# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td></td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Multiple Restorations and Divided Memory</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>From Periphery to Center: German Communists and the Jewish Question, Mexico City, 1942–1945</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Nuremberg Interregnum: Struggles for Recognition in East Berlin, 1945–1949</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Purging “Cosmopolitanism”: The Jewish Question in East Germany, 1949–1956</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Memory and Policy in East Germany from Ulbricht to Honecker</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Nuremberg Interregnum: Divided Memory in the Western Zones, 1945–1949</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Atonement, Restitution, and Justice Delayed: West Germany, 1949–1963</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Politics and Memory since the 1960s</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sources</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>515</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
right that an SPD national majority became impossible. In contrast to postwar Italy, where the Communist specter facilitated a half-century of conservative rule, the Communist absence in the Federal Republic made it easier for the SPD to move to the center in Bad Godesberg in 1959, and to win a national election in 1969. The prospect of Social Democratic victory increased pressures within West Germany in favor of a hard line toward the Nazi past.

The contours of postwar memory began to take shape when Nazism was triumphant and its political opponents were either in foreign exile, in the “inner” emigration of political withdrawal, or in Nazi prison and concentration camps. Before traditions could be restored, they had to be preserved. We turn now to that labor of preservation and to the impact of foreign travel on local traditions.

After 1945, East German Communist official memory of the Nazi era drew on an intact “antifascist” political tradition which originated in the Weimar Republic and continued in emigration during the period of Nazi rule. In this chapter I examine the dominant strand of Communist antifascism in the Weimar Republic, which later survived in exile in Moscow. Communist antifascism fostered a bipolar discourse in which communist dictatorships became part of the democratic world fighting against fascist dictatorship. Those, the Communists argued, who criticized the Soviet Union and the Communist parties were “objectively” supporting fascism. Those who sought to place the persecution of the Jews at the center of Communist antifascism were also out of step with a politics focused on class struggle and the centrality of the Soviet Union.

In 1933, following the Nazis’ arrest of Ernst Thälmann (1866–1944), the leader of the German Communist Party (Komunistische Partei Deutschland, or KPD) in the Weimar Republic, Wilhelm Pieck (1876–1960) became Thälmann’s successor as party chairman. Pieck and another member of the KPD Politburo, Walter Ulbricht (1893–1973), were leading figures of the Communist emigration, first in Paris and then in Moscow. While in Paris from 1935 to 1938, Ulbricht, along with Franz Dahlem and Paul Merker, led the KPD office in Paris. In Moscow from
1938 to 1945, Ulbricht demonstrated his loyalty to Stalin and consolidated his primacy over the KPD. Having emerged preeminent in Moscow, Ulbricht prevailed over potential challengers returning from concentration camps, such as Dahlem, and from emigration in the West, such as Merker. Ulbricht became the most powerful member of the German Communist Party and then the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistisches Einheitspartei, or SED) after World War II, as well as leader of the East German government from 1949 to 1971.³ His Zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung (1953) (On the History of the German Labor Movement) and Zur Geschichte der neuesten Zeit (1955) (History of the Recent Period) included his essays, speeches, and important party documents covering the period from Weimar to the mid-1950s.⁴ Pieck, who had been a comrade of Rosa Luxemburg’s, was a founding member of the KPD in 1918–19, continued as chairman of the Communist Party in exile, and ended as president of East Germany from 1949 to 1960. Collections of his essays covering the period from 1908 to 1950 appeared in 1951.⁵ Together, Pieck’s and Ulbricht’s writings offer the canonical texts and major themes of the postwar Communist narrative of the Nazi era. Subordination of the causal autonomous significance of Nazi ideology as well as hostility to German social democracy remained enduring elements of Communist antifascism.

Several themes of Communist antifascism were particularly decisive for shaping postwar memory. First, and most obviously, was the Comintern’s famous assumption that fascism was essentially a dictatorial, terrorist, and imperialist form of finance capitalism. Hence, Nazism—which the Communists always called “German fascism”—was to be understood first of all in the Marxist analysis of capitalism and class struggle; its anti-Semitic ideology was relegated to the realm of a superstructural epiphenomenon. Second, the German Communists argued that they bore no responsibility at all for the destruction of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism. That, they insisted, was the fault of German Social Democrats and their refusal to make common cause with the Communists in the Weimar years.

Yet, as they privately admitted on occasion, and as historians have amply documented, the German Communist Party, and its leader Ernst Thälmann, faced with the growth of Nazism, rejected all alliances with Social Democratic and liberal parties and denounced the Social Democrats as “social fascists.”⁶ Thälmann consistently blurred the distinctions between Weimar democracy and authoritarian rule.⁷ In a resolution on “the struggle against fascism” of June 4, 1930, the KPD Politburo declared that “the struggle against fascism is inconceivable without the sharpest struggle against the Social Democratic Party and its leadership, a leadership which represents a decisive weapon favoring the spread of fascism in Germany.”⁸ In November 1931 the KPD Central Committee declared that “social democracy is our major enemy in the proletariat. In the current period of the class struggle we conduct the major blow against social democracy.”⁹ As late as August and September 1932, at the twelfth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, held in Moscow, party leaders denounced cooperation between Communists and Social Democrats to resist Nazism as “right-wing opportunism.”¹⁰ During a KPD party conference in Berlin held in October 1932, Thälmann favorably quoted Stalin’s view that fascism and social fascism were “twin brothers” (Zwillinge), not contrasting ideologies.

A third element of Communist antifascism that exerted a continuing impact on postwar interpretations was the dialectically inspired inclination to see political disasters as preludes to subsequent Communist success.¹¹ In a 1934 booklet titled We Are Fighting for a Soviet Germany, Pieck, who became chairman of the KPD after Thälmann’s arrest, wrote that ten months of fascist dictatorship had “confirmed the prediction of the Communist International” that fascism would not usher in a period of reaction and that “the establishment of the Hitler dictatorship may indeed temporarily hinder but cannot put a stop to the development of revolutionary forces.”¹² The Soviet victory over Nazi Germany, combined with the failure of the Germans to overthrow Nazism themselves, simultaneously confirmed his Communist faith in an optimistic, dialectical “happy ending” to the class struggle, while at the same time it shook his belief that the Germans would make a significant contribution to that outcome.

