Timeline | bpb: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung

German History: 1914 to 1990

28 July 1914 World War I

- triggered by the assassination in Sarajevo (**28 June**)
- **28 July:** Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia
- **1 August:** The German Reich declares war on Russia
- **3 August:** The German Reich declares war on France
- **5 August:** Great Britain declares war on Germany after German troops invade Belgium

10 January 1920 Treaty of Versailles

World War I is officially over, and the Treaty of Versailles enters into force. The German Reich and its allies are made solely responsible for the outbreak of the war; Germany is forced to concede territory and make reparation payments. To promote world peace, the treaty stipulates the founding of an international League of Nations.

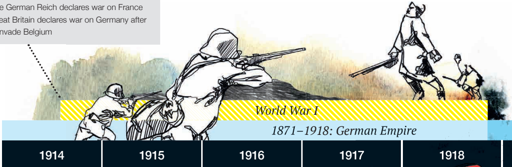
14 August 1919
Weimar Constitution

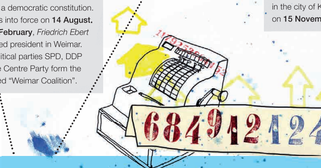
The Constitutional Convention adopts a democratic constitution. It enters into force on **14 August.** On **11 February**, *Friedrich Ebert* is elected president in Weimar. The political parties SPD, DDP and the Centre Party form the so-called “Weimar Coalition”.

1923 Hy

The value of t
money. Prices

On **1 Novem**
in the city of
on **15 Novem**

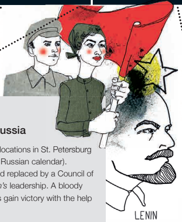




World War I

1871–1918: German Empire

1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922

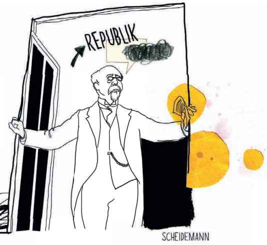


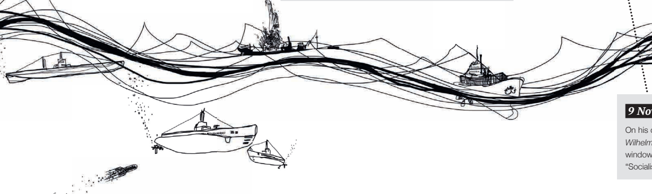
1 February 1917 Submarine warfare

As from **1915**, the German Reich repeatedly responds to the British blockade of the Atlantic with submarine attacks on enemy ships. The USA protest when a German submarine sinks a British passenger ship killing 139 American passengers. Following a temporary lull, the German Reich resumes unrestricted submarine warfare in **1917**, which leads to the entry of the United States into the war.

7 November 1917
October Revolution in Russia

Mutinous troops occupy strategic locations in St. Petersburg on **25 October** (according to the Russian calendar). The government is overthrown and replaced by a Council of People’s Commissars under *Lenin’s* leadership. A bloody civil war rages until the Bolsheviks gain victory with the help of their militia, the Red Army.





9 November 1918 Declaration of the Republic in Germany

On his own initiative, the chancellor *Max von Baden* announces the abdication of Kaiser *Wilhelm II*. At 2 p.m. *Philipp Scheidemann (SPD)* declares the “Democratic Republic” from a window of the Reichstag. Shortly afterwards, *Karl Liebknecht* (later KPD) announces the “Socialist Republic” from the Berlin City Palace. *Wilhelm II* officially abdicates on **28 November**.

perinflation

he Mark falls as the government continues to print
explode and supplies become scarce.

ber, one loaf of bread costs 192,000,000,000 Mark
Kassel. The introduction of the “Debt Security Mark”
ber breaks the cycle of inflation.

Ich werd' Millionär!
money, money, money
it's all about the money
000000,90

26 April 1925

A new president

Paul von Hindenburg is elected president in a run-off election after the death of *Friedrich Ebert*. In **1932**, he is re-elected against *Adolf Hitler*. *Hindenburg* is a monarchist who commanded the German forces during World War I. He believes in the “stab-in-the-back legend”, which believes that lack of political support at home was responsible for the defeat of German forces.

