

## Optional Reading 1: Culture, Values, and Politics

Values are commonly defined as deeply held beliefs, ideals, customs, and relationships that are central to our well-being and our sense of who we are and what we want to become. Many societies are held together by a core set of shared political values. Among people in the United States, for example, some of the most prominent values are the principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, beliefs in equal opportunity and the importance of individual expression, physical symbols such as the U.S. flag, and even an emphasis on consumerism. In the political arena, disagreements about values produce bitter divisions and often lead to serious conflict, even violence. In the United States, the issue of slavery in the nineteenth century and the abortion issue today illustrate the significance of political values.

Popular culture—for example, music, art, film, poetry, and television programs—reflects and shapes the values of a society. In the twentieth century, popular culture has gained sweeping influence. The growth of cities, the rise in literacy, and the spread of radio, film, television, and the internet have tied people together as never before. In our age of constant change, popular culture plays a critical role in conveying and shaping values.

Consider, for example, how the values associated with family life are portrayed by television programs today, such as *The Simpsons*, compared to those of the 1960s, such as *The Brady Bunch*. Unlike the respected television father figures of four decades ago, Homer Simpson comes across as a harmless buffoon whose children dwarf his wisdom.

Many societies have experienced periods in which opposing values have clashed, and very often this is expressed through the

popular culture of the time. For example, in the United States, young people in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s experienced conflicting values through popular culture. This period of U.S. history saw the emergence of rock ‘n roll, changes in male-female relationships called the “sexual revolution,” and the increased use of drugs. The new values of the young often clashed with the traditional values of the older generation. In addition to the conflicts over “sex, drugs, and rock ‘n roll,” there were deep struggles over values reflected in the civil rights movement and U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. All of these issues spilled over into the popular culture of the time. For example, *The Ballad of the Green Berets* gave listeners a very different view of the Vietnam War than Pete Seeger’s song, *Waist Deep in the Big Muddy*.

Like the United States during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Weimar Germany was a society marked by rapid change and sharp divisions over values. The clash of values touched every aspect of German culture, even architecture and classical music. As you will see from the examples that follow, the visual arts, popular music, drama, and literature were among the areas of culture most greatly affected.

After reading all of the pages in this section, select one visual image and one song to study in more detail. Use the study guide to direct your investigation.

*(The artwork on the following pages was reproduced from: Broadsheets: Political Posters in Germany, 1900-1970; The Culture of the Weimar Republic; Vote Left! The Political Poster in Germany, 1918-1933; and The Weimar Years: A Culture Cut Short.)*

## The Worker and Society

Artists and propagandists from both the left (KPD) and the right (NSDAP) of the political spectrum viewed German workers as the victims of exploitation by factory owners and corrupt politicians. Compare the sketch by George Grosz (left) with the NSDAP political cartoon (right) from 1924. (Note the Jewish symbol, the Star of David, dangling from the watch chain of the factory owner in the NSDAP cartoon.)



The String Puller

Also strikingly similar are the themes in Kaethe Kollwitz's *Demonstration* (left) and a sketch (right) from *Der Angriff* (*The Attack*), the NSDAP newspaper.



Berlin First!

## The Military and Society

From the establishment of a united Germany, the military occupied a privileged position in German society. But Germany's defeat in World War I led many Germans to rethink the role of the military. Compare George Grosz's drawing (top) of soldiers putting down a workers' uprising early in the 1920s with a NSDAP campaign poster (bottom) of 1932 that features the paramilitary forces of the S.A.



National Socialism:  
The Organized Will of the Nation

## Political Ideology

Many of Weimar Germany's political parties adopted songs as their unofficial anthems. The *Horst Wessel Song*, composed by a young member of the NSDAP's S.A. who was killed in a brawl, became the Nazi anthem. At the same time, *The International*, based on a poem written in the nineteenth century by a French worker, served as the anthem of the KPD. The painting below by Otto Griebel depicts German workers singing *The International*.

### Horst Wessel Song

Hold high the Banner! Close the hard ranks ser-  
ried!

S.A. marches on with sturdy stride.

Comrades, by Red Front and Reaction killed,  
are buried

But march with us in image at our side.

Gangway! Gangway now for the Brown Battal-  
ions!

For the Storm Trooper clear roads o'er the land!

The Swastika gives hope to our entranced mil-  
lions,

The day for freedom and for bread's at hand.

The trumpet blows its shrill and final blast!

Prepared for war and battle here we stand.

Soon Hitler's banners will wave unchecked at  
last,

The end of German slav'ry in our land!

### The International

Arise, ye prisoners of starvation!

Arise, ye wretched of the earth.

For justice thunders condemnation,

A better world's birth.

Tis the final conflict, let each stand in his place;

The International Party shall be the human race.

No more traditions' chains shall bind us;

Arise, ye slaves! No more in thrall.

The earth shall rise on new foundations,

We have been nought, we shall be all.

Tis the final conflict, let each stand in his place;

The International Party shall be the human race.



## Women in German Society

The social turmoil and economic uncertainty of Weimar Germany recast the place of women in German society. For many artists, the figure of the prostitute represented the moral bankruptcy and corruption of the early Weimar period. The visual arts and drama commonly featured prostitutes. Compare the sketches of George Grosz's *Friedrichstrasse* (left) and Otto Dix's *Prostitutes* (right) with the song about "Pirate Jenny," a prostitute, from *The Threepenny Opera*, written by Bertholt Brecht with music by Kurt Weill.