Fourth, the more the KPD sought to present itself, out of both
political conviction and political opportunism, as leading an antifascist, democratic, and national front, the less willing the party was to emerge as a defender of the Jews. Already in the Weimar era the KPD had shown its nationalist side as it competed with the right wing in attacking the Versailles treaty. A nationalism fed both by Marxism-Leninism and by traditional German hostility to “the West” would remain a key point of continuity in Communist discourse in the KPD after 1945 and in the SED regime after 1949.

Fifth, Marxist-Leninist economic reductionism and a view of ideology as primarily an instrument for other purposes also contributed to marginalization of the Jewish question. The Communists viewed anti-Semitism as above all a tool of the capitalist classes for confusing, dividing, and weakening the working class, not as an ideology with a history and an impact independent of the history of capitalism. Communists who argued that Nazi anti-Semitism had an autonomous political significance were exceptional. The problem with Communist theory, however, did not consist only in sins of omission and neglect. It included active hostility to Jews. Since Marx’s essay on the Jewish question, a strong undercurrent of Marxism had associated the Jews with capitalism and the bourgeoisie. Although Hitler attacked “Jewish bolshevism,” Communists were divided between a reflexive sympathy for a seemingly natural ally and a view of the Jews as part of the international capitalist antagonist.

Sixth, basic assumptions about religion and society deeply embedded in the Marxist and Communist tradition contributed to the forgetting and marginalization of the Jewish question, including the Holocaust. Communists, after all, believed that religion was, as Marx put it, an “opiate of the people” or a “necessary illusion” linked to the existence of class society and capitalism. They reasoned that revolution, by eliminating capitalism and creating a classless, Socialist, and then Communist society, would lead to the disappearance of both religion and religious hatreds—including anti-Semitism. Hence, there was no need to devote particular attention to the Jewish question any more than to any other religious matter. The thesis of a dialectic of enlightenment which Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno applied to Nazism and the Holocaust fits far more plausibly as an explanation of the rage at stubborn other-

ness which remained a central characteristic of twentieth-century Communists who saw themselves as heirs to the tradition of Enlightenment rationalism and universalism.

Reflecting the Stalinization of the KPD in the 1920s, when German Communists thought about the oppression of nationalities, they were guided by a canonical text, Stalin’s 1913 essay on the national question. “A nation,” he wrote, was “a historically grounded, stable community of people that emerges on the basis of a community of language, territory, economic life, and cultural characteristics rooted in the community.” Because the Jews lacked these prerequisites, he continued, they were not a nation. Once in power, however, the Bolshevists proved to be ideologically flexible; they recognized Jewish autonomy in local areas, and even considered giving the Jews an autonomous entity, Birobidzhan, to which they would move. The initial Soviet sympathy for Israel in 1947 and 1948 drew on such “Stalinist” recognition of Jewish claims to nationhood. This labile character of Communist thinking about the Jewish question is important to keep in mind both to understand why those fighting anti-Semitism might look favorably on Communist antifascism and to grasp the interaction between contingent political events and the emergence of central and peripheral elements of Communist thinking on the issue.

Or, in simpler terms, the party line could change. At the Comintern’s Seventh Congress in Moscow in July and August 1935, the Soviet-controlled Comintern replaced the ultraleftism of the Third Period with a call for a Popular Front against fascism that would bring Communists together with Social Democrats and liberals. Pieck now denounced the previous Communist assault on democracy and social democracy. The Communists, he said, both underestimated the fascist danger where it did exist, namely, in the “Hitler movement,” and saw “fascism where it did not at all exist,” namely, in some of the regional Social Democratic governments of the last years of the Weimar era. At the same meeting, Walter Ulbricht made the devastating admission that the KPD had “directed its main blows against social democracy at a point at which it should have directed them against fascism.” Such blunt and honest assessment, however, did not then become public knowledge.

From October 3 to 15, 1935, the German Communist exile leadership
in Moscow held what came to be known as “the Brussels Conference.” Pieck made the case for a turn to the Popular Front in a speech soon published in France as a pamphlet titled Der neue Weg zum gemeinsamen Kampf für den Sturz der Hitlerdiktatur (The New Path for the Common Struggle for the Overthrow of the Hitler Dictatorship). Der Neue Weg became the canonical text for the KPD of the Popular Front period. Pieck now publicly admitted that the Communists’ “most serious error” was the failure to “bring our struggle against social democracy into a proper proportion to the struggle against fascism.” When they should have attacked “the fascist movement,” the Communists instead attacked social democracy and “bourgeois democracy.” Hence, “it was inevitable that we were unable to mobilize the working class for the struggle against fascism . . . For a long time the underestimation of the fascist danger prevented the party from taking the course of creating a unity front with Social Democratic workers.” The German Communists, with their attacks on social democracy, had assumed responsibility for the failure of a united front against fascism to emerge in Germany as it had in France. The result of the shift in the Comintern line and its attendant self-criticism was an abrupt reversal toward “unity of action” with all “antifascist” forces, including the previously despised Social Democrats. Pieck’s Neue Weg placed the German Communists in the causal chain of events in German history which had made the Nazi seizure of power possible. It was not only “the others” who had to bear the responsibility. In retrospect, Pieck’s statement of October 1935 would remain an unusual moment of chastened and honest self-reflection.