16 July 1927

Money for the unemployed

Unemployment insurance becomes the fourth pillar of the German welfare state. Chancellor *von Bismarck* introduced health insurance (**1883**), accident insurance (**1884**) and pensions (**1889**).

25 October 1929

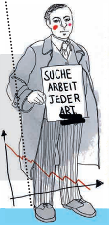
Black Friday

Stock prices at the New York Stock Exchange plummet for several days, triggering a global economic crisis. Germany is hit especially hard as foreign loans are withdrawn. More than six million people lose their jobs by **1932**.

30 March 1930

Presidential cabinet

Heinrich Brüning is elected chancellor and forms a presidential cabinet. It does not have a parliamentary majority but uses emergency decrees to enact policies. Two more presidential cabinets follow, under *Franz von Papen* (**1932**) and *Kurt von Schleicher* (**1932/33**).



30 January 1933 Nazis assum

Adolf Hitler is appointed chancellor by Presi
At dusk, National Socialists celebrate by ma
Brandenburg Gate in a torchlight parade. Th
the strongest parliamentary party in **1932**. W
dies in **1934**, *Hitler* assumes the presidency

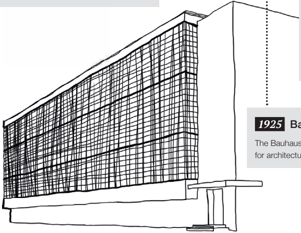
Weimar Republic

1923 | 1924 | 1925 | 1926 | 1927 | 1928 | 1929 | 1930 | 1931 | 1932

9 November 1923

Beer Hall Putsch

Adolf Hitler and *Erich Ludendorff* declare a “national revolution” in Munich and plan to organise a march on Berlin. Local police quickly subdue the uprising. *Hitler* is later arrested and sentenced to prison, but is released after nine months for “good conduct”.



DIE GOLDENEN ZWANZIGER

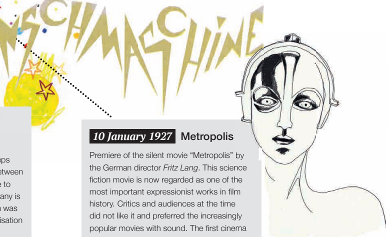
1 December 1925

Treaty of Locarno

The Treaty of Locarno marks the first steps towards the normalisation of relations between Germany and the Allies. All parties agree to respect national borders. In **1926**, Germany is admitted to the League of Nations (which was founded in **1920**), an international organisation that aims to maintain world peace.

1925 Bauhaus in Dessau

The Bauhaus is founded in **1919** by *Walter Gropius* in Weimar as an educational institution for architecture, art, and design. In **1925**, it moves to Dessau.

