The social system of Weimar Germany has always been controversial. From the start Weimar society was characterized by a peculiar fluidity: between 1913 and 1933, the German Reich, commonly referred to as the Weimar Republic, was a virtual laboratory of sociocultural experimentation. In the streets of German towns and cities, political armies competed for followers—a process punctuated by assassinations and advertised by street battles embroiling monarchists, imperial militarists, nihilistic war veterans, Communists, Socialists, anarchists, and National Socialists. Parliamentary activity involved about twenty-five political parties whose shifting alliances produced twenty governmental cabinets with an average lifespan of less than nine months. The political circus performed in an economic crazy house: the hungry postwar years skidded into an inflationary period during which the German mark—valued before the war at 4.2 per dollar—plummeted to the value of 4.2 billion to the dollar. At this point, in November 1923, individuals paid a billion marks to send a letter abroad and the German Republic verged on complete financial bankruptcy and political disintegration.

An era of political and economic reconstruction began in 1924; by 1929 Germany had become the leading industrial power on the European continent. The Great Depression, announced by the crash of the New York Stock Exchange in October 1929, brought the Weimar Republic to the brink of disaster: by the end of 1932, nearly half of the German labor force was unemployed. Many jobless men provoked arrest, seeking shelter and food in prison, others swelled the ranks of the Red Front and, ominously, those of Hitler’s Storm Troops. In his propaganda the budding dictator exploited the additional economic problem of reparations payments to the Western Allies which the Young Committee had finally set in such a way that the actual payments, including interest, were to total approximately 29 billion
dollars from 1923 to 1938.

The Weimar Republic was also a whirling carousel of personal experimentation with differing life-styles. Guitar-playing, poetry-reading, free-loving youngsters roamed the country giving expression to the antibourgeois sentiments of the youth movement; nudist colonies flourished; in Berlin nightclubs phallic symbols became part of interior decoration, naked girls swung from the ceiling, and the staged performance of the sexual act was incorporated in the routine of show business; prostitutes and transvestites took their place in the street scene along with proselytizers for exotic cults.

The controversial character of Weimar Germany found its most intense expression in political conflict. Rightists and Nazis attacked the Weimar Republic as the product of sinister machinations; as a no-man's-land conjured up by the traitorous hands of a cowardly and servile gang: "the November criminals."

Leftists and Communists worked against the new German Reich, which they denounced as an unholy alliance against the workers—the founders of the Republic, they claimed, had betrayed the proletarian revolution.

Many sober and respected citizens experienced Weimar Germany as a necessary evil and turned Vernunftrepublikaner—rational republicans.

The Social Democrats and many liberals worked hard to launch and navigate the new ship of state. Some progressive intellectuals and artists hailed the Weimar Republic as a new golden age, and their enthusiasm was not unfounded. In Weimar Germany, intellectual and artistic innovations transformed science, philosophy, literature, music, painting, the theater, movies, and architecture into images expressing the dawn of a new consciousness. After the collapse of the Republic, political refugees carried the productive spirit of Weimar culture into the four corners of the world, merging it with the creative mainstream that aroused the awareness of people in the twentieth century. The creative process of Weimar culture is rich in conspicuous examples such as expressionist painting, atonal music, Brechtian theater, Einsteinian physics, and revolutionized visual experiences commonly associated with the Bauhaus. But while cosmopolitan audiences cheered successive opening nights, exhibitions, and first editions, conservatives and, increasingly, Nazis, reassured the provincial masses with warmed-over portions of traditional beer-and-sauerkraut culture (see Tilton).

Special political interests as well as past and present controversy have shrouded Weimar Germany in the swirling mists of history and often the contemporary interpreter feels reminded of the blurred outlines of that "ghostly freighter" Lotte Lenya used to sing about in The Threepenny Opera.
But one stark fact rises clearly above the shifting fogs which glide across the historical landscape: Weimar Germany became the demoniacal creator of the monster Nazism.