Another aspect of the Neue Weg speech was less reassuring. Pieck agreed with the criticism of the Comintern leader Georgi Dimitrov that the German Communists had in effect been insufficiently nationalistic in the Weimar years. Specifically, they had “displayed great shortcomings in this struggle [against the Versailles treaty] and did not understand how to take the national feelings of the masses into account in [their] agitation.” They should now “stand for the complete elimination of the Versailles diktat and for the voluntary reunification into a free Germany of all those parts of the German people who had been torn away by this diktat.” Pieck returned to the argument that the Communists had not been nationalistic enough at a KPD conference held outside Paris in January–February 1939, known as the “Bern Conference.” He argued that the KPD should stress the “conflict between the policy of Hitler fascism and the interest of the German nation,” and no longer avoid words such as Nation and Volk: “Saving the nation from catastrophe means saving it from traitors and destroyers, Hitler fascism, and big capital. This is the highest national deed of our era.” Speaking the language of nationalism appeared to contradict coming to the defense of the Jews, the great “other” in Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, in the face of Nazi persecution, the German Communists did make common cause with German Jews. In response to the anti-Jewish pogrom of November 9, 1938, the KPD in exile published a special issue of Die Rote Fahne, the party’s clandestine newspaper. The Central Committee passionately denounced the pogrom “which has covered Germany’s honor with the deepest disgrace in the eyes of the whole of humanity.” All “honorable Germans” rejected the attacks on defenseless Jews. The statement continues:

The struggle against the Jewish pogrom is an inseparable part of the German struggle for freedom and peace against the National Socialist dictatorship. Hence, this struggle must be conducted with the most complete solidarity with our Jewish fellow citizens by all who have been subjected to the tyranny of the Hitler dictatorship . . . The German working class stands at the forefront of the battle against the persecution of the Jews . . . The liberation of Germany from the shame of the Jewish pogrom will coincide with the hour of the liberation of the German people from the brown tyranny.

The statement was unique in the history of German communism. Never before or afterwards did the KPD, or later the SED, so emphatically proclaim its solidarity with the Jews persecuted by Nazism, or link the Jewish fate to that of the “German struggle for freedom and peace.” In the postwar era, Ulbricht did not include the statement in the canon of glorious moments of Communist antifascism.
Pieck, ever the revolutionary optimist, argued that the pogrom was due to Hitler’s fear of popular antagonism in response to his war provocations of September 1938. The pogrom represented the Hitler regime’s efforts “to intimidate the German people as a whole and thus to break their growing resistance.” It was, he continued, not only the Jews who were the Nazis’ victims: “It is the working masses as a whole against whom these excesses are directed.” The working class and the Communists “feel bound in solidarity with the persecuted Jewish population, and see in their defense the preservation of their own interests.”

The typically Communist aspect of Pieck’s argument was his rejection of the idea that the Nazi attack on German and European Jewry was made for its own sake, not in order to weaken the working class or intimidate “the people as a whole.” This view of the Nazi persecution of the Jews as a functional tool for other political purposes was also evident in Ulbricht’s description of the pogrom as a “weapon of fascist war policy” and a tool of Nazi domination. Ulbricht asserted that the pogrom “intended to split the mass opposition and prevent the unification of workers and peasants, intellectuals and the middle class and of all freedom-loving people in Germany... The cause of the persecuted and murdered Jews is the cause of all moral men and women... [and] of peace, freedom, and humanity.” Ulbricht still viewed anti-Semitism through the prism of class struggle, as an instrument or weapon for achieving some other end. Yet underestimation or misunderstanding was not the same as hostility or indifference. He placed the cause of the “persecuted and murdered Jews” firmly within the concerns of Communist antifascism. Moreover, particularly striking in view of the subsequent hostility of the German Democratic Republic to Israel was Ulbricht’s criticism of Nazi agitation against the Jews in Palestine: “Through stirring up race hatred, it [Nazi Germany] seeks to strengthen fascist influence among the Arabs and to prepare the capture of colonies by German fascism.” Ulbricht did not include the article in the official East German history of the German labor movement. Publication of his denunciation of Nazi imperialism in the Middle East in 1938 would have been an awkward reminder of a past moment of solidarity with the Jews, which stood in sharp contrast to the East German government’s hostility to the Jewish state.

The core leadership of the KPD, including Ulbricht and Pieck, spent the wartime years in Moscow, where they observed the suffering inflicted by the German armies on the Soviet Union. In 1955 Ulbricht dedicated his postwar account of those years to the “fighters of the Soviet army, to whom the German people are indebted for their liberation from fascism, and also to the nameless heroes of the illegal antifascist struggle.” Yet the work contained very little about the German resistance to Nazism, and only 6 of the 616 pages of Volume 2 of the official history of the German labor movement, his previously published essays and speeches covering the period 1933–1946, dealt with the “antifascist opposition in Germany.” “Antifascist resistance” between 1933 and 1945 in Germany remained a minor episode in Ulbricht’s official history. For Ulbricht, Nazism’s primary victim was also the source of its defeat. While the German invasion of the Soviet Union was “the greatest crime of German history,” the Red Army emerged as the main source of resistance to fascism. It was only after the “blows of the Soviet army” had destroyed the legend of the German army’s invincibility that “broad circles of the German people were willing to listen to arguments for reason and to face reality.” The Red Army’s victory over the Wehrmacht at Stalingrad turned the tide in the war and demonstrated the military, political, moral, and economic superiority of the Soviet Union over Hitler’s Germany, encouraged anti-Nazi opposition in Germany both among government officials and “in the ranks of working people,” and made the United States and Great Britain more interested in forming a second front in Europe so that the Soviet army alone would not defeat Nazi Germany. Just as he saw the German Communist Party as “the only” real antifascist force within Germany, so was the Soviet Union the leader of antifascist resistance among the warring states of World War II. Ulbricht offered a realist’s assessment of the power of states, not a romance of widespread German resistance.
Ulbricht gave backhanded praise to the resistance group of Jewish Communists led by Herbert Baum in Berlin when he wrote that Baum had “taught the members to see that the essence of fascism was not only in terror against the Jews, but rather was in the oppression of the whole German people, and that therefore they must fight actively for the overthrow of fascism.” He was, however, openly dismissive of the conspirators of July 20, 1944. Their actions, he said, constituted “the projects and efforts of German monopolists to preserve their power beyond the lost war and to find a way out at the cost and to the detriment of the German and other peoples.”

The first loyalties of the German Communists in wartime Moscow were with Stalin and the Soviet regime. Despite the emergence of the Jewish Antifascist Committee, the Germans did not fundamentally change their views about the Jewish question during the war and Holocaust. Instead they directed their appeals on Moscow radio at the invading Wehrmacht and German POWs. Pieck’s wartime radio addresses document his efforts to separate the Germans from the Nazi regime, and the collapse of his hopes for an internal German revolt. In April 1942 Pieck called on the Germans to restore Germany’s honor, which had “been discredited before the whole world by Hitler’s and his barbarians’ war crimes.” In July 1942 he called “the Hitler clique... the deadly enemy of the German people.”