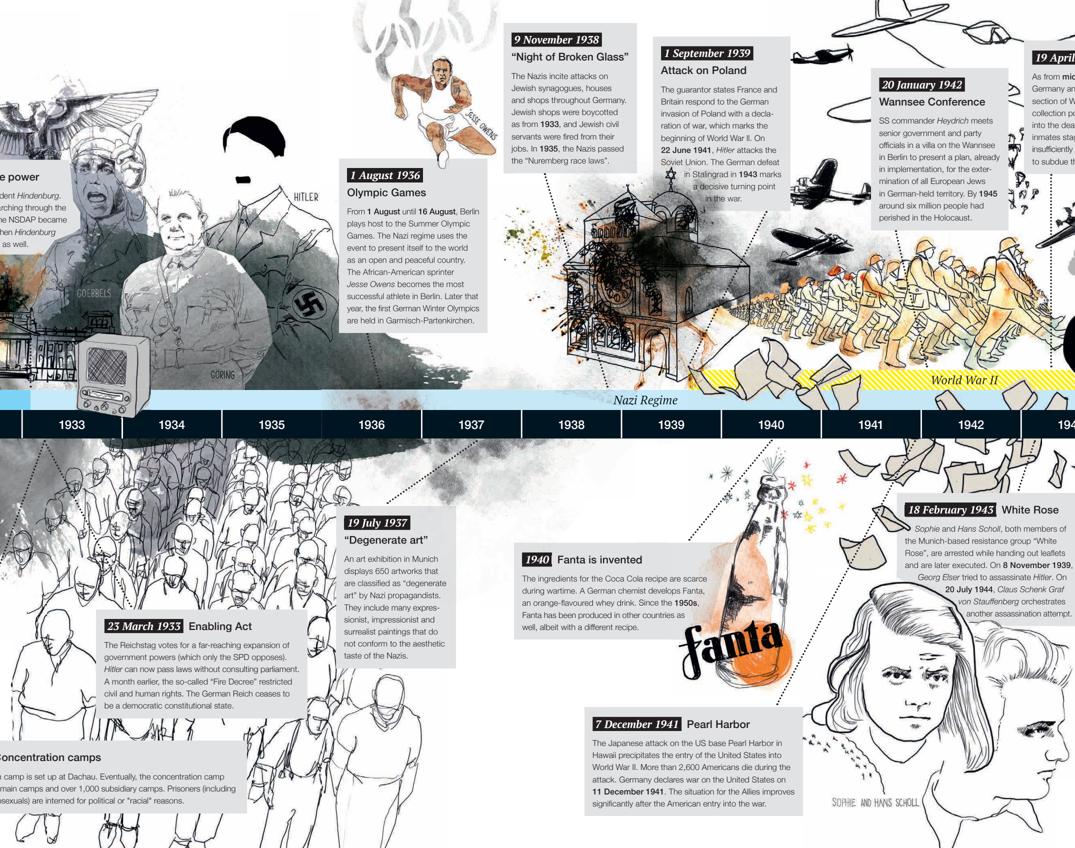


10 January 1927 Metropolis

Premiere of the silent movie “Metropolis” by the German director *Fritz Lang*. This science fiction movie is now regarded as one of the most important expressionist works in film history. Critics and audiences at the time did not like it and preferred the increasingly popular movies with sound. The first cinema in Berlin opened in **1895**.

22 March 1933 C

The first SS concentration
system encompasses 24
Jews, communists, homo



e power

dent *Hindenburg*.
arching through the
he NSDAP became
hen *Hindenburg*
as well.

1 August 1936
Olympic Games

From **1 August** until **16 August**, Berlin plays host to the Summer Olympic Games. The Nazi regime uses the event to present itself to the world as an open and peaceful country. The African-American sprinter *Jesse Owens* becomes the most successful athlete in Berlin. Later that year, the first German Winter Olympics are held in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

9 November 1938
“Night of Broken Glass”

The Nazis incite attacks on Jewish synagogues, houses and shops throughout Germany. Jewish shops were boycotted as from **1933**, and Jewish civil servants were fired from their jobs. In **1935**, the Nazis passed the “Nuremberg race laws”.

1 September 1939
Attack on Poland

The guarantor states France and Britain respond to the German invasion of Poland with a declaration of war, which marks the beginning of World War II. On **22 June 1941**, *Hitler* attacks the Soviet Union. The German defeat in Stalingrad in **1943** marks a decisive turning point in the war.

20 January 1942
Wannsee Conference

SS commander *Heydrich* meets senior government and party officials in a villa on the Wannsee in Berlin to present a plan, already in implementation, for the extermination of all European Jews in German-held territory. By **1945** around six million people had perished in the Holocaust.

19 April

As from **mic**
Germany an
section of W
collection po
into the dea
inmates stag
insufficiently
to subdue th

23 March 1933 Enabling Act

The Reichstag votes for a far-reaching expansion of government powers (which only the SPD opposes). *Hitler* can now pass laws without consulting parliament. A month earlier, the so-called “Fire Decree” restricted civil and human rights. The German Reich ceases to be a democratic constitutional state.

Concentration camps

n camp is set up at Dachau. Eventually, the concentration camp
main camps and over 1,000 subsidiary camps. Prisoners (including
osexuals) are interned for political or "racial" reasons.

19 July 1937
“Degenerate art”

An art exhibition in Munich displays 650 artworks that are classified as “degenerate art” by Nazi propagandists. They include many expressionist, impressionist and surrealist paintings that do not conform to the aesthetic taste of the Nazis.

1940 Fanta is invented

The ingredients for the Coca Cola recipe are scarce during wartime. A German chemist develops Fanta, an orange-flavoured whey drink. Since the **1950s**, Fanta has been produced in other countries as well, albeit with a different recipe.

