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From Stumbling Blocks to Stepping Stones

What America Can Learn from Germany about Reconciliation

Melissa Dalton-Bradford

On December 7, 1970, while in Poland to sign the Warsaw Treaty, German chancellor Willy Brandt visited the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The towering stone and bronze monument commemorates the bloody confrontation between Polish resistance groups and German military that took place on the eve of Passover in April 1943, when seven hundred Jewish insurgents wielding only pistols and homemade grenades fought against the well-equipped SS, who, in the end, leveled and incinerated the entire ghetto. More than seven thousand Jews died in that uprising, and an additional forty-two thousand were rounded up and deported to concentration camps. Under gray and steely skies, Brandt now stood face-to-face with a monument to that event. Surrounded by international dignitaries, journalists, and photographers, Brandt slowly carried a large memorial wreath to the steps of the monument, laid the wreath on the ground, and straightened the ribbon. Then, without ceremony, he dropped abruptly and heavily to his knees. Motionless, wordless, arms hanging down with one hand folded atop the other as if captured mid-sacrament, Brandt riveted his gaze to the ground for about half a minute while cameras clicked frenetically, and onlookers held their breath. In a speech delivered in March 1971 at the Christian-Jewish Week of Brotherhood, Brandt recalled that moment, saying, “As I stood in Warsaw at the beginning of December, the burden of recent German history, the burden of a criminal racial policy, lay upon me. I then did what people do when words fail, and I memorialized—for my compatriots—the millions who were murdered.”¹

1. Willy Brandt, *People and Politics: The Years 1960–1975*, trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978), 399. For Brandt’s quote, see “Woche der Brüderlichkeit 1971:

A year later Brandt was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize “for paving the way for a meaningful dialogue between East and West.”² His image, with the title “Man of the Year,” graced the cover of U.S. *TIME* magazine for “seeking to end World War II by bringing about a fresh relationship between East and West,”³ and two years on, Brandt was reelected, his policy of Ostpolitik (healing and fortifying relations with Eastern Europe) having initiated a desperately needed rapprochement. Germany’s foreign minister Heiko Maas offered a fitting summation: “The genuflection by Willy Brandt contributed like almost no other event to the self-discovery of Germany after World War II and to the reconciliation in Europe.”⁴

Brandt’s silent thirty seconds spoke volumes. Yet they constituted only one of countless moments and markers along the route from the edge of a historical abyss to Germany’s current ranking as one of the world’s most trusted and admired leaders. A BBC World Service Poll taken in 2013 placed Germany as most popular among its EU neighbors, with 60 percent of the larger world saying the same thing.⁵ A similar poll taken in 2017 has Canada with the highest positive ranking, followed closely by Germany.⁶ Germany’s hard-won global reputation of decency and trustworthiness, unthinkable seventy years ago, is directly tied to its scrupulous self-criticism, its frequent declarations of accountability (and its repeated apologies) for its crimes against humanity, its insistence on unsparingly educating the public about even the most heinous acts committed in Germany’s name, and its efforts toward peacemaking throughout the modern world.

Rede des Bundeskanzlers auf der Eröffnungsveranstaltung in Köln,” *Bulletin* 43 (March 23, 1971): 442, https://www.willy-brandt-biografie.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1971_Brandt_Rede_Br%C3%BCderlichkeit_4982.pdf. The German original reads: “Als ich Anfang Dezember in Warschau stand, lag auf mir die last der jüngsten deutschen Geschichte, die Last einer verbrecherischen Rassenpolitik. Ich habe dann getan, was Menschen tun, wenn die Worte versagen, und ich habe so—für meine Landsleute mit—der Millionen Ermordeter gedacht.”

2. “Willy Brandt—Facts,” The Nobel Peace Prize 1971, The Nobel Prize, accessed August 11, 2021, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1971/brandt/facts/>.

3. “On the Road to a New Reality,” *TIME* 97, no. 1 (January 4, 1971): 6.

4. Michael Fischer and Doris Heimann, “German Foreign Minister Praises Historic Brandt Warsaw Genuflection,” dpa International, December 6, 2020, <https://www.dpa-international.com/topic/german-foreign-minister-praises-historic-brandt-warsaw-urn:newsml:dpa.com:20090101:201206-99-593174>.

5. “BBC Poll: Germany Most Popular Country in the World,” *BBC News*, May 23, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22624104>.

