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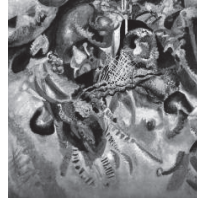
- Pink Triangle: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pink_triangle_jew.svg

Essential Questions

- Why was Weimar culture tolerant of homosexuals?
- What historical events led to the rise of the Nazis to power?
- What parts of Nazi ideology made them particularly repressive towards homosexual men?
- How were homosexuals treated compared to other persecuted groups?

Weimar Culture

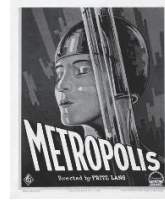
- 1919—The Democratic parliamentary republic was founded in Weimar, Germany, following the end of World War I
- Culture of this period was one of the richest in art, film, theater, architecture, design, literature, and music
- German Expressionism dominated art and film
- Modernism, an artistic movement, emphasized new forms of writing, painting, architecture, and film
- Advancements were also made in science, technology, and philosophy



Wassily Kandinsky, *Fugue*



Bauhaus School of Architecture and Design



Metropolis, a film by Fritz Lang



Poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht

At the end of the First World War in 1918, Kaiser Wilhelm II, the ruler of Germany, stepped down as leader. A new, democratic parliamentary government was established and first met in Weimar, Germany in 1919; historians refer to it as the Weimar Republic. This government signed the Versailles Treaty that the Allied leaders drafted at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. It was a very unpopular treaty in Germany because it made the country accept all the blame for the war, pay enormous reparations, and give up all its colonies and some of its territory.

During the period of the Weimar Republic, the arts flourished, especially in Berlin. Modernism, a movement that had begun in the late 19th century, encouraged artists to throw off the old conventions in painting, sculpture, architecture, film, theater, and music. Realism was out, and expressionism was in. The German Expressionist movement in art did away with realistic representations; artists focused on expressing moods or emotions through colors and shapes. Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky were among the painters who taught at the Bauhaus School of Art, Architecture, and Design. New forms for architecture were put forth by Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, who emphasized that form and function must work together. Their designs were much simpler than those of the highly decorative Victorian and Edwardian periods. Gropius said that a new architectural style was needed for a new era.

German Expressionism also made its mark on film. Directors Fritz Lang (*M*, *Metropolis*), F. W. Murnau (*Nosferatu*), and Robert Weine (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*) all used shadows and sharp angles in their sets and cinematography in order to create an atmosphere of suspense or horror.

In literature, authors such as Erich Maria Remarque (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) and Thomas Mann (*Buddenbrooks*, *The Magic Mountain*) gave a voice to postwar cynicism and a record of what they saw as the decline of German society. More radical writers, such as Bertolt Brecht, made no secret of their strongly anti-war views or communist sympathies.

Many discoveries in the new field of quantum mechanics were made in Weimar Germany. Physicist Werner Heisenberg developed his Uncertainty Principle during this period and worked with fellow physicists Max Born and Pascual Jordan to define quantum physics and its basic tenets.

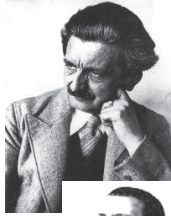
In all, the Weimar era in Germany blazed new paths in the arts that influenced painters, writers, and filmmakers around the world. The scientific discoveries made during this period would help lead to the development of the atomic bomb during World War II.

Picture source:

- Bertolt Brecht: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-W0409-300,_Bertolt_Brecht.jpg