7 December 1941 Pearl Harbor

The Japanese attack on the US base Pearl Harbor in Hawaii precipitates the entry of the United States into World War II. More than 2,600 Americans die during the attack. Germany declares war on the United States on **11 December 1941**. The situation for the Allies improves significantly after the American entry into the war.

18 February 1943 White Rose

Sophie and *Hans Scholl*, both members of the Munich-based resistance group “White Rose”, are arrested while handing out leaflets and are later executed. On **8 November 1939**, *Georg Elser* tried to assassinate *Hitler*. On **20 July 1944**, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg* orchestrates another assassination attempt.

1943 Ghetto uprising

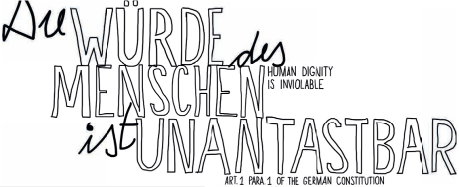
-1940, 500,000 Jews from
d Poland were forced into a 4 km²
arsaw. The ghetto serves as a
int for Jews due to be deported
th camps. In **April 1943**, ghetto
ge an uprising (despite being
armed). It takes the SS until **16 May**
e revolt.

8 May 1945 German surrender

The German Wehrmacht unconditionally surrenders to the allied forces. World War II in Europe is over. Japan surrenders on **2 September**, after the explosions of two atomic bombs in Hiroshima (**6 August**) and Nagasaki (**9 August**). World War II resulted in an estimated death toll of 50 to 70 million worldwide.

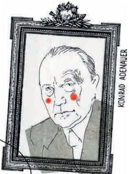
20 June 1948 Currency reform

The Deutschmark is introduced in West Germany. It is replaced by the Euro in **2002**. Every citizen receives forty Mark "bounty". The currency reform in the Western zones results in the Soviet blockade of Berlin, which the Western Allies counter with the Berlin airlift.


Die WÜRDE des MENSCHEN ist UNANTASTBAR
HUMAN DIGNITY IS INVIOLABLE
ART. 1 PARA. 1 OF THE GERMAN CONSTITUTION

23 May 1949 German Constitution

The "Grundgesetz", the West German constitution, comes into force. It was drafted by the Parliamentary Council (65 electoral members, including four women) with the backing of the three Western allies. *Theodor Heuss* is sworn into office as German president on **12 September**. Three days later, *Konrad Adenauer* becomes the first German chancellor.



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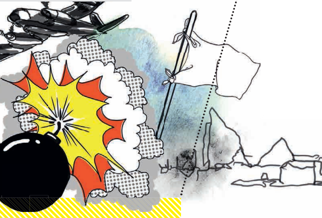


Stark wie die
DIE MARK
Das kostet 'nen Groschen.

Post-war era

43 | 1944 | 1945 | 1946 | 1947 | 1948 | 1949 | 1950 | 1951 | 1952 | 1

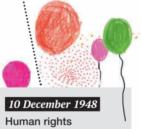
October 1946

Flight and displacement

The Allied Control Council estimates that the number of displaced persons has reached 9.6 million. According to present research up to 14 million Germans were forced to leave their homes in the East.

1948 First Mustang jeans

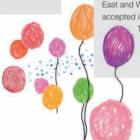
The L. Hermann clothing factory in Künzelsau, Germany, (later renamed "Mustang Jeans") produces the first pair of European jeans. They were allegedly invented by the German emigree *Löb Strauß* (later *Levi Strauss*), who manufactured the first American pair of jeans in **1873**. In the **1950s**, jeans turn from a working-class item into a youth symbol for freedom and rebellion.



10 December 1948

Human rights

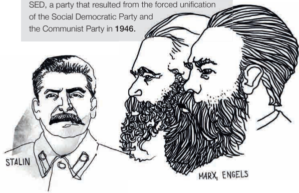
The members of the United Nations (UN) announce the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UN had been founded in **1945** and today includes 193 members states. East and West Germany were accepted into the UN in **1973.** The main tasks of the UN are the protection of global peace and human rights.



7 October 1949

The GDR is founded

The Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ) evolves into the German Democratic Republic (GDR). *Wilhelm Pieck* becomes the first president and *Otto Grotewohl* becomes prime minister. Political power lies with the SED, a party that resulted from the forced unification of the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party in **1946**.