6. “Sharp Drop in World Views of US, UK: Global Poll,” *Globe Scan*, July 4, 2017, <https://globescan.com/2017/07/04/sharp-drop-in-world-views-of-us-uk-global-poll/>.

To understand the journey Germany has made toward reconciliation for its racially driven crimes, this research will begin by exploring the origins of Nazi Germany's race laws. We will then track what worked and what did not in Germany's decades-long effort to move from pariah to globally respected leader in peace, noting that the story has been at times hostile and violent, at times more a lurching cautionary tale than a textbook trajectory toward absolution. We will observe how Germany's emergence from the moral and physical devastation of war can offer guideposts, if not a detailed road map, toward a nation's moral revitalization. In conclusion, this study will extend an urgent invitation to its readers to confront, root out, and seek reconciliation for racist ideology and its ancillary atrocities in their own histories and contemporary cultures. For members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, this explicit and pressing plea is to live true to our discipleship by raising our voices against the signs and sins of racism. Only by doing so can we claim to follow One who "inviteth . . . all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black or white, bond or free, male or female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Ne. 26:33).

The Origin of Nazi Germany's Race Laws

The insidious germ that feeds racial discrimination did not originate in modernity. Already in 400 BC, Plato, the father of Western philosophy, taught that selective breeding would elevate society. Ancient Rome practiced infanticide to weed out the weak, and countless variations of the same line of thinking persisted across many cultures throughout history. An obsession with racial purity resurfaced with a vengeance in nineteenth-century fin de siècle Western society, a period when, due to unprecedented swings in immigration, both Germany and America witnessed seismic shifts in population in terms of quantity and degree of diversity. What followed was a preoccupation with protecting national identity, which in turn generated research, publications, and formal statements related to racial purity, all emerging between the 1880s and 1920s.

The same years saw German soldiers colonizing South West Africa, enacting genocide on its native inhabitants, whom the Germans called "Untermenschen," or subhumans. While the term "Untermensch" was notoriously applied later by Nazi Germany to the Jews, the idea had gained traction earlier in America. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, researchers Lothrop Stoddard and Madison Grant popularized in the United States a pseudoscience called eugenics. By the 1920s, Stoddard, a Harvard historian, Boston University-trained lawyer, conspiracy

theorist, and member of the Ku Klux Klan, had become a recognized leader of the eugenics movement in the United States by writing *The Rising Tide of Color against White World Supremacy*. The work became required reading among both Klan members and early Nazi leaders. And it was in Stoddard's second major work, *Revolt against Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man*, that the term "Untermensch" entered the lexicon.⁷

Madison Grant was both as racist and as doctrinaire as Stoddard.⁸ In 1916, he authored what James Q. Whitman, author of *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law*, claims was America's most influential work of scientific racism, *The Passing of the Great Race* (approximately seventeen thousand copies sold in the United States alone).⁹ A Yale- and Columbia-educated New York lawyer, Grant argued that there were patently "worthless race types" in contrast to "desirable types."¹⁰ The inferior races, he reasoned, should be quarantined or expelled from superior races, if not altogether eliminated. That book became one of Hitler's oft-referenced texts, moving him to exult to Grant that *Passing* was his "bible."¹¹ Grant served until his death as vice president of the U.S. Immigration Restriction League. At the Nuremberg trials where WWII war criminals were sentenced, Germans introduced *Passing* as evidence that the policies of the Third Reich were not native to Germany but were in fact inherited from American ideologies.¹²

Germans absorbed the contagion of American racialist theories while American readers fell under the spell of self-appointed European spokespeople for racial hierarchy. Few were as influential as Eugen Fischer. A professor of anthropology and eugenics in Berlin, Fischer had conducted

7. Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); see Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1920); and Lothrop Stoddard, *The Revolt against Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922).

8. Adam Serwer, "White Nationalism's Deep American Roots," *The Atlantic*, April 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/04/adam-serwer-madison-grant-white-nationalism/583258/>.

9. James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018), 7, https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload_documents/Hitler%27s%20American%20Model%20for%20NYU.pdf; Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race; or, the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916).