The war was being waged in the interest of “a small band of robbers, of plutoocrats, and Nazi big shots.” The “greatest national crime against the German people” was the “imperialist war of plunder against the Soviet Union.” The Germans could save themselves from ruin only by overthrowing this “clique.” If, however, the Germans waited for Nazism to be defeated from without, they would be “burdened with a heavy guilt for having stuck with this band of criminals until the end.” His radio broadcasts of 1942 included extensive reports of German atrocities on the Eastern Front: “more than 900,000” Poles murdered or dead from hunger since 1939; several hundred thousand taken to concentration camps; almost 2 million shipped to forced labor in Germany. Pieck stressed the particular barbarity of the ongoing war against the Jews: “The SS bandits in Poland were especially intent on annihilating the Jewish population. Seven hundred thousand Jews have already been murdered. Hundreds of thousands of Jewish families have been crammed together into concentration camps and are dying of hunger and disease.” He offered vivid and detailed descriptions of the “unheard-of crimes the Nazi band committed against the Russian civilian population.” There was, he said, “no bestiality imaginable which the SS bloodhounds will not commit against the Russian people.” He repeatedly returned to the theme that the only way the Germans could regain the respect of other peoples was to overthrow the Nazis. These evocations of Nazi barbarism and of the German revolt which failed to occur had enduring consequences for postwar East German politics.

Pieck’s sentiments were shared by other leading German exiles in Moscow as they engaged in efforts to undermine the German armies on the Eastern Front. Toward that end, in July 1943 they founded the Nationale Komitee Freies Deutschland (National Committee for a Free Germany), or NKFD, along with the Bund Deutscher Offiziere (Association of German Officers), composed of captured German officers. At the founding meeting, the NKFD issued a “Manifesto to the Wehrmacht and the German People.” It stated:

If the German people continue to permit themselves to be led to ruin without will and without resistance, then with every passing day they become not only weaker and more powerless but also more laden with guilt. Then Hitler will be overthrown only by the weapons of the [Allied] coalition. Such an outcome would mean the end of our national freedom and of our state. It would bring about the dismemberment of our fatherland. And we could not bring an indictment against anyone but ourselves.

If, however, the German people quickly pull themselves together and prove through their deeds that they want to be a free people, and are determined to liberate Germany from Hitler, they win the right to determine their own future destiny themselves, and the right to belong to the world.

**THAT IS THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE THE SURVIVAL, THE FREEDOM, AND THE HONOR OF THE GERMAN NATION.**
As the war continued, the anger of the Moscow exiles toward the Germans grew. Erich Weinert, a member of the KPD and the president of the NKFD, rejected the view that terror alone kept Hitler in power. It was also, he continued “your [the Germans’] obedience, your fateful bond [to Hitler] . . . your cowardly silence and hesitation which still always gives Hitler the possibility to preserve his power.” The Germans, he insisted, had means—strikes, work slowdowns—to “break his power . . . You need only the will to use them.” The coexistence of mass crimes with the absence of revolt stretched the credibility of the view that German fascism was only the terrorist rule of a small clique of capitalists, militarists, and Nazi functionaries lacking popular support.

While, on the one hand, the leaders of the NKFD spoke the wartime language of Popular Front antifascism, they were also establishing the justification for imposing a postwar dictatorship on an untrustworthy and dishonored people.

From July 19, 1943, until November 3, 1945, the NKFD published the Moscow edition of Freies Deutschland. Reflecting the journal’s Moscow location and the KPD’s efforts to appeal to Germans to overthrow the Nazis, the pages of Freies Deutschland focused on the main battles on the Eastern Front, the impact of the war on Germany, and the contribution of the Soviet Union and the Red Army. In spring and fall 1945, revelations of the full extent of Nazi war crimes occupied up to 20 percent of the paper’s pages. In the spring of 1945, as the Red Army was liberating the Nazi death camps, Freies Deutschland carried reports about the fate of the Jews in Auschwitz and Maidanek.

Although they did not ignore the Jewish catastrophe, the members of the NKFD did not repeat or expand on the solidarity with the Jews which the Communists had declared in 1938. On the contrary, published at least they kept a certain distance. In May 1942, ten months before Soviet hopes were raised by the victory at Stalingrad, the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee in Moscow, composed of prominent Jewish Communists, declared that “with pride, we Jews of the Soviet Union speak for Jews of the whole world.” The statement specifically referred to the attack on the Jews of Europe and the Soviet Union, who “are beaten, tortured, and murdered by the bestial Hitlerites”; called the Red Army the “hope of all humanity”; and warned that in the summer of 1942, “the fate of all humanity . . . and also the fate of the Jewish people” would be decided. Yet, despite the existence of the Jewish Antifascist Committee, there was no public expression of political or ideological ferment among German Communist exiles about the Jewish question in wartime Moscow. Even in the face of the Holocaust taking place on and behind the Eastern Front, German Communists’ prewar assumptions about the Jewish question remained intact.

Outlines for courses in modern German history and politics prepared for German prisoners of war in the Soviet Union indicate the continuing orthodoxy of German and Soviet Communists. Anti-Semitism was the “most precise expression of the cannibalistic essence of [Nazi] race theory.” Above all, as the lecture notes for a course taught in 1942 stress, anti-Semitism was a “tool” of reaction for diverting mass discontent “onto the tracks of a murderous war against the working Jewish masses.” The fascists used this tool “to weaken the strength of the German people and break its struggle against fascism,” while “the Nazi scoundrels” used the tool of anti-Semitism “to personally enrich themselves by appropriating the property of the Jewish bourgeoisie.” A 1944 course outline on the war and modern German history lists “Hitler’s campaign of extermination under the banner of race theory” as the topic of one of twenty lectures. A 1944 lecture on “the Hitler fascists’ campaign of extermination under the banner of race theory” still clung to the view of anti-Semitism as a “tool of the German fascists” designed to divert the anger of dissatisfied masses away from those who were “really guilty” and to mobilize “broad masses of the peoples of Europe against the so-called Jewish plutocrats in England and America” as well as against ‘Jewish domination’ in Russia.”