2 August 1945 Potsdam Agreement

The "Big Three", the USA, Soviet Union and Britain, agree to transfer 25 % of German sovereign territory to Poland and the Soviet Union and to divide the remainder into 4 zones of occupation, which are to be demilitarized, denazified, democratized and decentralized. In addition some factories are to be dismantled.

6 June 1944 D-Day

Allied forces land in Normandy and open a second front against Nazi Germany. Around 150,000 soldiers break through the German defences along the French Atlantic coast. By the end of June, the Allies have more than one million soldiers on French soil.

6 May 1955

NATO membership

The Federal Republic of Germany becomes a member of NATO. The military and defence alliance was founded in **1949** and today includes 30 members in North America and Europe. The Eastern counterpart was the Warsaw Alliance***, which was established in **1955** and included the GDR.

July 1954 The Miracle of Bern

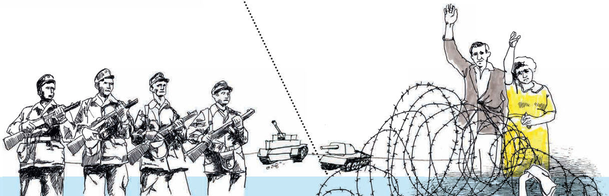
e West German football team wins the world ampionships after beating the favourites, ungary, 3:2 in the final in Switzerland. Further orld Cup victories follow in **1974** (in Germany, d after losing 0:1 to the GDR in the opening und), **1990** (in Italy) and **2014** (in Brazil).

25 March 1957 Treaty of Rome

France, Italy, the Benelux countries and West Germany form the European Economic Community (EEC) with the goal of expanding economic cooperation. The EEC is the predecessor of the European Union, which includes 27 member-states with 446 million inhabitants.

12 April 1961 First man in space

Yuri Gagarin from the Soviet Union becomes the first man in space. His capsule orbits earth for 106 minutes. The first satellite (Sputnik) had been successfully launched in **1957**. In **1969**, American *Neil Armstrong* becomes the first man to set foot on the moon during the Apollo 11 mission.



Divided Germany

953 | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 | 1957 | 1958 | 1959 | 1960 | 1961 | 1962 | 1963

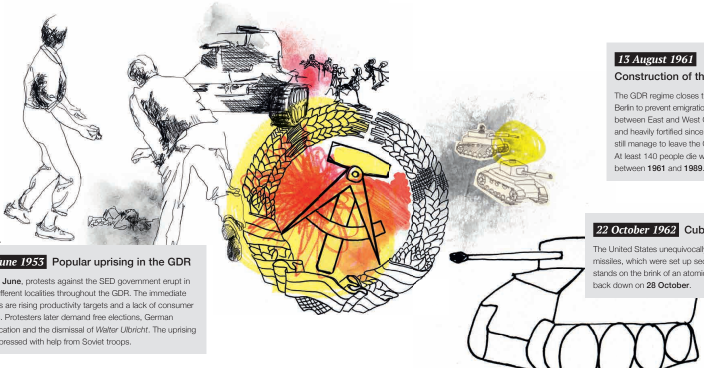
*1949 – 1963: Konrad Adenauer (CDU/CSU + FDP, DP and GB/BHE)**

*1950 – 1971: Walter Ulbricht (Secretary-General / First Secretary)***

13 August 1961

Construction of the Berlin Wall

The GDR regime closes the border between East and West Berlin to prevent emigration to the West. Much of the border between East and West Germany had already been closed and heavily fortified since **1952**. Around 3.5 million people still manage to leave the GDR between **1945** and **1961**. At least 140 people die while trying to cross the Berlin Wall between **1961** and **1989**.