10. Grant, *Passing of the Great Race*, 47.

11. Serwer, "White Nationalism's Deep American Roots."

12. Paul Julian Weindling, *Nazi Medicine and the Nuremberg Trials: From Medical War Crimes to Informed Consent* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 229.

medical field work among enslaved indigenous adults and children in Germany's African colonies. In *The Bastards of Rehoboth and the Problem of Miscegenation in Man*, published in 1913, Fischer argued unapologetically for a hierarchy of races.¹³ Beyond giving his indigenous subjects experimental injections of smallpox, tuberculosis, and typhus, Fischer studied and ran a barrage of tests on 310 children, the mixed-race offspring of Herero women and German men. Like other members of the German governing body in the colonies, Fischer was categorically against mixed-race reproduction, believing it would lead to the deterioration of the superior Nordic-Aryan race. On these children, consequently, Fischer performed forced sterilizations. But he did not stop there. Justified by his conviction that such humans were "inferior" or of "lesser racial quality," Fischer advocated genocide, declaring that "whoever thinks through thoroughly the notion of race, can not arrive at a different conclusion."¹⁴ Hitler studied *Principles of Human Heredity and Race Hygiene* while writing *Mein Kampf*, adopting Fischer's notions of racial hierarchy with Nordic-Aryan "Herrenvolk," or the master race, at the apex, and the darkest-skinned peoples at the base. Hitler expressed his admiration for Fischer by appointing him president of Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (now Humboldt University) in Berlin.

Stoddard, Grant, and Fischer provided the theoretical rationalization for the Nazis' industrialized annihilation of millions. American mag-nates, high profile personalities, politicians, and millionaires—Carnegie, Rockefeller, Kellogg, Alexander Graham Bell, President Calvin Coolidge, and Henry Ford, among others—provided endorsement and publicity to the eugenics crusade.¹⁵

13. Eugen Fischer, *The Rehoboth Bastards and the Problem of Miscegenation among Humans* (Jena, Ger.: G. Fischer, 1913).

14. Quoted in Clarence Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 51, translated from Eugen Fischer, *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen* (Jena, Ger.: Gustav Fischer, 1913), 302.

Eugen Fischer, in a lecture dating from 1939, justified such undertakings as simple, pragmatic self-defense: "When a people wants . . . to preserve its own nature, it must reject alien racial elements, and when these have already insinuated themselves, it must suppress them and eliminate them. The Jew is such an alien and, therefore, when he wants to insinuate himself, he must be warded off. This is self-defence. In saying this, I do not characterize every Jew as inferior, as Negroes are, and I do not underestimate the greatest enemy with whom we have to fight." Quoted in Richard M. Lerner, *Final Solutions: Biology, Prejudice, and Genocide* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 38.

15. For example, the Rockefeller Foundation funded the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics (KWI-A) in Berlin, which was established and headed by Eugen Fischer. C. Kurbegovic, Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology,

Only the “surface of American society is . . . covered with a layer of democracy, from beneath which the old aristocratic colors sometimes peep,” Alexis de Tocqueville had written a century earlier in *Democracy in America*.¹⁶ The veneer was too thin to hide from de Tocqueville the underlying scourge of racial oppression inherent in the treatment of indigenous peoples and, above all, in slavery. That entrenched practice “pained and astonished” de Tocqueville as it did other friends of America. In contrast, the German lawyer Heinrich Krieger was fascinated by the American practice of enslaving African and Native peoples and became singularly influential in the Nazis’ assimilation of American race law. As an exchange student in law at the University of Arkansas in the 1930s, Krieger observed at close range the implications of race in the South and spent his year abroad scrutinizing the legal architecture of the infamous Jim Crow era. While residing in Fayetteville, he wrote numerous articles expounding on American racial jurisprudence and outlining the specifics of U.S. race legislation, including the over thirty states that prohibited miscegenation.¹⁷ In 1934, he published “Race Law in the United States” in the *Verwaltungsarchiv* (the Administrative Archive),¹⁸ followed by “Principles of the Indian Law and the Act of June 18, 1934,” published in *George Washington Law Review*.¹⁹

On June 5, 1934, when German bureaucrats and jurists gathered to draft the “Nürnbergergesetz” (Nuremberg Laws), they had already engaged in extensive study of American case law and legislative acts, including Krieger’s works. Nazis cited Krieger’s findings repeatedly and verbatim, and though many of them judged America’s race laws too radical for their purposes, they were “inspired by America’s ability to treat marginalized populations as less than full citizens while still maintaining a positive global reputation.”²⁰ Thus, Krieger’s description of

Human Heredity, and Eugenics (KWI-A), September 14, 2013, accessed February 8, 2022, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/connections/5233cdc25c2ec500000000a8>.

16. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Vols. I and II*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Bantam, 2000), 50.

17. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model*, 61.