Nazi mass murder and other manifestations of genocide in the twentieth century have given a special urgency to analyses which pursue anti-Semitism and those frightening changes in political climate that led to the ash-darkened sky over Holocaust Germany (see Kren and Rappoport). Weimar society bubbled to the surface in the crucible of war and revolution. The German revolution followed in the wake of the military catastrophes triggered by the Allied offensives of July and August 1918. By October, Kaiser William II and the German High Command were sufficiently unnerved to allow the formation of a parliamentary government and to prompt its chancellor, the liberal Prince Max of Baden, to request President Woodrow Wilson to take steps for the restoration of peace. The half-hearted maneuverings of the German leaders and the Allied desire for Germany's total defeat prolonged the privations of the war, and in late October and early November sailors of the imperial fleet at Kiel mutinied to prevent a suicidal engagement with the English. By November 4, all German battleships flew the red flag and disgorged armed sailors who spread the revolution from ports to other cities. The soldiers who were sent against the mutineers refused to take action, and many of them joined the revolt (see Tobin). On the morning of November 9, Berlin was in revolutionary turmoil: crowds of workers and soldiers had transformed the Reichstag into an armed camp; Karl Liebknecht, the Spartacist leader, prepared to proclaim a soviet republic from the balcony of the imperial castle; Philipp Scheidemann, a leader of the Majority Socialists, countered this move by proclaiming the German Republic from a window of the Reichstag; Prince Max handed over the office of chancellor to the Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert. On the following day, William II fled across the German border to Holland, and at 5:00 A.M. on the morning of November 11, 1918, four reluctant German delegates signed the armistice.

On the day of the kaiser's departure, the Berlin convention of the Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets voted to support Ebert's "social republic." On November 10, as well, Ebert was informed by General Wilhelm Grüber that he could count on the collaboration of the Supreme Military Command. A disgusted Liebknecht denied his support, but the Independent Socialists joined with the Majority Socialists to create a cabinet. The provisional German government, which commenced its activities as the "Council of People's Representatives," lost the cooperation of the Independent Socialists after Ebert had ordered troops to Berlin on December 24 for an unsuccessful attempt to clear the palace of revolutionary "people's sailors."

Ebert's Majority Socialists began to long for a return to law and order by means of a national assembly, elected not only by Socialists, but by the entire population; elections for a
constituent assembly were fixed for January 19, 1919. When Ebert tried to dismiss the president of Berlin's police, the Independent Socialist Emil Eichhorn, the Communists joined the Independent Socialists in the manifesto of January 5, 1919, calling upon the German proletariat to stage a great mass demonstration against the government of Ebert and Scheidemann. These developments unleashed the Spartacus Rebellion, which transformed the German capital and other cities into battle zones where radical Independent Socialists and Communists fought against the supporters of the Ebert government. Ebert appointed the former basket weaver and trade union leader Gustav Noske as Supreme Commander of a volunteer corps. Led by bloodthirsty career officers of the old imperial army, Noske's troops entered the center of Berlin on January 11. The Spartacist strongholds succumbed to heavy fire, and by January 15, the volunteers of "bloodhound" Noske had cleared the last snipers from Berlin. The same day the Spartacist leaders Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and Wilhelm Pieck were arrested and beaten by staff members of the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützendivision. Liebknecht was murdered by Kapitänleutnant von Pflugk-Hartung; Luxemburg was gunned down by Leutnant Vogel; Pieck survived to participate in the affairs of the Weimar Republic as a Communist delegate. He returned to Germany from his Moscow exile in 1945 and became president of the German Democratic Republic in 1949.

The murder of Rosa Luxemburg is of special importance: German anti-Semites hated her not only as a professional revolutionary, but above all as a representative of the East European Jews who occupied a special place in anti-Semitic demonology (see Aschheim).

The elections for a national constituent assembly were held, as scheduled, on January 19, and on February 6 the national assembly met at Weimar, the city of Goethe. On February 11, Ebert was elected president of the Reich that was commonly called the Weimar Republic. The next day Scheidemann formed a coalition government made up of Social Democrats, the Catholic Center, and the Democrats. After approving Scheidemann's cabinet, the assembly began drafting a new constitution, which was adopted on July 31 and signed on August 11, 1919.

Ebert's alliance with the High Command of the old army had cleared the way for a democratic republic; but in fighting the extreme Left, the new government bent so far to the Right that it became an accomplice to the defeat of the social revolution. The Weimar coalition neither achieved public control over Germany's reactionary, monopolistic industrialists, nor did it succeed in breaking up the huge landed estates that were the power bases of feudal-minded agrarian overlords. From the beginning, therefore, the democratic leaders of Weimar Germany had sealed their own doom: their actions preserved the economic arrangements and military values of imperial Germany, leaving excessive power in the hands of cartel bosses and Junkers, who hated the Republic and worked for the return of an authoritarian regime. Many
workers, disappointed by the failure of social reform, strengthened the left-wing opposition of Independent Socialists and Communists who attacked the Social Democratic party and the Republic from the other corner of the ring. In growing numbers, discouraged bourgeois liberals withdrew into a world of fantasy, where they dreamed of vague and irrational verities. Their ill-defined concerns with the German homeland and German youth tied many Weimar liberals to exponents of neoconservatism, anti-Semitism, and the radical right (see Pois). Bourgeois feminism as well failed to challenge the class structure of German society and became an ally of groups working for the preservation of inequality and social injustice (see Bridenthal).