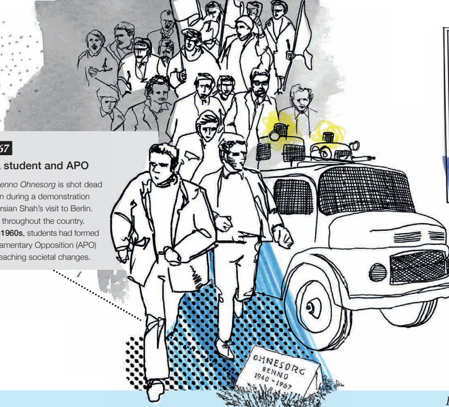


17 June 1953 Popular uprising in the GDR

On **17 June**, protests against the SED government erupt in 440 different localities throughout the GDR. The immediate causes are rising productivity targets and a lack of consumer goods. Protesters later demand free elections, German reunification and the dismissal of *Walter Ulbricht*. The uprising is suppressed with help from Soviet troops.

22 October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis

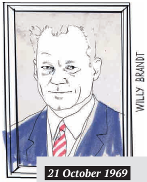
The United States unequivocally demand the dismantling of Soviet medium-range missiles, which were set up secretly, and impose a naval blockade. The world stands on the brink of an atomic war between the two superpowers. The Russians back down on **28 October**.



2 June 1967

Death of a student and APO

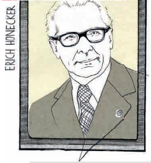
The student *Benno Ohnesorg* is shot dead by a policeman during a demonstration against the Persian Shah's visit to Berlin. Protests erupt throughout the country. Since the **mid-1960s**, students had formed the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (APO) to call for far-reaching societal changes.



21 October 1969

Willy Brandt

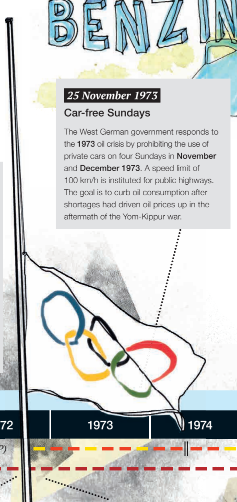
Willy Brandt becomes the first Social Democratic chancellor (in a SPD/FDP coalition government). In **1974**, *Helmut Schmidt* (SPD) succeeds him. *Brandt* chooses the motto "Take a chance on democracy" for his years in office. In **1971**, he receives the Nobel Peace Prize for his "New Eastern Policy".



3 May 1971

Erich Honecker

Erich Honecker becomes First Secretary (and later Secretary-General) of the Central Committee of the SED. In **1976**, he also assumes the chairmanship of the State Council in the GDR. He remains in office until **October 1989** and is succeeded by *Egon Krenz*. *Honecker* falls ill and is never held responsible for the crimes and failures in the GDR. He dies in Chile in **1994**.



25 November 1973

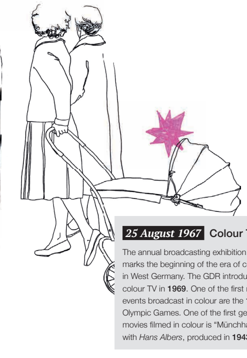
Car-free Sundays

The West German government responds to the **1973** oil crisis by prohibiting the use of private cars on four Sundays in **November** and **December 1973**. A speed limit of 100 km/h is instituted for public highways. The goal is to curb oil consumption after shortages had driven oil prices up in the aftermath of the Yom-Kippur war.

Divided Germany

1964 | 1965 | 1966 | 1967 | 1968 | 1969 | 1970 | 1971 | 1972 | 1973 | 1974

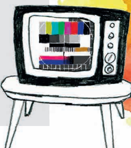
1963 – 1966: Ludwig Erhard (CDU/CSU + FDP) — *1966 – 1969: Kurt G. Kiesinger (CDU/CSU + SPD)* — *1969 – 1974: Willy Brandt (SPD + FDP)*

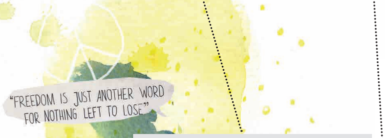


25 August 1967

Colour TV

The annual broadcasting exhibition in Berlin marks the beginning of the era of colour TV in West Germany. The GDR introduces colour TV in **1969**. One of the first major events broadcast in colour are the **1972** Olympic Games. One of the first german movies filmed in colour is "Münchhausen" with *Hans Albers*, produced in **1943**.




"FREEDOM IS JUST ANOTHER WORD FOR NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE"

15 August 1969

Woodstock

History's most famous music festival lasts until the early hours of **18 August**. 32 bands and artists perform blues, folk, soul, and rock music in front of several hundred thousand fans. Woodstock is regarded as a highlight of the hippie movement and as an iconic representation of youth culture in the **1960s**.