18. The *Verwaltungsarchiv* is a quarterly journal for administrative theory, law, and policy in government, academics, and law. It contains articles addressing and analyzing topics impacting everyone from civil servants to officials sitting in the highest judicial offices.

19. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model*, 54; Heinrich Krieger, “Principles of the Indian Law and the Act of June 18, 1934,” *George Washington Law Review* 3, no. 3 (1935): 279–308.

20. Michael Adkison, “The University of Arkansas’s Hidden History of Helping Nazis,” *Facing South*, April 30, 2021, <https://www.facingsouth.org/2021/04/university-arkansass-hidden-history-helping-nazis>.

America's apparatus of legal discrimination shaped the institutional and legal underpinnings of the Third Reich and its quest for racial purity.

In September 1935, National Socialists unfurled the Nuremberg Laws under dazzling Swastika banners that both threatened and mesmerized the "Volk." German officials and a mostly compliant citizenry enacted a systematic masterplan that legalized purging racial impurities from their midst. A year later, when those laws went into effect, Germany became a well-developed racist regime, employing American laws as blueprint for the Third Reich's legislative framework. At the same time, Krieger published his magnum opus, *Das Rassenrecht in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Race Law in the United States), in whose pages he proclaimed approvingly that the global leader in codified racism was the United States.²¹ An ocean away, American lawmakers were busy drafting policies, with support (or at least acquiescence) from otherwise ordinary and decent citizens, that would severely disadvantage minority (primarily Black) populations for generations to come.

Whitman writes that the men who authored the legal codes of the Nazi regime and laid the groundwork for an Aryan nation wondered "how to institutionalize racism in the new Third Reich" and did so "by asking how the Americans did it."²² Isabel Wilkerson argues persuasively that in the infant stages of National Socialism, those German legal scholars and government officials who partnered with Hitler to draft the Nuremberg Laws looked to the United States not only as *an* example of racist ideology but as *the* classic template of the day for radically racialist jurisprudence.²³ For example, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene (German Society for Racial Hygiene), founded in 1905, pointed admiringly to the "dedication with which Americans sponsor research in the field of racial hygiene and with which they translate theoretical knowledge into practice."²⁴ Thirty years later, in 1939, the Grossdeutscher Pressedienst (Greater German Press Agency) wrote, "For us Germans, it is especially important to know and see how one of the biggest states in the world with Nordic stock already has race legislation which is quite

21. Ira Katznelson, "What America Taught the Nazis," *The Atlantic*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/11/what-america-taught-the-nazis/540630/>; Heinrich Krieger, *Das Rassenrecht in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1936).

22. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model*, 53; see also Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), 79.

23. Wilkerson, *Caste*, 79.

24. Kühl, *Nazi Connection*, 15.

comparable to that of the German Reich.”²⁵ When Hitler and his cohorts began formulating their grand plan, U.S. race laws based on a culture of ethnic purity were already entrenched as a cultural and political fixture. Hitler praised America’s slaughter and compulsory expulsion to reservations of Indigenous Americans, stating that the United States had wisely “gunned down the millions of Redskins to a few hundred thousand.”²⁶ He praised the Immigration Act of 1924 (known also as the Asian Exclusion Act) and praised it as a model for his strategy for racial purification. And he commended the custom of torturing, mutilating, and lynching Blacks, extolling that singularly American “knack for maintaining an air of robust innocence in the wake of mass death.”²⁷

There can be no question that there was considerable cross-pollination of racist ideology between America and Germany. But it is vital to note that by “borrowing heavily” from American purity laws governing citizenship, intermarriage, and immigration, Germany “managed its marginalized groups and guarded its ruling white citizenry,” fashioning law by law the scaffolding that would undergird the Holocaust.²⁸ Humbly taking responsibility for crimes America has committed against its own includes acknowledging that our racism fed the ugliest genocidal bureaucracy humankind has ever produced. Taking responsibility also includes recognizing that those ideologies continue to infest our society to this day and threaten to multiply, driving deeper the rifts in our nation and our world. Taking responsibility requires the commitment of all levels of governments as well as organizations and individuals to the demanding and unending work of reconciliation and healing. For that, we can now analyze Germany’s efforts as our guide.