The year 1920 marks both the beginning of full-scale Rightist counter-revolution and the last successful demonstration of working-class solidarity. In March 1920, a rightist conspiracy, headed by the self-proclaimed "Reich Chancellor" Wolfgang Kapp and supported by the rebellious troops of the Ehrhardt Brigade, a Freikorps unit, assumed power in Berlin for a few days. The Kapp Putsch was defeated by the refusal of the higher civil servants to collaborate with the rebel government and by the crippling blow of a general strike called by the Social Democratic party and carried out by all labor unions.

German labor failed to reap the benefits of its success in the Kapp Putsch; the Socialist parties refused to cooperate with the victorious trade-union leaders, who called for the establishment of a labor government as the unified expression of the will of the entire working class. The rebuffed trade unions accepted the return of the ineffectual Weimar coalition, and thus began their disastrous policy of compromising with the ruling groups. While the workers' leaders permitted organized labor to skid to a secondary power position, General Hans von Seeckt, chief of the army command, used all his cunning to build the army into a state within the state. From then on it was not the life-giving strength of productive labor (see Grossmann), but the death-oriented power of the army that was to exercise the decisive force in the Republic.

At the end of June 1920, the Social Democrats lost their dominant position in Germany; the Weimar coalition was replaced by the new combination of the Center, the Democrats, and the German People's party. The parliamentary delegation of the German People's party was led by Gustav Stresemann, who contributed signally to the further development of Weimar Germany as a bourgeois-capitalist democracy. From August 1923 to November 1923, Stresemann held the offices of chancellor and foreign minister; afterwards—until his death in 1929—he acted as foreign minister.

Stresemann began his political career in the Republic under difficult circumstances. The population was embittered by the severe demands of the Treaty of Versailles, which had become effective in January 1920. Public dissatisfaction was deepened
by Allied insistence on reparations payments, more than six billion gold marks annually for forty-two years, and by the French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr on January 11, 1923, in retaliation against technical German defaults on reparation obligations in the delivery of timber. People were unnerved by the steady deterioration of the value of German currency and the subsequent inflation which culminated on November 20, 1923.

Stresemann's patient negotiations and careful policies of stabilization averted the worst consequences of these developments; he called off the passive resistance against French occupation forces and ordered the resumption of work and reparation payments. On November 20, 1923, a new currency, covered by a mortgage on Germany's entire agricultural and industrial resources, ended the inflation; in 1924, the Dawes Plan reduced annual reparation payments and provided the German government with an international loan of 200 million dollars. Strengthened by the Dawes Plan, the German economy began its remarkable recovery.

During these years of crisis and slow recovery, the rightist opponents of the Republic missed no opportunity to strengthen their position; free from the responsibilities of government, they peddled cheap and unrealistic slogans designed to incite chauvinistic emotions among the voters. Undaunted by the miserable Kapp Putsch, right-wing conspiracies, such as Organization Consul, elevated murder to an expression of patriotism; many republican leaders fell victim to Fememord. On August 26, 1921, Matthias Erzherger (see Hunt), Catholic Center politician and chief signer of the armistice, was gunned down in the Black Forest; on June 24, 1922, Walter Rathenau, Jewish industrialist and foreign minister, was attacked with guns and hand grenades in suburban Berlin-Grünwald. Rathenau's death motivated Chancellor Josef Wirth to give a Reichstag speech in which he announced that the "enemy stands on the right." Despite mass demonstrations and measures such as the Law for the Protection of the Republic, assassination remained a favored mode of Rightist policies. Ominously, the courts of law developed a tendency to show incredible leniency toward rightist terrorists, while severely punishing even minor infractions on the part of leftist individuals. Indicative of this tendency was Hitler's brief and comfortable stay at Landsberg prison—a virtual sabbatical for subversives—which was the only consequence of his Beer-Hall Putsch of 1923.