26 August 1972

Olympic Games

The XX. Olympic Games begin in Munich. They last until **11 September**. 122 teams with more than 7,000 athletes set a new participation record. The celebratory mood is dampened when Palestinian terrorists attack the Israeli team and take hostages. Seventeen people ultimately die.

21 December 1972

Basic Treaty

The Federal Republic and the GDR sign the "Basic Treaty", which emphasises mutual recognition, the renunciation of armed attacks, and the exchange of diplomatic representatives. Further treaties with states from the Eastern Bloc follow and improve relations with West Germany.

4 December 1971

First McDonald's

Germany's first McDonald's franchise opens in Munich. Today, almost 1.500 McDonald's exist in Germany, and other fast food chains have opened restaurants as well. Fast food is criticised for being unhealthy, and harmful to the environment.

1 August 1975

The Helsinki Accords

In Helsinki, the *“Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe”* (CSCE) produces its final declaration. It emphasises economic cooperation and the protection of human rights. The Helsinki Accords later become a reference point for many dissidents from Eastern Europe. In **1995**, the CSCE evolves into the *“Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe”* (OSCE).

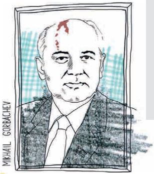
26 August 1978 A German in space

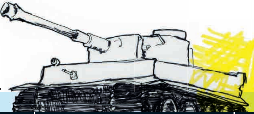
Sigmund Jähn from the GDR becomes the first German to fly into space on the Soviet “Soyuz 31” mission. In **1983**, *Ulf Mehrbold* becomes the first non-American to fly aboard the Space Shuttle, and the first West German in Space. *Mehrbold* serves on additional space-flights in **1992** and **1994**.

“MR. GORBACHEV,

11 March 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev

Mikhail Gorbachev becomes General Secretary of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union and launches the Glasnost (transparency) and Perestroika (remodelling) reforms. He remains president until **1991** but cannot prevent the implosion of the Eastern Bloc. *Gorbachev* conducts disarmament negotiations with US President *Ronald Reagan*.

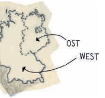


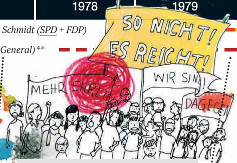


1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1978 | 1979 | 1980 | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984

1974 – 1982: Helmut Schmidt (SPD + FDP)

*1971 – 1989: Erich Honecker (First Secretary / Secretary-General)***





12 December 1979

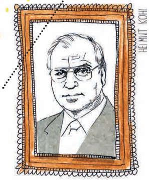
NATO double-track decision

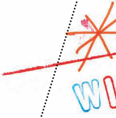
NATO decides on a double-track strategy: Warsaw Alliance nations are offered disarmament negotiations while NATO pursues rearmament and modernisation in Western Europe. Thousands of protesters march against NATO’s strategy.

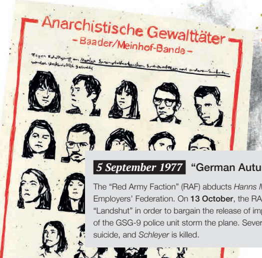
1 October 1982

Helmut Kohl

Helmut Kohl (CDU) is elected chancellor in a CDU/CSU/FDP coalition government. His predecessor *Helmut Schmidt* (SPD) had been removed from office through a constructive vote of no confidence. *Kohl* is the longest-serving chancellor in German history; he remains in office until **1998**. His achievements during the time of reunification have earned *Kohl* the nickname “Chancellor of Unification”.