The German Path to Reconciliation

Jewish-American, Berlin-based scholar Susan Neiman, in *Learning from the Germans*, offers a place to begin our analysis by introducing her readers to “Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung,” the German word whose closest English

25. Quoted in Wilkerson, *Caste*, 79.

26. Whitman, *Hitler’s American Model*, 10, 89 n. 30, citing Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions That Changed the World* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 386–87. Whitman added a fuller and slightly altered translation of the passage quoted by Kershaw, from Adolf Hitler, *Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen* (1928; repr., Munich: Saur, 1994), 3:1, p. 161. See also Waitman Wade Beorn, *The Holocaust in Eastern Europe: At the Epicenter of the Final Solution* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 61.

27. Quoted in Wilkerson, *Caste*, 81.

28. Wilkerson, *Caste*, 78–79.

equivalent is “reconciliation.”²⁹ In contrast to “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” sometimes used in similar contexts and which means overcoming or surmounting one’s past, *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* emphasizes, broken into parts, continually-working-through-one’s-past. Neiman stresses that this laborious process begins with facing the truth. “What readmitted Germany to the family of civilized nations only decades after the Holocaust and allowed it to become the leading power in Europe,” she asserts, “was the recognition of its crimes. Having the will to face your shameful history can become a show of strength.”³⁰ There were many attendant factors that led to a tipping point when most Germans would not only concede their nation’s crimes but also support the process of reconciliation and all that that entails. We will examine seven.

1: Denazification

The victors, the Allies, demanded penance from defeated Germany, and the first step was calling criminals to justice. The IMT (International Military Trials, otherwise known as the Nuremberg Trials) continued over a four-year period, convicting 1,426 criminals and handing down sentences ranging from imprisonment to death. The first hearings focused on twenty-three leading Nazi officers. Of those, only three were found not guilty, and twelve were executed. In the end, only a few war criminals were in fact brought to justice. But in the minds of some, sentencing individual criminals might not have been the ultimate objective of the process. As Robert M. Kemperer, German-American prosecutor pointed out, the “trials with their devastating collections of German documents were the greatest history seminar ever held in the history of the world.”³¹ The point, as eminent historian Ian Buruma writes, was a “symbolic punishment of the German people,” a “morality play” that “claimed to deliver justice, truth, and the defeat of evil.”³² In other words, beyond sentencing war criminals, the IMT hoped to discredit in the public’s eyes the regime that had stoked war and genocide and “stamp out the whole tradition on which the German nation [had] been built up.”³³

29. Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2019), 7–8, 17.

30. Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, 32.

31. Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 144–45.

32. Buruma, *Wages of Guilt*, 145.

33. J. M. Troutbeck, quoted in Nicholas Pronay and Keith Wilson, eds., *The Political Re-Education of Germany and Her Allies after World War II* (London: Routledge, 1985), 18.

The trials were but one publicized facet of a larger denazification program. The Allies further intended to locate and remove specific Nazi party sympathizers from any government responsibility. But that process was staggering, if not doomed from the start. It was virtually impossible to differentiate between major offenders, Nazi party members, opportunists, the duty-driven, the morally disengaged, the “Mitläufer” (those who blankly went along), and the supposedly oblivious bystanders. Furthermore, stabilizing postwar Germany required skilled civic leadership, and the overwhelming majority of prewar and wartime civic leaders had in fact been supporters of the regime, if not Nazi party members. Complicating matters, at the same time the denazification purge was underway, the Cold War was setting in, and attention was turning swiftly to the task of quelling Communism. Within a few years, most former Nazis were returned to their posts. In 1952, 60 percent of civil servants in Bavaria were former Nazis, and ten years after the war, 90 percent of judges in West Germany were former Nazi party members.³⁴

A more successful element of denazification was the removal of all physical symbols and messaging of the Nazi regime. Allies called for a complete “Liquidation of German Military and Nazi Memorials and Museums”³⁵ and seized control of public communications to accelerate a comprehensive reeducation of the German people. By July 1946, the Information Control Division of the U.S. Army had taken over German media, commandeering 37 German newspapers, 6 radio stations, 314 theaters, 642 cinemas, 101 magazines, 237 book publishers, and 7,384 book dealers and printers.³⁶ Part of the reeducation effort also entailed disseminating a propaganda campaign aimed at shaming and blaming the German citizenry for war horrors. The Allies hung posters showing photos of piles of corpses in concentration camps with headlines screaming, “This is your fault!”³⁷ Even as they mourned the seven million German lives lost in the war (more than any war in history),

34. Frederick Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler: The Occupation and Denazification of Germany* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 284.