The professional army of Weimar Germany did not fail to turn republican problems and achievements to the advantage of anti-republican militarists. The economically significant treaty of friendship that was signed between the Soviet Union and Germany on April 16, 1922, at Rapallo provided the chance for military activities in Russia, which the Treaty of Versailles had withheld from the volunteer army that the Allies had limited to 100,000 men. In 1920 the army delighted in putting down the
workers' revolt in the Ruhr; in 1923, the army again made itself "useful" by suppressing attempted Communist coups in the working-class strongholds of Saxony and Thuringia.

For the Germans the year 1925 brought prosperity and further international reconciliation; on the front of internal politics the year spelled disaster. The Dawes Plan of 1924 had initiated a flow of foreign investments and short-term loans to Germany. This stimulated a wave of modernization affecting large portions of the country's industrial apparatus. Rising production and wages were accompanied by decreasing unemployment and by the end of 1928 Germany had become the leading industrial power in Continental Europe.

The internal political disaster began on February 28, 1925, when Friedrich Ebert, president of the Republic, died at the age of fifty-four. On March 29, 1925, the Germans went to the polls to elect a new president, but, as could be expected, not one of the seven candidates achieved the required majority on the first ballot. For the second round of voting, the republican groups supported Wilhelm Marx of the Center party as the single candidate of the Volksblock; the German Nationalists rallied the forces of the Right around the retired Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, and their major spokesman, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, persuaded the seventy-seven-year-old Junker to run; the Communists renominated their own candidate, party chairman Ernst Thälmann. By the slim margin of 904,151 votes, the elections of April 26, 1925, gave Hindenburg the simple plurality which the law required for a second-ballot victory. The self-professed monarchist Hindenburg received 14.6 million votes, while 13.7 million votes went to Marx, supporter of the Republic. Thälmann received the crucial 1.9 million votes which withdrew strength from the republican forces and ironically helped the Rightist cause by making possible the election of a man who personified Prussian militarism, German nationalism, and agrarian Junker conservatism. Kurt Tucholsky, one of the company of left-wing intellectuals associated with the radical, but independent Berlin journal Weltbühne, remarked after the election of Hindenburg that the Germans now had a "republic until further notice."

This "notice" was not given until 1930, and for five years parliamentary principles continued to govern the political life of the German Reich. The period from 1925 to 1928 was not only a time of prosperity, it was also the core of the "Stresemann era," which some like to identify as those "golden twenties."

While Stresemann acted as foreign minister he signed three major treaties on behalf of Germany, contributing to the development of an era of international good will. The Locarno Pact, signed on October 16, 1925, guaranteed the status quo of Germany's western frontiers, reaffirming in particular the German renunciation of Alsace-Lorraine. In response, the Allies began to withdraw their
military units from the Cologne zone of the occupied Rhineland; on September 8, 1926, Germany was admitted to the League of Nations with the permanent seat on the council. On April 24, 1926, Stresemann signed the Berlin Pact, extending the original Rapallo agreement with the Soviet Union; the new Russo-German agreement calmed Soviet fears with regard to German complicity in an anti-Soviet bloc, but renewed suspicion of Germany in most other European nations. On August 27, 1928, Stresemann signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact to outlaw war and was warmly received by the Parisians.

The sincerity of Stresemann's intentions has been questioned by historians, and the problem of his political morality may never be satisfactorily resolved. His policies of international reconciliation, however, combined with economic prosperity to create a period of relative stabilization. In the 1928 elections to the Reichstag, voting practices indicated strong popular support for the original design of the Republic: approximately 65 percent of the ballot went to political parties that were loyal to the Weimar constitution; the Communists received 11 percent of the votes; right-wing parties picked up less than 25 percent, and among them the Nazi party received no more than 3 percent of the valid votes.

The Social Democrats, who had received 30 percent of the ballot, supported Stresemann's foreign policy, but opposed the strong influence that industrialists and businessmen exerted on the government. Especialy ominous was the consolidation of monopoly capitalism, which gave far-reaching power to such gigantic trusts as I. G. Farben, Siemens, and Vereinigte Stahlwerke. The right-wing Nationalists, who had received 14 percent of the vote in 1928, fought violently and vociferously against international reconciliation. The Communists remained suspicious of Stresemann's policies and attacked what they considered his plotting against the Soviet Union; when Germany entered the League of Nations, they denounced this move as an anti-Soviet alliance between German capitalists and an international "consortium of imperialist bandits."