Of course, the Communists were not alone in failing to grasp the centrality of anti-Semitism or the Holocaust at the time. Neither the United States nor Great Britain placed the Jewish catastrophe at the center of its analysis of or strategies for fighting World War II, nor understood the primacy which Hitler attributed to his war against the Jews. Nonetheless, given the proximity of Soviet military power to the scene of the crimes, this was a fateful misunderstanding indeed. So far,
no evidence has come to light which indicates that the German Communist exiles in Moscow urged the Soviet government to use its army or air force to stop or delay the operations of the Nazi death camps. The poet Johannes R. Becher (1891–1958), a future member of the SED Central Committee, one of the leading East German literary intellectuals, and a future minister of culture, was also in Moscow with Ulbricht. His unpublished 1944 essay, “The Race Theory of German Fascism,” intended for an internal party discussion group, indicates how one leading figure of the German exile was thinking about these issues. He described Nazi racial theories as pseudoscience, as “conscious distortions and falsifications” about race and blood with catastrophic consequences. The “ideological poisoning” of the Germans, he said, had resulted in the “hated and contempt of the whole of progressive humanity toward Germany. The fascists pseudoscholars, no less than the imperialist economic leaders and the party leaders of the NSDAP [the Nazi Party], are traitors to the German nation and criminals against humanity.” Despite an extensive treatment of the historical origins of modern racism, Becher gave short shrift to the specifically anti-Jewish components of Nazi racial ideology. Defense of the Soviet Union against the Nazi invaders was the Communists’ first priority. Perhaps another reason for his reticence lay in the efforts of the German exile to speak as the true representatives of the German nation in opposition to the Nazi “traitors.” Explicit and frequent identification with the Jews did not help in that endeavor. On the contrary, for Germans subjected to propaganda, it might lend credence to the Nazi association of the Jews and bolshevism. Despite the shortcomings and opportunism of the Moscow exiles’ understanding of anti-Semitism, some Communists entertained the hope that the Communists’ general revulsion against Nazi racism would extend to a postwar renewal and deepening of solidarity expressed in November 1938 with persecuted Jewry.

The Allied victory over Nazism was bittersweet for the German Communists in Moscow. In a radio address from Moscow on May 4, 1945, Wilhelm Pieck expressed the ambivalence of anger and shame that moment. Every “honorable and true German,” he said, was filled with joy at the Red Army’s victory “over the forces of darkness, insanity, and genocide embodied in Hitlerism ... Yet the joyful news is mixed with the bitter, tortured consciousness that the German people themselves did not free themselves from this band of murderers, but instead followed them to the end, and supported them in their war crimes.” Blinded by Hitler’s early successes, the Germans refused to listen to the warnings of antifascists, and adopted the “Nazi poison of imperialist ideology of plunder ... You [the Germans] became the tools of Hitler’s wars and thus have taken a great shared guilt and responsibility. Now you will bear this guilt toward other people and must again clear the German name of the filth heaped on it by the Hitler band.”

With defeat certain, the Germans nevertheless fought to the bitter end. In late May, Georgi Dimitrov, Pieck’s longtime colleague in the Comintern, told Pieck that the majority of Germans “would have been happy if Hitler had won the war.” In the Battle of Berlin alone, fought between April 16, 1945, and May 1, 1945, the Soviets suffered 300,000 men killed, wounded, or missing, while a half-million people were killed, injured, or wounded. The German Communists in Moscow returned as realists of power politics. Pieck’s lingering romanticism had been crushed when the hoped-for internal German revolts and fissures failed to materialize. If Russian soldiers raped German women, imposed harsh occupation policies, turned former Nazi concentration camps into camps for a new brand of political prisoner, then Ulbricht, Pieck, and their associates remembered that it was only the Allies, and especially the Red Army, not the Germans, which had defeated fascism. While Communist romanticism about the German revolution had been crushed, the Soviet victory appeared to confirm the Marxist-Leninist conviction that history was indeed unfolding along the lines of a bloody and tragic yet triumphant dialectical logic. The returning exiles were as angry, ashamed of, and bitter toward their fellow Germans as they were filled with gratitude toward their Soviet liberators. Such deep emotions and convictions had a lasting impact.

For the Communists, World War II and the alliance with the Western powers was a kind of revival of the Popular Front era. In the early months after the war, the Communists spoke the language of
democracy which had been the common discourse of wartime antifascism. The continuities and mixed emotions of the returning exiles were apparent in the KPD's "Aufruf" (appeal) to the German people of June 13, 1945. The statement, which was written by Anton Ackerman, editor in chief of the Moscow radio station of the NKPD, with supervision from the Communist functionary Georgi Dimitrov and assigned by the members of the KPD Central Committee, became the canonical text of East German Communism. The "Aufruf" distilled the Communists' memories of war and Nazism, assigned responsibility and guilt for the German catastrophe, and drew lessons for the future. It offered a long list of those whose "policies of aggression and extermination had burdened the German people with heavy guilt and responsibility in the eyes of the whole of civilized humanity." The list included Hitler, Göring, Himmler, Goebbels, Nazi Party members, German generals, imperialists, employers, and the large German banks. The Nazis' crimes included the violent annexation of Austria, the division of Czechoslovakia; the plunder and oppression of Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, France, Yugoslavia, and Greece; and the bombing of English cities.

But the greatest and most fateful of Hitler's war crimes was the treacherous and deceptive attack on the Soviet Union . . . German workers! Could there be a greater crime than this war against the Soviet Union?

The acts of cruelty which the Hitler bandits committed in foreign countries were monstrous. The Hitler Germans' [Hitlerdeutscher] hands are stained with the blood of millions of murdered children, women, and elderly people. Day after day in the death camps the extermination of human beings was carried out in gas chambers and ovens. Burning living bodies, burying living bodies, cutting living bodies up into pieces—this was how the Nazi bandits ravaged.

Millions of prisoners of war and foreign workers seized and taken to Germany were worked to death, and died of hunger, cold, and disease.

The world is shaken and simultaneously filled with the deepest hatred toward Germany in view of these unparalleled crimes, this horrifying mass murder which was carried out by the system of Hitler Germany.

If German people, like were to be revenged with like, what would become of you?