35. See “Liquidation of German Military and Nazi Memorials and Museums,” Directive no. 30, in Matthew Dessem, “How Did We Treat Monuments to White Supremacists When They Weren’t *Our* White Supremacists?” *Slate*, August 13, 2017, <https://slate.com/culture/2017/08/read-the-allied-order-to-destroy-nazi-monuments-in-germany.html>.

36. Alfred H. Paddock Jr., “Major General Robert Alexis McClure, Forgotten Father of US Army Special Warfare,” accessed February 10, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061115053715/http://www.psywarrior.com/mcclure.html>.

37. Neiman *Learning from the Germans*, 47.

Germans wrestled with “Kollektivschuld,” or collective guilt,³⁸ as they slowly came to terms with multiple millions of victims of genocide—their former Jewish (and Roma, Sinti, homosexual, Black, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other victimized) neighbors.

2: Denial, Avoidance, and Obfuscation

By 1951, the IMT and denazification efforts had largely failed at calling the guilty to justice and extracting a mea culpa from a defeated people. Many Germans argued that, given all they had suffered at the hands of these victors, the Allies had no right to judge them. Germans believed that they were victims—of war, of occupation, and even of Nazism itself, which, some said, “was a good idea, badly applied.”³⁹ Germans took over the denazification process, enacting Amnesty Laws that reversed many Allied efforts to impose justice. Observing this, General Eisenhower estimated that a successful denazification process would take fifty years.⁴⁰ Nazis were excused, and German society’s demands for exculpation from guilt in the catastrophe were appeased. According to the surveys commissioned by the occupying government put in place by the United States soon after the war, a third of the population was still staunchly anti-Semitic, and two-thirds felt no responsibility whatsoever for countrywide anti-Semitic sentiments. Some Germans believed the reports of the Holocaust had been exaggerated, if it had happened at all. Others held that if it had in fact happened, it had been justified. And 83 percent held that Germany’s crimes were no worse than those of other nations.⁴¹

Neiman notes in an interview with Deutsche Welle that well into the 1960s, besides answering those surveys, few Germans openly talked about the realities they had witnessed during the war. Perhaps this was out of evasion and the sense that they were the greater victims of the war, Neiman explains, or it was due to the collective trauma of war and

38. See Lars Rensmann, “Collective Guilt, National Identity, and Political Processes in Contemporary Germany,” in *Collective Guilt: International Perspectives*, ed. Nyla R. Branscombe and Bertjan Doosje, Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 169–90.

39. Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 58.

40. Noland Norgaard, “Eisenhower Claims 50 Years Needed to Re-Educate Nazis,” *Oregon Statesman*, October 13, 1945, 2, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://www.news-papers.com/clip/1206197/eisenhower-50-years-for-de-nazification/>.

41. Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler*, 283–90.

of those particular postwar years.⁴² Desperate and starving, Germans barely survived the winter of 1946/47, one of the coldest on record, when most rivers and 80 percent of the country's infrastructure were frozen. Surrounded by tons of rubble and occupation troops; suffering from cholera and diphtheria; and threatened by rampant looting, robbery, and murders, many committed suicide while others coped by burying the past. It was their zero hour, or as one says in German, their "Stunde Null," when the past was submersed in silence.

3: A Truly Postwar Generation

In the 1960s, in the final years of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's administration, a seismic shift tipped Germany's general opinion regarding World War II. The trial of Adolf Eichmann—a leading SS officer who had facilitated the deportation of Jews, and who, upon being found guilty of fifteen counts of crimes against humanity, was executed by hanging—seemed to begin to alter public opinion. In those proceedings, among the first in history to be completely and internationally televised, not only Eichmann, and "not the Nazi regime alone, but anti-Semitism throughout history," were cross-examined and exposed.⁴³

The Eichmann trial was reported in the international press, drawing heated commentary. Throughout Germany in particular, the media coverage catapulted to the forefront of German public discourse and artistic expression themes pertaining to the war, war crimes, and national identity.⁴⁴ The public's conscience was not just pricked but stabbed. And the generation that was just coming of age, the children who had grown up in an atmosphere of muffled whispers about their parents' and country's past—"Hitler's children," as some called them—erupted in revolution. As German historian Norbert Frei writes, this was a time when "wrenching, sometimes violent, confrontation between the generations" began.⁴⁵ It took a singular intersection of events and the literal passing of a generation for the new one to demand answers. The year 1968 was marked

42. Susan Neiman, in "May 8, 1945, Was 'Zero Hour' for Germany in Multiple Ways," Deutsche Welle, accessed February 4, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/end-of-world-war-two-marks-zero-hour-in-germany/a-53352628>.