**Pirate Jenny***by Bertholt Brecht*

You gentlemen can watch while I'm scrubbin' the floors,  
and I'm scrubbin' the floors while you're gawkin'  
and maybe once you tip me and it makes you feel swell,  
on a ratty waterfront in a ratty old hotel,  
and you never guess to whom you're talkin',  
and you never guess to whom you're talkin'.

Suddenly one night, there's a scream in the night,  
and you yell, "What the hell could that a been?"  
And you see me kind a grinnin' while I'm scrubbin'.  
And you say "What the hell's she got to grin?"  
And a ship, a black freighter, with a skull on its masthead will be comin' in.

You gentlemen can say, "Hey girl finish the floors, get upstairs,  
make the beds, earn your keep here!"  
You toss me your tips and look out at the ships;  
but I'm countin' your heads while I make up the beds,  
'cause there's nobody gonna sleep here.  
Tonight none of you will sleep here.  
Tonight none of you will sleep here.

Then that night there's a bang in the night,  
and you yell, "Who's that kickin' up a row?"  
And you see me kind a starin' out the windows.  
And you say "What's she got to stare at now?"  
And the ship, the black freighter, turns around  
in the harbor, shootin' guns from the bow!

Then you gentlemen can wipe off the laugh from your face,  
ev'ry building in town is a flat one.  
Your whole stinkin' place will be down to the ground,  
only this cheap hotel standin' up safe and sound,  
and you yell, "Why the hell spare that one?"  
And you yell, "Why the hell spare that one?"

All the night through with the noise and to do,  
you wonder who's that person lives up there.  
Then you see me steppin' out into the morning,  
lookin' nice with a ribbon in my hair.  
And the ship, the black freighter, runs the flag up its masthead and a cheer rings the air.

By noontime the dock is all swarmin' with men,  
comin' off of that ghostly freighter.  
They're movin' in the shadows where no one can see,  
and they're chainin' up people and bringin' them to me,  
askin' me, "Kill them now or later?"  
Askin' me, "Kill them now or later?"

Nine by the clock and so still on the dock,  
you can hear a foghorn miles away.  
In that quiet of death, I'll say, "Right now!"  
And they pile up the bodies and I'll say,  
"That'll learn you!"  
Then a ship, the black freighter, disappears out to sea,  
and on it is me.

## The Abortion Controversy

Women’s issues, particularly abortion rights, typically reflected fundamental differences in values. The SPD and the KPD actively campaigned to repeal paragraph 218 of the German criminal code, which prohibited abortions, while the predominantly Catholic Center party and the NSDAP strongly opposed repeal. *The Ballad of Paragraph 218*, by Bertholt Brecht, presents a conversation between a married woman (“Frau Griebel”) and her doctor. The poster below, *Down with the Abortion Paragraph!*, by Kaethe Kollwitz, was used by the KPD in its election campaign.

### The Ballad of Paragraph 218

by Bertholt Brecht

“Please, doctor. I’ve missed my monthly...”

Why, this is simply great!

If I may put it bluntly

You’re raising our birthrate.

“Please, doctor, now we’re homeless...”

But you’ll have a bed somewhere

So best put your feet up, moan less

And force yourself to grin and bear.

You’ll make a simply splendid little mummy

Producing cannon-fodder from your tummy

That’s what your body’s for, and you know it,  
what’s more

And it’s laid down by law

And now get this straight:

You’ll soon be a mother, just wait.

“But, doctor, no job or dwelling:

My man would find kids the last straw...”

No, rather a new compelling

Objective to work for.

“But, doctor...” Really, Frau Griebel

I ask myself what this means

You see, our state needs people

To operate our machines.

You’ll make a simply splendid little mummy

Producing factory fodder from your tummy

That’s what your body’s for,

and you know it, what’s more

And it’s laid down by law

And now get this straight:

You’ll soon be a mother, just wait.

“But, doctor, there’s such unemployment...”

I can’t follow what you say.

You’re all out for enjoyment

Then grumble at having to pay.

If we make a prohibition

You bet we’ve a purpose in mind.

Better recognize your condition

And once you’ve agreed to put yourselves in  
our hands, you’ll find

You’re a simply splendid little mummy

Producing cannon fodder from your tummy

That’s what your body’s for,

and you know it, what’s more

And it’s laid down by law

And now get this straight:

You’ll soon be a mother,  
just wait.



Down with the Abortion Paragraph!

## The Unemployed and Political Violence

Street battles between members of the NSDAP and the KPD intensified as the economic depression deepened in the early 1930s. In *Song of the S.A. Man*, Bertholt Brecht, a KPD member, reveals sympathy for the young unemployed men who were attracted to Hitler's movement. Compare *Song of the S.A. Man* with the *Horst Wessel Song*, p17.

### Song of the S.A. Man

by Bertholt Brecht

My hunger made me fall asleep

With a belly ache

Then I heard voices crying

Hey, Germany awake!

Then I saw crowds of men marching:

To the Third Reich, I heard them say.

I thought as I'd nothing to live for

I might as well march their way.

And as I marched, there marched beside me

The fattest of that crew

And when I shouted "We want bread and  
work"

The fat man shouted too.

The chief of staff wore boots

My feet meanwhile were wet

But both of us were marching

Wholeheartedly in step.

I thought that the left road led forward

He told me that I was wrong.

I went the way that he ordered

And blindly tagged along.

And those who were weak from hunger

Kept marching, pale and taut

Together with the well-fed

To some Third Reich of a sort.

They told me which enemy to shoot at

So I took their gun and aimed

And, when I had shot, saw my brother

Was the enemy they had named.

Now I know: over there stands my brother

It's hunger that makes us one

While I march with the enemy

My brother's and my own.

So now my brother is dying

By my own hand he fell

Yet I know that if he's defeated

I shall be lost as well.