In 1929 Germany's prosperous economic development came to a grinding halt. The Great Depression brought the German Reich close to economic collapse: by the end of 1932, almost half of Germany's labor force was jobless. In the Reichstag elections of May 1928, the Nazis had received a mere 3 percent of valid votes, but in July 1932, 37 percent of the ballot went to the Nazi party. Hitler's propaganda campaign—financed by big industrialists and bankers (see Kuhn)—exploited the additional economic problem of reparations payments to the Western Allies, totaling about 29 billion dollars payable until 1938.

The depression brought the beginning of the end for parliamentary government: on March 27, 1930, Weimar Germany's last Great Coalition broke up with the resignation of the Müller cabinet.
The government of Social Democratic Chancellor Hermann Müller collapsed because of its inability to settle a dispute between the Social Democrats and the People's party concerning the elimination of a serious deficit in the unemployment fund. The business-oriented People's party called for a cut in unemployment benefits, while the Social Democrats demanded new taxes on business. The crisis provided Hindenburg and General Kurt von Schleicher, head of the ministerial office in the ministry of defense, with the long-awaited opportunity for authoritarian government.

On March 23, 1930, President Hindenburg asked Heinrich Brüning, parliamentary leader of the Catholic Center party, to form a cabinet without firm party ties; two days later he appointed Brüning chancellor. The new government was weighted to the right and included no Social Democrats (see Breitman). Brüning's deflationary policy and program of economic retrenchment found insufficient parliamentary support, and his unpopular measures were carried out by means of the president's emergency powers under Article 48 of the Weimar constitution. From the beginning Social Democrat Rudolf Breitscheid implored the government not to use Article 48; its employment, he warned, could only lead into the darkness of dictatorship.

These developments encouraged Hindenburg to drop all democratic pretenses and to show himself for what he was—a treacherous, reactionary Junker. The eighty-four-year-old president withdrew his support from Brüning, forcing his resignation on May 30; then Hindenburg sided openly with the large landowners and industrial magnates against the Social Democratic working masses that had supported him against the presidential candidates, Hitler and Thälmann, thereby making possible the old field marshal's reelection on April 10, 1932. Hindenburg's betrayal of the democratic forces sealed the fate of the doomed Republic, which became subject to the dangerous crosscurrents of partisan interests represented by generals, cartel bosses, and East-Elbian landlords, who shared an appreciation of the Nazis as an ill-mannered, but highly useful force counterbalancing the Socialist and Communist hordes. General von Schleicher confided in a letter: "Indeed, if the Nazis did not exist, we should have had to invent them." Under Schleicher's influence Hindenburg appointed Franz von Papen as chancellor on May 31, 1932; this ambitious Catholic aristocrat confronted the people with his "cabinet of barons," a government consisting of military leaders, industrialists, and Junkers. Papen's nonparty government had no popular support, but survived until November 1932, propped up by the president and the army (see Hörster-Philipps).

In 1932 German jails were crowded with close to nine thousand leftist political prisoners. In the basements of their headquarters, the Nazis tortured their enemies to death; in the streets, Communists and Nazis fought pitched battles. Following the advice of his minister of defense, General von Schleicher,
Papen lifted the ban that Brüning's government had imposed on the Nazi SA (Sturmabteilung) and SS (Schutzstaffeln). Hitler was given a free hand, and the Reichstag elections of July 31, 1932, resulted in a triumph for "Adolf Légalité," whose party became the largest in the country, polling over 13,700,000 votes with 230 seats in the Reichstag (see Stachura).

The Weimar Republic came to an end in the Byzantine power games which Papen, Schleicher, and Hitler played against a deadlocked parliament (see Petzina). The November elections of 1932 reduced the Nazi seats in the Reichstag to 196; only the Communists registered significant gains, polling close to six million votes with one hundred seats. The Social Democrats retained 121 seats, but deep-rooted programmatic differences between the two Marxist parties, as well as mutual blindness to the lethal nature of Nazi power, prevented the formation of a leftist coalition government (see Geary). These differences would not interest the SS concentration camp guards, who would later murder Communists and Socialists side by side.

Alarmed by the increase in the Communist vote and Hitler's drive for power, Schleicher forced Papen's resignation and took over the office of chancellor. On December 3, 1932, Schleicher's government began to operate in the hope of dividing the opposition on both the right and the left. Schleicher planned to reduce the Nazi threat by bringing Gregor Strasser's "left wing" into his regime; he also intended to pacify the Social Democrats by inviting the participation of trade-union leaders. Hitler immediately reacted by removing Strasser from the office of party secretary; later, in the Nazi blood purge of June 1934, he had Gregor Strasser murdered, along with Schleicher (see Nagle). The leaders of the Social Democratic party opposed any form of cooperation with Schleicher, and by January 6, 1933, they had succeeded in cutting all connections between organized labor and the chancellor.