43. David Ben-Gurion, quoted in Valerie Hartouni, *Visualizing Atrocity: Arendt, Evil, and the Optics of Thoughtlessness* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 93.

44. See David Cesarini, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (London: Vintage, 2004), 324–56.

45. Belinda Cooper, "Truth and Reconciliation," *New York Times*, February 9, 2003, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/09/books/truth-and-reconciliation.html>.

by student revolts that erupted around the western world—in Paris, Prague, Berkeley—but nowhere were the revolts as fierce as in Berlin. It was an epicenter for students, who, freshly cognizant of their forebears' culpability in the Holocaust, protested that former Nazis (or Nazi sympathizers) now held some of Germany's highest political offices. Feeling betrayed both by their fatherland and their very fathers, they took to the streets, demanding answers, apologies, and change.

4: The Historians' Dispute

On the one hand, a new generation's clash with the traditions of its predecessors was hostile and violent. On the other, that energy plowed fresh ground in which the seeds of reconciliation could be planted. This schism between generations and factions—one guarding the gates of an idealized history, the other pickaxing at it—was evidenced in the "Historikersstreit" (the historians' dispute) of the 1980s. This battle of worldviews and opinions regarding Germany's recent history, a fight that had begun already in 1945 and had flared in the late '60s, went another round in highly publicized exchanges between conservative and left-of-center scholars.

Instigated by Ernst Nolte and countered by Jürgen Habermas, the dispute's primary arguments were about how to explain Germany's recent history in a way that would make the future bearable: What motivated Nazism? Was the Holocaust unique and uniquely horrible? Who was culpable? Why should that matter if it is past? Should the present pay for the past? And who, when all these questions are answered, are we as a people? Nolte opined that "embedded in the context of twentieth century genocide, the Final Solution and the state and society responsible for it seem neither unique nor singularly evil." Hence, the Nazi past, which, he wrote, "hung like the sword of judgement over the present," ought to be minimized if not entirely removed. In response, Habermas argued that Nolte and his camp "wanted to utilize revisionist history to dress up national history with a conventional identity," criticizing his opponents for masking the evils of the Nazi era, thereby shutting off Germany from the rest of the West.⁴⁶

46. Hanging over such queries was the overarching notion of historiography: whether the future is controlled by those who determine the content of memory, as Michael Stürmer, far-right politician and one of the debates' principal participants famously wrote. If the future of Germany belonged to those who controlled (that is, muzzled, sanitized, deliberately distorted, or shot holes through) its past, then which

Vitriolic, intentionally controversial, and barbed with stinging personal attacks, the historians' dispute was a firestorm of ethical and moral questioning. The heart-searching elicited (and still elicits today) complex responses and required profound reflection on Germany's identity: past, present, and future. The international attention the dispute with its public debates drew added ballast and valuable contour to the exercise,⁴⁷ but one factor that made the public sparring especially impactful was that those calling for German accountability were Germans themselves. Unlike the IMT and denazification programs which, to Germans, smacked of Schadenfreude on the part of the war's victors, the debates were different. They were fellow-Germans pointing judgment's finger as much at themselves as at anyone else, an intrafamilial plea for collective penance and rebirth. For all these reasons, the historians' dispute induced public truth-seeking, which inched Germany closer to acknowledging the cruelties and criminality within its own history and, in turn, toward reconciliation.

Germany's conversion from denying its history to insisting on accurate historical self-knowledge was wrenchingly confrontational, which might encourage other nations whose own routes toward reconciliation for historical wrongs may also swerve, at times appear hopeless, or even implode. Many if not most Germans of the late 1980s—forty years after the war—knew their nation's future depended on an openly critical attitude about the Nazi past, writes Buruma, and they therefore called for a clean “break with the discretion, the silence, the evasions that were thought to have been necessary to turn millions of former Nazis into republican citizens.”⁴⁸ Primed for greater unity, the nation experienced just that when,

German people were they going to become? Those who, after suspecting or even witnessing the rationalized butchery of fellow humans choose to respond with a shrug of collective amnesia, or those who choose to bow in collective guilt? Habermas's retort was absolute: “We in Germany . . . must, undisguisedly and not simply intellectually, keep awake the memory of the suffering of those murdered at German hands.” Michael Stürmer, “How Much History Weighs,” in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*, trans. James Knowlton and Truett Cates (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1993), 197; Jürgen Habermas, “On the Public Use of History: The Official Self-Understanding of the Federal Republic is Breaking Up,” in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?*, 168.