Gay Culture in Weimar Germany

Adolf Brand



Magnus Hirschfeld,
Institute of Sex Research



Hannah Hoch, *Cut with the
Kitchen Knife*

Hannah Hoch, artist



Christopher Isherwood
(left) and poet W.H. Auden

In this artistic cauldron, gay life thrived. Many gay men and women were involved in the arts, including artists Richard Grune and Hannah Hoch; Robert Odeman, a musician, actor, and cabaret owner; and writers Hans Heinz Ewers and Erika Mann. Magnus Hirschfeld, a homosexual, headed the Institute of Sex Research, where he studied human sexuality—including homosexuality. Adolf Brand published the first gay journal in Germany, *Der Eigene* (Self-Owner). He used the journal to call for political activism, particularly the abolition of Paragraph 175, which made homosexual acts a criminal offense. Brand and Hirschfeld were members of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, which was founded in 1897 and was dedicated to gay rights. The Committee arranged speaking tours and exhibits to educate the public about homosexuality. Because of their efforts, gay rights became a big topic of public discourse in the 1920s. Nightclubs and cabarets put on shows in which men dressed as women and sang and danced. According to historian Frank Rector, there were more gay bars and gay publications in Berlin in 1920 than there were in New York in 1980. Many gay men lived openly with partners, despite the threat of arrest. They did this in part because many policemen in Berlin and other cities looked the other way and adopted a “live and let live” attitude toward homosexuals. However, some men did get arrested and faced criminal charges and imprisonment.

Christopher Isherwood, an English writer, lived in Weimar Berlin for many years and wrote about life there. He described his own homosexual encounters as well as a wide cast of nightlife characters in his book *The Berlin Stories*. These stories formed the basis of the musical *Cabaret*, which was also made into an Academy Award–winning motion picture.

Hitler Comes to Power



Ernst Röhm, head of the SA



Nazis burning the library of Magnus Hirschfeld



Hitler and SA (Brownshirts) members at a Nazi rally

With the country economically crippled by huge reparations and high inflation, the Weimar government lost the support of the German people. In 1933, Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and was granted sweeping powers. Nazi ideology idealized strong male images; homosexual men were stereotyped and reviled as weak and effeminate. However, many gay men joined the Nazi Party because they felt Hitler had the best plan for getting Germany back on its feet. For a while, homosexuals felt that they would not be bothered since one of Hitler's closest associates, Ernst Röhm, was a known homosexual. Hitler had even stated that one's personal life should not be an issue in politics.

Nazi ideology, however, was not tolerant of homosexuality. One of the first targets was Magnus Hirschfeld. In May 1933, soon after Hitler took power, Hirschfeld's Institute of Sex Research was ransacked and his library burned. (The writings of Hitler's political opponents, as well as the works of Jewish writers, were burned as well.) Hirschfeld was abroad at the time and never returned to Germany. He died in France in 1935.

Things got worse for homosexuals when Röhm fell out of favor with Hitler. Röhm had headed the SA, a paramilitary organization that had served as Hitler's shock troops while the Nazis built themselves up as a political power. This group, also known as the Brownshirts, beat up virtually anyone who was a political opponent of the Nazis: communists, socialists, labor organizers, and others. They also persecuted Jews and marched publicly to demonstrate the Nazis' power. After Hitler became chancellor, however, Röhm's ambitions soon conflicted with those of the Führer.

Röhm wanted to combine the SA and the German Army and put both under his control. The leaders of Germany's military viewed Röhm and his men as thugs and wanted no part of them. They would not stand for Röhm being elevated to a level above career officers, many of whom came from Germany's upper class. Although Röhm had fought bravely in World War I, the military leadership did not believe him qualified in any way to take over Germany's army.

Hitler needed the support of the German officer corps if he was going to be able to pursue his ambitions to extend Germany's power over countries to the east, including Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the USSR. To prevent Röhm from becoming too much of an impediment to his plans, Hitler gave orders for "Operation Hummingbird." On June 30th, 1934, the SS (*SchutzStaffel*), another Nazi paramilitary organization that served as Hitler's personal guards, began a round-up of SA men. Over the next two days, more than a thousand people were arrested and at least 85 were killed, including Röhm, although several historians say that the actual death toll might have been several hundred.

Hitler used Röhm's homosexuality as a justification for what had happened. In the wake of the "Night of the Long Knives," as the purge came to be known, homosexuals were targeted by the Gestapo, the German secret police. They entrapped gay men by inviting them to sexual encounters and then arresting them. Nazi ideology preached that every Aryan man and woman was supposed to marry and have children to repopulate the Master Race. Anyone who was not married was immediately suspect. People were encouraged—or even paid—to inform on friends, co-workers, tenants, relatives, and others. Homosexuals began to face arrest and detention in one of the growing number of concentration camps the Nazis had begun to build.