On January 23, 1933, Schleicher admitted to Hindenburg that his strategy of forming a parliamentary majority had failed; he asked the president for an order dissolving the Reichstag linked with an indefinite and, therefore, unconstitutional postponement of the prescribed new elections. Hindenburg refused Schleicher's request, trusting in the success of secret negotiations involving Papen, rightist leaders, and the detested, but unavoidable Hitler. On January 28, Schleicher and his entire cabinet resigned and Hindenburg asked Papen to "clarify" the political situation. The nineteen Weimar governments were not noted for longevity: the average life span of a cabinet was less than nine months. With a duration of twenty-one months the Great Coalition of 1928 had survived the longest; with a duration of fifty-four days Schleicher's government was short-lived even by the standards of the Republic.

Papen wasted no time; with the support of Oskar von Hindenburg
and Otto Meissner he persuaded President Hindenburg to do what
the old field marshal had so far considered inconceivable, namely,
to appoint the "Austrian corporal," Adolf Hitler, chancellor of
Germany. Hitler and the members of his proposed cabinet, which
included von Papen as vice-chancellor, received their commissions
from Hindenburg on the morning of January 30, 1933. On the
evening of this demonic Monday, a confused eighty-five-year-old
German president and an ecstatic Hitler gazed down on the stream
of Nazi battalions, marching with flaming torches through the
Wilhelmstrasse.

Weimar society was dead. Germany sank into a darkness from the
depth of which there soon emerged a ceaseless stream of political
refugees.

The proscription of creative activity formed part of the
immediate program of Nazi oppression. Shortly after their
assumption of power, the Nazis ordered the Berlin newspaper Die
Nachtausgabe to publish a "first list" of forbidden authors. The
black list, which appeared on April 23, 1933, outlawed all major
writers including such Weimar luminaries as Bertolt Brecht, Max
Brod, Alfred Böblin, Lion Feuchtwanger, Egon Erwin Kisch,
Heinrich Mann, Thomas Mann, Theodor Plievier, Erich Maria Remarque,
Arthur Schnitzler, Ernst Toller, Kurt Tucholsky, Arnold Zweig,
and Stefan Zweig. This first list was followed by others, and
soon literate Germans realized that nearly eight hundred writers
had disappeared from their cultural environment.

The Nazi attack against German culture proceeded on all fronts
of intellectual-artistic creativity and banned all significant
thinkers, composers, sculptors, and painters. Soon intellectuals,
artists, and writers disappeared in Nazi concentration camps where
they were beaten to death along with activist workers and
political enemies of the German dictatorship.

But like the later exhibitions of Entartete Kunst, which were
meant to demonstrate the evils of "degenerate art," the black-
listing of authors alerted the world to the astounding creative
vitality of Weimar culture. People began to realize to what
extent the artistic-intellectual community of Weimar Germany had
contributed to the transformation of science, philosophy,
literature, music, painting, the theater, motion pictures,
and architecture into configurations of images expressing the
dawn of a new consciousness. The Nazi policy of proscription
could not fail to backfire, since it included creative movements
of international renown, such as expressionism, Piscator's
documentary theater, Einsteinian physics, Dadaist photomontage,
the new portraiture, the Dessau Bauhaus, the typographic
revolution, functional design, constructivism, photo-journalism,
Brecht's epic theatre, agitprop, Proletkult, and New Music
(see Meyer).

Weimar Germany's creative avant-garde went abroad. The innovators

In Germany the new rulers slapped their own art scene together (see Burns). Nazi public art, mass-produced by and for the media, consisted of sculpture, and architecture that glorified oppression, armament production, combat, and death. The dictator, who had once painted postcards during his residence in a Viennese asylum for vagrants, left the imprint of his taste on paintings. Nazi exhibits showed archaic provincial genre works. The creators of Auschwitz had an insatiable appetite for nondescript nudes, insipid country scenes, and group portraits of simple people. These hyper-German productions of tenth-rate painters came complete with absurd and pompous titles to endow them with "blood and soil" profundities. Nazi art had a dual function. The practitioners of this art were ordered to justify degrading and oppressive social relationships. Nazi artists also had to spread a tattered veil over the real processes taking place in Holocaust Germany: police terror, torture, murder, moronicization of the masses, war planning, genocide, and the repression and destruction of the Jews.