The "Aufruf" followed the pattern of wartime agitation in its focus on the Soviet Union and a certain vagueness as to the identity of the Nazis' victims. Yet its emphasis on the shame and guilt which Nazism had brought upon Germany was unmistakable. Rather than wallow in self-pity over the catastrophe that had descended on them, the "Aufruf" warned the Germans to consider themselves fortunate that the occupiers would not treat them as horrificly as the Germans had treated others.

The "Aufruf" also expressed the spirit of the still intact anti-Hitler coalition. In addition to the Soviet Union, it included England and the United States as members of the United Nations which had fought for "justice, freedom, and progress. Through their sacrifices, the Red Army and the armies of its allies have saved humanity from Hitler barbarism" and thus also "brought peace and liberation from the chains of Hitler slavery to you, the productive German people." Credit for the victory over Nazism was shared, not monopolized or reduced to a zero-sum game of recognition and nonrecognition between the Soviet Union and the Western democracies.

The appeal expressed deep anger at the great majority of Germans, an anger at odds with the conventional Marxist picture which limited guilt and responsibility to a small ruling class.

All the more, conscience and shame must burn in every German person because the German people bear an important part of the shared guilt [Mitschuld] and shared responsibility [Mitleidigung] for the war and its consequences.

It is not only Hitler who is guilty of the crimes committed against humanity! The 10 million Germans who voted for Hitler in a free election in 1932 also bear a part of the guilt, although we Communists warned that "whoever votes for Hitler, votes for war!"

All those German men and women bear guilt who looked on, without will and resistance, as Hitler seized power, smashed all demo-
catic organizations, above all workers’ organizations, and imprisoned, tortured, and beheaded the best Germans. All those Germans bear guilt who saw in rearmament the “Great Germany” and glimpsed in wild militarism, in marching, and in drilling the only saving grace for the salvation of the nation.

Our misfortune was that millions and millions of Germans succumbed to Nazi demagoguery, and that the poison of beastly racial doctrine and of the “struggle for living space” could infect the organism of the people.

Our misfortune was that broad layers of the population lost the elementary feeling for decency and justice, and followed Hitler when he promised them a well-filled lunch and dinner table gained by war and thievery at the cost of other peoples.

Thus, the German people became the tools of Hitler and his imperialist employers.\(^{95}\)

Mass support for Nazism was the source of German misfortune. The references to the “millions and millions” and “broad layers” who supported the Nazis coexisted uneasily with the orthodox view of “German fascism” as a tool of a small elite of Nazi leaders, militarists, and imperialists who used terror above all to govern a potentially rebellious populace.

The “Aufruf” conveyed an appeal for an antifascist democracy but also presented a rationale for imposing a nondemocratic government over the Germans. Rather than celebrating the glories of the antifascist German resistance, it recalled memories of widespread support for Nazism. During the Popular Front (1941–1945), the war on the Eastern Front (1941–1945), and the early postwar months, the Soviet Union and the European Communists presented themselves as part of the world of democracies arrayed against Nazism. The Nazi era, however, had added a new rationale for dictatorship. For Jacobins and Leninists, the answer to governing a misguided and even immoral “people” was to create an educational dictatorship. The particular German Communist distrust toward a dangerous people thus offered yet another rationale for imposing a postwar dictatorship in the name of democratic antifascism.\(^{96}\) This dangerous people had refused to rally to the Communists

and had fought for the Nazis to the bitter end. In the emerging postwar ideology of antifascism, assertions of the Germans’ Mischuld and Mitverantwortung for Nazi crimes could legitimize rule by the Communists and delegitimate, at least for the near future, democratic rule by the Germans.

The “Aufruf” did contain acknowledgments of past errors: “We German Communists ... feel guilty because as a consequence of a series of our mistakes ... we were unable to forge the antifascist unity of workers, peasants, and intellectuals in the face of all adversaries” or lead a successful revolt against the Nazi regime and thus “avoid a situation in which the German people failed in the face of history.”\(^{97}\)

Compared to Wilhelm Pieck’s statement to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in Moscow in 1935, this reference to a “series of our mistakes” was extremely mild indeed. It said nothing about the disastrous policies of the Third Period and the attack on “social fascism.”

For those, such as Kurt Schumacher, who remembered these attacks, such admissions of fallibility did not go nearly far enough. Yet, as we will see, Schumacher also expressed deep disappointment in the failure of the Germans to oppose Nazism.

The “Aufruf” repeated familiar criticism of the Social Democrats. Ackermann wrote that fascism was able to spread in Germany after 1918 because those responsible for World War I were not punished, genuine democracy was not attained, reaction had a free hand, and “the anti-Soviet witch-hunt of some democratic leaders prepared the path for Hitler and paralyzed the antifascist unity front of the power of the people.” Therefore, “we demand: no repetition of the mistakes of 1918!” Anticommunism was among the “mistakes of 1918” which must not be repeated. The Communists had been right about fascism from the beginning. Unfortunately, the Germans did not listen to their warnings. The German people had failed before history, but the German Communists possessed a tradition of “decisive struggle against militarism, imperialism, and imperialist war.”\(^{98}\)

Notwithstanding its sharp criticism of the Germans and its implicit justification for a new dictatorship over a dangerous people, the “Aufruf” promised postwar democracy. The “bourgeois–democratic revolu-
tion of 1848” should be completed by abolishing feudal residues and Prussian militarism. It would be wrong to impose the Soviet system on Germany, “for this path does not correspond to the current developmental conditions in Germany.” Rather, the Germans should establish an “antifascist, democratic regime, a parliamentary-democratic republic with all democratic rights and freedoms for the people.”

To judge from the rest of the “Aufruf,” the longer the returning exiles dwelt on the crimes of the Nazi past, the more skeptical they would become regarding the wisdom of a postwar German democracy.