Ironically, Nazi persecution did not extend to lesbians unless they came to the attention of the police for other reasons, such as working with the resistance. Nazis believed that lesbians could be "converted" to heterosexuality. Only a very few lesbians were incarcerated for being gay.



- 1933–1945—approximately 100,000 men arrested for being homosexuals; 50,000 were convicted
- Not known exactly how many were sent to concentration camps
- In the camps, homosexuals had a 60% death rate, compared to 35% for Jehovah's witnesses and 40% for political prisoners

Not all gay men who were arrested ended up in concentration camps. Subject to torture during interrogation, men could escape incarceration if they named other gay men. Even then, they risked being rearrested if they were caught again. Many gay men married lesbian friends in order to mislead the police. Another way to avoid being sent to prison or a concentration camp was to accept being castrated. Of the men who were sent to concentration camps, many suffered the worst treatment of any inmates except for Jews. They were put on the hardest work details, given the least amount of food, and were frequently tortured, raped, or sodomized by the guards, in addition to other abuses. Moreover, homosexual inmates often suffered mistreatment by their fellow inmates who were not homosexuals. If they got sick, they were not allowed to go to the clinic but simply left to die.

Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, was obsessed with “curing” homosexuality, so in the camps SS doctors performed experiments on these men, hoping to find a homosexuality gene. One doctor inserted capsules of testosterone into gay inmates’ bodies to see if additional quantities of the hormone would make them more “manly.”



Richard Grune



Albrecht Becker

Albrecht Becker was born in Thale, Germany, in 1906. From a young age, he knew he was homosexual. When he was 18, he fell in love with an older man and lived with him for over a decade. In 1935, he was arrested for violating laws against homosexuality. Becker was lucky in that he was sent to a regular prison, not a concentration camp. When he got out of prison, Becker enlisted in the army because, as he said in an interview, he wanted to be around men. He was careful not to have any homosexual affairs while in the army. After the war, Becker made his living as a production designer and worked on over 100 motion pictures. He died in Hamburg in 2002.

Artist Richard Grune was born in Flensburg, Germany in 1903. He studied at the Bauhaus school in Weimar and was a student of painters Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. He moved to Berlin in February 1933, shortly after Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. He was arrested in 1934 in a general roundup of men accused of being homosexuals. Under torture, Grune confessed that he was gay. He was tried for violating Paragraph 175, the part of the German Criminal Code that outlawed homosexual acts. He was convicted and sentenced to prison. After he was released from prison, the Gestapo arrested him again and sent him to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. In 1940, he was transferred to Flossenbürg concentration camp. He was put to hard labor in the quarry and subject to sadistic treatment by the guards.

In 1945, as allied armies closed in on Flossenbürg, Grune and the camp's other prisoners were evacuated and began a march to the Dachau concentration camp. During the march, he escaped and fled to his sister's home in Kiel.

After the war, Grune published a set of lithographs titled *Passion of the Twentieth Century* that depicted his experiences in the concentration camps. He used his artistic talent to leave a record of what life had been like in Sachsenhausen and Flossenbürg.

Grune spent most of his later life in Spain, but returned to Germany and died there in 1983.

Klaus and Erica Mann



Klaus Mann in the U. S. Army



Erika Mann

Klaus and Erika Mann were children of Thomas Mann, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929. Erika, the oldest of Mann's six children, was also a writer as well as an actress. She was a lesbian, although she had a brief marriage in the 1920s to actor Gustaf Gründgens. Klaus Mann was also a writer and also homosexual. He and Erika were very close as children, and this closeness continued when they went to Berlin in 1923. Klaus, who had started writing stories while still a child, got a job as a theater critic and Erika became an actress with Max Reinhardt's theater company. She appeared in the 1931 film *Mädchen in Uniform* and several theater productions.

