff
Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change After Bismarck*
(Ann Arbor, Mich., 1991) and *From Unification to Nazism* (Boston, 1986). See also the essays in
James Retallack, ed., *Imperial Germany, 1871–1918* (Oxford and New York, 2008); and
Sven Oliver Müller and Cornelius Torp, eds., *Imperial Germany Revisited: Continuing Debates
and New Perspectives* (New York, 2011).

For good introductions to the political world of Wilhelm II’s Germany, see Thomas
*Germany in the Age of Kaiser Wilhelm II* (New York, 1996), and *Wilhelm II: the Kaiser’s Personal
Monarchy, 1888–1900* (New York, 2004). German foreign policy of the imperial period is
covered in Imanuel Geiss, *German Foreign Policy, 1871–1914* (Boston, 1976). On the
growth of anti-Semitism as a political force, see Paul W. Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction:
A Study of Political Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1949); Peter C. Pulzer, *The
Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1988);
and Richard Levy, *The Downfall of the Anti-Semitic Political Parties in Imperial Germany* (New
Haven, Conn., 1975). On the role of the Pan-German League, see Roger Chickering, *W
Introduction


MySearchLab™ Connections

Study and Review

While the rise of Nazism shocked some observers, the movement had its roots in political trends in Continental Europe: nationalism, politicization of the social classes, and imperialism. These trends, combined with severe economic conditions, created conditions in the Weimar Republic in which Nazism could grow and flourish.

Read the Document

1. Adolf Hitler, Excerpt from *Mein Kampf*
   This excerpt shows Hitler’s rationale and the reasoning behind his anti-Semitic views and policies.

Read the Document

2. The German Act of Confederation, 1814
   This document is a prime example of the stirrings of the nationalism that would sweep Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Read the Document

3. William Graham Sumner, from *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (1883)
   This excerpt recommends the political approach of “minding one’s own business.” Many in the intellectual elite dismissed working-class demands for improved conditions as unnecessary, and argued and that the best position was to deal with problems as they occurred.

RESEARCH AND EXPLORE

Fascism evolved partly from the frustrations of the working class. The demand for improved living and working conditions exploded as a result of severe postwar inflation and shortages in Germany. This unfocused anger and a search for national pride after a humbling defeat allowed what had been a fringe movement to emerge as a real political force.

1. How did the workers’ movements in post–Industrial Revolution Europe influence nationalist policies in Germany? How did this contribute to the rise of fascism in Germany?
2. In which ways can German anti-Semitism be traced to Martin Luther? Without the writings of Martin Luther, might Catholic attitudes to the Jews have led to an equally high level of anti-Semitism among Germans?
3. Had Germany and Austria/Hungary won World War I, would Nazism have developed in Germany? In which ways were the extreme socioeconomic conditions of postwar Germany essential for the development of the Nazi party?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Unification of Germany, 1866–1871
Nazi Rally