The Soviets and their German Communist allies did not differ from the Americans and the British in their initial determination to impose a harsh occupation policy to ensure that Nazism would be crushed. At the outset, the still United Nations agreed that the goal was a denazified and democratic Germany as well as trials of those accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. In calling for equality before the law, a purge of Nazi personnel in the educational and research institutions, education concerning “the barbaric character of the Nazi race theory,” academic and artistic freedom, and “recognition of the duty for reparations and compensation [“Anerkennung der Pflicht zur Wiedergutmachung”] to other peoples for the damage done to them by the Hitler aggression,” the “Aufruf” echoed Western occupation policies. Yet it also envisaged that a “block of antifascist parties” including Communists, Social Democrats, and the Center Party would be the “firm foundation” on which Nazism would be eliminated and a democratic regime established.

Perhaps, given the deep bitterness felt by Social Democrats toward the Communists for their role in Weimar, twelve years of Nazi propaganda about “Jewish bolshevism,” and the enormous hatreds left over from the war on the Eastern Front, there was little likelihood that even the most democratically inclined German Communist would have found willing partners in a “bloc of antifascist parties.” The leaders of the democratic left such as Kurt Schumacher remained on the scene, and they held very critical and skeptical views of the Communists’ renewed professions of support for democracy. Communist success in the postwar years required that the Social Democratic leaders of the Weimar era either not remember the Communist attacks of the Third Period or the Hitler-Stalin pact, or remember but be willing to forgive and forget in view of the Soviet contribution to the defeat of Nazism. Yet the policies of the Soviet occupying authorities and the returning Communist exiles further reduced what little likelihood there was of postwar cooperation among the German antifascists. Their postwar actions confirmed their critics’ arguments that Communist antifascism contained a series of Justifications for imposing a second totalitarian dictatorship on Germany.

For the Communists, power meant a monopoly on interpretation of the past. To judge by their numbers and the political power of their authors, interpretations of recent history became a very high priority. By December 1945 the Soviet- and KPD-controlled presses had printed 50,000 copies of Walter Ulbricht’s wartime analysis of the Nazi regime, Der Legende vom Deutschen Sozialismus (The Legend of German Socialism). Another 300,000 had been published by January 1947. The book was reissued in the 1950s under the title Der Faschistische Deutsche Imperialismus (1933–1945) (Fascist German Imperialism, 1933–1945). Its third edition alone, published in 1956, amounted to an additional 340,000 copies. Die Legende vom Deutschen Sozialismus was the canonical text of the East German analysis of the Nazi regime. It displayed the continuity of Communist antifascism from Weimar to the postwar era.

The original title, “The Legend of German Socialism,” indicated Ulbricht’s intention to refute the notion that “National Socialism” had anything to do with “socialism,” and instead to assert the close links between the leading Nazis and leading German industrialists and bankers. Nazism was neither “national” or “socialist” but was instead the Todfeind (deadly enemy) of the German people. It was the “open terroristic rule of the most reactionary, chauvinistic, and imperialistic elements of German finance capital.” By using the term “fascism” in place of “National Socialism” or “Nazi,” Ulbricht presented the Hitler regime as one example of a general capitalist crisis rather than as a product of specific features of German history and society. The force
of the term “fascism,” ubiquitous in Communist discourse since the 1920s, was not diminished by the fact that the Nazi regime had been defeated by a coalition led by the Soviet Union and the two leading capitalist democracies.

Yet, as a German Communist, Ulbricht placed Nazism back in the continuities of German history. “Hitler fascism” represented the “coalescence, development, and deepening of all that was reactionary in German history.” It was the endpoint of a series of defeats for democratic forces. In the Peasant War and the Reformation, in 1848, and again in 1918–19, the forces of reaction had repeatedly enhanced their position and defeated the forces of progress. Democratic forces in Germany had been unable to achieve a victorious bourgeois-democratic revolution from within. Hence, German national unity was delayed, and attained only under the direction of the reactionary Junkers. The leadership of the working class proved itself unable to assume its historic task of destroying German imperialism in 1914, while a revolutionary party was not yet in place in 1918 to lead a mass struggle for a revolutionary solution to the crisis of imperialism and the nation. Yet if this Marxist variant of the German Sonderweg was correct, the case against capitalism in general would appear to be considerably weakened.

Ulbricht was aware of how history served as a source of both justification and legitimation. He placed the blame for the division between the Communists and the Social Democrats in Weimar completely on the SPD. “Under the influence of the anticommunist witch-hunt fostered by monopoly capital,” Social Democrats had turned against popular action, ruptured the unity of the working class, and thus prevented the power of monopoly capital from being broken. “The fascist dictatorship could have been prevented” if the Social Democrats had mobilized “the common power of the workers’ organizations” and used their positions in government to “break the power of the reactionaries.” The implication for politics after 1945 was clear: to the extent to which the Social Democrats fought the Communists and made their peace with a reformed capitalism, they were repeating their Weimar errors. Those, primarily the Social Democrats, who aimed at a reform capitalism were simply repeating earlier mistakes. Ulbricht’s text was a model of ideological flexibility. If the Communists had been right about everything in the past, they should govern, alone if necessary, in the future. If only a powerful few had victimized the hapless Germans, the way was clear for Communist appeals to the German nation.

Die Legende had another important, less rarely noted effect. The more Ulbricht focused on capitalist elites, the less heavily the burden of responsibility and guilt lay on the “millions and millions” of people mentioned in the KPD “Aufruf” of June 1945. Ulbricht placed responsibility for Nazism on “three hundred German arms industrialists and leaders of banks” who had sought a way out of Weimar’s economic crisis by supporting the Nazis. These “traitors to the national interest of the German people” were responsible for Hitler’s seizure of power and for both World Wars. The corollary to the view that the Nazis and the capitalists were traitors to the nation was that it was the Communists, not the Nazis, who represented the nation. For Ulbricht, coming to terms with the Nazi past obviously meant eliminating capitalism. Everything else was empty rhetoric. The result of that view was to acquit the “millions and millions” of Germans of the accusations of shared guilt and responsibility hurled at them in the “Aufruf” and by the Moscow émigrés. Indictment of the powerful few offered absolution to the victimized and powerless masses, who could now participate in building a socialist, antifascist democracy.