In 1933, when Hitler came to power, Thomas Mann and his wife were in Switzerland. Klaus left Berlin, thinking that he would return in a few months. When that did not happen, he went to Amsterdam, where he published a literary magazine that included works by some of the best writers in Europe. His uncle, Heinz Mann, contributed an incendiary essay against the Nazis. Klaus also found a publisher who agreed to publish books that had been banned in Germany. For this activity, Klaus's German citizenship was revoked, something he considered a "badge of honor." Klaus had several relationships with men, but never found a lasting partner. He never understood how the German people could be so enamored of Hitler and it left him disillusioned and often depressed. He became addicted to morphine, which he likened to a "little death." Erika was the last of the Mann family to leave Germany. After Hitler came to power, she too left Berlin and returned to Munich, where she had been born. There was less Nazi influence in Munich, and Erika and several friends put together a cabaret called "The Peppermill" in which, through fables and metaphors, they issued a warning about the Nazi regime that Erika directed. Erika also took care of her father's papers after he left the country so that they would not be destroyed by the Nazis. Eventually, Munich also became unsafe and Erika, with most of her company, left for Switzerland. She put on "The Peppermill" there, too, but the Swiss pro-Nazi party attacked the theater and Erika had to leave the country. She contacted W. H. Auden, the English poet, who was also homosexual, and suggested a "lavender marriage" (one in which both the man and the woman were gay, but marry for convenience) —in this case to make Erika eligible for a British passport. He agreed and she went to England. They stayed married for the rest of Erika's life, although they did not live together.

Drawing on the life of his ex-brother-in-law, Gustaf Gründgens, Klaus wrote *Mephisto*, a novel about a German actor who, despite the Nazis' oppression of political opponents, Jews, and free expression, becomes a favorite within Nazi circles in order to further his career. In September, 1936, Erika and Klaus went to America. Erika became a lecturer and writer; and published a book, *School for Barbarians*, which exposed the Nazis' use of propaganda in the German education system. She lectured around the country about the dangers posed by Nazi Germany. When France fell in 1940, Erika went back to England to help in the war effort there.

When America entered the war in 1941, Klaus enlisted in the American army, writing propaganda leaflets that were dropped by planes over Germany and served as an interpreter. Erika covered the Nuremberg trials and after the war served as her father's interpreter on his lecture tours. Klaus felt let down by his countrymen. While still in the army, he had visited his childhood home in Munich and discovered that the SS had taken it over and turned it into a Lebensborn house. The Lebensborn program was designed by Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS. Young women volunteered to go to these homes and become impregnated with children of SS men in order to breed more Aryan children. Appalled and feeling let down by his countrymen, he returned to the United States, but found himself unable to write, convinced that he could not express himself in English as well as in German. He killed himself in 1949.

Erika was forced to leave the United States when her political opinions and lifestyle caused her to become a target of the FBI. She returned to Europe and worked to get her brother's works published in Germany, dying in 1969. Klaus's novel *Mephisto* later became a bestseller and a highly successful film, winning the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 1981.

Postwar Period



Robert Jackson delivers the opening speech in Nuremberg, Germany at the first trial for war crimes



Berlin memorial to homosexual victims of the Nazis. The inscription reads "Struck Dead, Hushed Up."

After the Allies' victory in World War II, they tried top Nazi officials for war crimes and crimes against humanity—specifically the Nazis' attempted extermination of the Jews of Europe and their treatment of political opponents, Roma people (Gypsies), and Jehovah's Witnesses. The Nazis' war on homosexuals was not mentioned because these men had been considered criminals under Germany's laws predating the Nazi regime. Unlike other concentration camp prisoners, they were not eligible for reparations or state pensions for injuries they had suffered during their imprisonment. Neither were those who had been castrated eligible for compensation.

Under the Allies' military occupation of Germany, many of these men were transferred to ordinary prisons to serve out their sentences, with no recognition of the time they had been in concentration camps. They also were arrested and imprisoned after the war ended, again, for violating Germany's criminal code.

Both East Germany and West Germany kept versions of Paragraph 175 in their criminal codes until 1968 and 1969, respectively. In 1994, a reunited Germany reaffirmed that homosexual activity would not be considered a crime.

In 2002, Germany finally issued a formal apology for the actions against homosexuals during the Nazi era. Many countries have erected monuments to gay victims, including Germany.

Picture source:

- Berlin Memorial: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gedenktafel_Homosexuelle_Opfer_Nollendorfplatz_Berlin_2.jpg