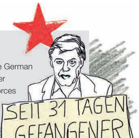






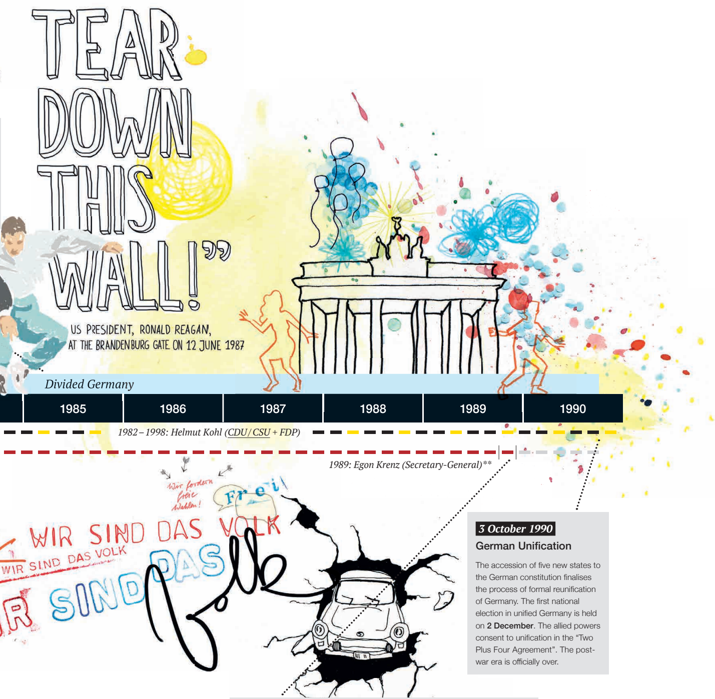
5 September 1977 “German Autumn” and the RAF

The “Red Army Faction” (RAF) abducts *Hanns Martin Schleyer*, president of the German Employers’ Federation. On **13 October**, the RAF highjacks the Lufthansa airliner “Landshut” in order to bargain the release of imprisoned RAF members. Elite forces of the GSG-9 police unit storm the plane. Several RAF members commit suicide, and *Schleyer* is killed.



3 August 1984 First email

The University of Karlsruhe receives the first email in Germany. It was sent from the United States as part of a project aimed at improving scientific communication and exchange. Today, it is hard to imagine a world without email and other new communication technologies as more than 66 million Germans use the internet.



TEAR DOWN THIS WALL!”

US PRESIDENT, RONALD REAGAN,
AT THE BRANDENBURG GATE ON 12 JUNE 1987

Divided Germany

1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990

1982 – 1998: Helmut Kohl (CDU/CSU + FDP)

*1989: Egon Krenz (Secretary-General)***

3 October 1990

German Unification

The accession of five new states to the German constitution finalises the process of formal reunification of Germany. The first national election in unified Germany is held on **2 December**. The allied powers consent to unification in the “Two Plus Four Agreement”. The post-war era is officially over.

9 November 1989 **Fall of the Berlin Wall**

The GDR regime opens the border to West Berlin “without further delay”. In the following days, the remaining border to West Germany is successively opened. As from **May 1989**, many East German citizens had fled to West Germany via Hungary and Austria. In the West German embassy in Prague, thousands of people from the GDR seek refuge before being allowed to travel to the West.

— Legende

Abbreviations:
APO = Extra-Parliamentary Opposition
BHE = Association of Displaced and Disenfranchised Germans
CDU = Christian Democratic Union
CSU = Christian-Social Union
DDP = German Democratic Party
DP = German Party
EEC = European Economic Community
FDP = Free Democratic Party
GDR = German Democratic Republic
KPD = German Communist Party
NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSDAP = National Socialist German Workers' Party
RAF = Red Army Faction
SBZ = Soviet Occupation Zone
SED = German Socialist Unity Party
SPD = German Social Democratic Party
SS = Schutzstaffel (paramilitary units of the NSDAP)
UN(O) = United Nations (Organisation)
US/USA = United States of America

Comments:

The senior party within a coalition government is underlined in the text.

* CDU/CSU held power from 1949 until 1963 under Chancellor Adenauer, either as a union government (1960/1961) or with junior partners (FDP, DP, GB/BHE) in a coalition government.

** Although the German Democratic Republic was founded in October 1949, the post of General Secretary of the SED Central Committee was only created at the 3rd SED Party Conference in July 1950. From 1953 to 1976 the position was renamed “First Secretary of the SED Central Committee”. Further information about power politics in the GDR is available at: www.hdg.de/lemo/kapitel/geteiltes-deutschland.html, including material (relating to events) post-October 1989.

*** The Warsaw Alliance had been referred to as “Warsaw Pact” by the West but was formally named “Warsaw Treaty Organisation of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance”.

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