Ulbricht’s analysis of anti-Semitism and the Jewish catastrophe remained within the economistic and instrumentalist conceptions of the 1930s and wartime 1940s. He wrote that after 1933, “Hitler fascism” began with the destruction of the Communist and Social Democratic parties and trade unions, as well as with pogroms against the Jews. The anti-Jewish measures spread racial hatred “as preparation for the planned annihilation of members of other peoples in war.” In his references to the death camps, he did not mention that their primary purpose was the destruction of European Jewry. Instead, he wrote of “mass annihilation of the civilian population and the prisoners of war in Poland and in the occupied Soviet territories” and referred to “piles of corpses, mass graves, ovens for burning human beings to which
millions of innocent men, women, and children fell victim.” Ulbricht directed his sympathy and admiration to the Soviet Union, both the primary victim of the Nazis and the primary source of deliverance from them.114

In the first postwar years of what we could call the Nuremberg interregnum, Ulbricht and his colleagues did focus on mass support for Nazism and hence complicity in its crimes. On June 25, 1945, Ulbricht spoke to the first meeting of Communist functionaries of the KPD’s Berlin organization. “Imperialist conquest . . . race hatred . . . wars of annihilation against other peoples” had led to catastrophe for Germany.115 The outcome of the war “had demonstrated the superiority of the Soviet democracy over Nazi tyranny” and justified those who had supported the October Revolution of 1917.116 Victory over Nazism could also “have been a great victory of our German people had they understood how to use the military weakness of the Hitler regime to overthrow the Nazi regime by themselves. The tragedy of the German people consists in the fact that they obeyed a band of criminals. That is the most awful and frightful thing about it all! The recognition of this guilt is the precondition for our people’s definitive break with the reactionary past and for decisively taking a new path.”117 Four times in his speech Ulbricht turned to the issue of Mitverantwortung. The Germans “shared responsibility” lay in permitting the Nazis to take power, indulging “propaganda of hatred against the French, Polish, Russian, and English people”; gullibly permitting themselves to be deceived; slavishly obeying “the commands of a band of war criminals”; applauding Hitler’s victories; and thinking themselves “superior to other peoples.”118 Ulbricht flatly asserted that the Nazi crimes were possible because “the German working class and the productive parts of the population failed before history.”119 Only when “our people are filled with shame for having “allowed these barbaric crimes to take place” could they “summon the inner power to take a new, a democratic, a progressive path, one which alone can secure the future of the nation.”120

Certainly such a nationwide admission of shame was desirable and necessary for taking a new path.

It is important to grasp the ambivalence of Communist emotions and ideology during the Nuremberg interregnum evident in Ulbricht’s statements. All of the German Communist’s experience since the 1920s had made painfully clear that the overwhelming majority of the Germans despised both German and Russian communism, that “millions and millions” of Germans had in fact supported the Nazi regime, and that thousands and thousands had participated in its crimes. Even if postwar Germans expressed their shame over Nazi crimes, why should anyone believe such belated self-serving protestations? Indeed, when the Communists spoke of German guilt and shame, they seemed to buttress their case against democratic rule by these same Germans in the near future. Protest against “antifascist” rule by postwar Germans could be and was attacked as “objectively” and often “subjectively” fascist. Those who called for popular rule by postwar Germans opposed to an antifascist regime were thus calling for rule by millions who had supported Nazism. In this way, memories of Nazism fostered distrust of popular democracy and legitimated “antifascist” dictatorship.

Ulbricht and his comrades had it both ways. On the one hand, by expropriating capitalists and large landowners, they had eliminated fascism’s roots. On the other hand, the imposition of a harsh dictatorship was nevertheless necessary because, notwithstanding Marxist orthodoxy about capitalism and fascism, the German Communists were well aware how strong Nazism’s mass support had been. Understandably, the Communists were reluctant to state publicly that their dictatorship rested on the fear and mistrust of the majority of Germans.121 Vivid memories of past mass support for the Nazis, conveyed in the public language of German guilt and shame, far from deepening a willingness to “dare more democracy” deepened the Communists’ willingness to establish a second German dictatorship.

The gap between the Communists’ professions of democratic intent and their actual dictatorial practice became a central theme of the Cold War. Yet the problem of how to govern a people so deeply compromised by the extent of their support for a criminal regime was a, if not the, central political and moral dilemma of postwar politics in both Germany. During the Nuremberg interregnum, the Communists spoke the discourse of the Popular Front, Pieck’s “Neue Weg” speech, and war-
time antifascism, and avoided the radicalism of a rapid transition to socialism.\textsuperscript{122} They denounced racism and supported the reeducation of German youth.\textsuperscript{123} They did focus attention on the centrality of the Soviet contribution to the war.\textsuperscript{124} Yet they also noted that the Western Allies had refused Nazi offers of a separate peace “because the democratic Great Powers were willing to fight together [with the Soviet Union] until Nazism was destroyed, and to work most closely together after the war as well.”\textsuperscript{125} They spoke of the “moral duty of the German people” to make restitution (\textit{Wiedergutmachung}) for the material damage done to the Soviet Union. Restitution to the peoples harmed by the Nazis was a “matter of honor of every antifascist, a matter of honor for every German.”\textsuperscript{126} But the Communists did not talk about those things which troubled their wartime allies in the West: the attack on “social fascism” of the Third Period, the purges and terror of the Stalin regime, and the Hitler-Stalin pact.\textsuperscript{127} Nor did they recall or emphasize in their recollections their fleeting moments of solidarity with the Jews.

Before and after 1945, the Soviet Union remained at the center of Communist narratives of antifascism. The Jews were competitors for scarce political and emotional resources. Their fate did not come close to matching the hold that the drama of the Soviet Union had on the hearts and minds of German Communists. While the Communists noted the racist character of the war on the Eastern Front—although they usually called it an “imperialist” war—they rarely if ever mentioned the Jewish catastrophe and never addressed its central role in Nazi policy. The trauma of Nazism and the redemptive Soviet victory deepened their Communist, and often Stalinist, beliefs. Beyond the importance which any coherent ideological framework has in a confusing period, the Soviet victory appeared to add the weight of history’s judgment. In this regard, Walter Ulbricht was an orthodox Hegelian in his respect for those on whom the cunning of history had bestowed victory. European Jewry had been the big loser of World War II. As we will see, the Holocaust did not fit into the Communists’ plans for their postwar commemorative victory parades.

We have seen that interest, ideology, and experience combined to keep the persecution of European Jewry on the margins of the dominant...