47. In short order, the debates expanded, drawing global interest, when historians and philosophers from outside of Germany—Brits, Canadians, Americans, Israelis—joined the fray. One such intellectual was Auschwitz survivor, spiritual luminary, and Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel, who wasted no time in calling Nolte and his defenders “the four bandits” of German historiography, soundly denouncing them as apologists for the Third Reich. John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (New York: Random House, 1997), 238.

48. Buruma, *Wages of Guilt*, 188.

in 1989, the Berlin Wall was demolished. At that time, the work toward reconciliation was only nascent and became far more complicated as East and West German memories and interpretations of the war met, quite literally, face-to-face. Major (and by many accounts, the most significant) work toward full reconciliation was yet to come.

5: *Confessing and Apologizing*

If a single thirty-second public act of penance like Willy Brandt's silent supplication in Warsaw could pivot history, then it is wise to study what makes an effective apology. "To apologize," writes Nicholas Tavuchis in his seminal work, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*, "is to declare voluntarily that one has *no* excuse, defense, justification, or explanation for an action (or inaction) that has 'insulted, failed, injured, or wronged another.'"⁴⁹ Brandt falling spontaneously to his knees was voluntary, authentic, and visually defenseless. It was a posture of pure and unstudied penitence where he, as a proxy for his people, rendered himself small, laid aside the shield of language, and begged for forgiveness. As Tavuchis notes, "One who apologizes seeks forgiveness and redemption for what is unreasonable, unjustified, undeserving, and inequitable."⁵⁰ Whether the offended or victimized (in this case, Poland) wholeheartedly embraces the offender's or perpetrator's (Germany's) apology is unpredictable. This is an important issue to which this essay will return when discussing Germany's initial attempt at reconciliation with Israel. What history has proven, nonetheless, is that Brandt's fall to his knees was a decisive step toward reconciliation, and reconciliation, in turn, was a definitive step toward Germany's reunification.

After Brandt's, a second ground-breaking German public apology was offered in words. The landmark speech given by German president Richard von Weizsäcker on May 8, 1985, commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II. U.S. president Ronald Reagan was slated to attend the event, but days prior, on May 5, he made a controversial ceremonial visit to the Bitburg, Germany, cemetery where forty-nine S.S. officers (among many others) were interred.⁵¹ Public out-

49. Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 17; emphasis in original.

50. Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, 17.

51. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Joint German-American Military Ceremony at Bitburg Air Base in the Federal Republic of Germany," May 5, 1985, accessed February 4, 2022. <http://www.vlib.us/amdocs/texts/reagano51985.html>.

cry at what appeared to be Reagan's disregard of war crimes, or even his tacit sympathy for their perpetrators, was unleashed on both sides of the Atlantic. Weizsäcker's World War II commemorative address landed as a resonant counterpoint. In it, Weizsäcker lauded May 8, not as a day of defeat and humiliation, as it had always been known, but as a "day of liberation" from Nazism. Laying blame at the feet of the public's chiefly enthusiastic support of National Socialism, he pointed to the inseparable connection between the Nazi takeover in Germany and the tragedies of World War II. And, with extraordinary candor, he added that when the Holocaust had become a known fact, "all too many of us claimed they had not known anything about it or even suspected anything." He continued, saying, "All of us, whether guilty or not, whether old or young, must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and liable for it." He also spoke these piercing words: "We need to have the strength to look truth straight in the eye—without embellishment and without distortion. . . . We must understand that there can be no reconciliation without remembrance."⁵²

A third apology of note came in 2008 from Angela Merkel, who became Germany's chancellor in 2005. On numerous occasions, she had already spoken with striking specificity about the Nazi crimes and the need to remember and take accountability for her nation's past.⁵³ On this occasion in particular, a commemoration for the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Jewish state after the Holocaust, Merkel delivered an extraordinary address at the Knesset (Israeli Parliament).⁵⁴ Using the Hebrew word *Shoah* for the Holocaust, Merkel solemnly admitted to the Parliament that the "break with civilization that was the Shoah" was unprecedented and that "the mass murder of 6 million Jews, carried out in the name of Germany, has brought indescribable suffering

52. Richard von Weizsäcker, "Speech in the Bundestag on 8 May 1985 during the Ceremony Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the End of War in Europe and of National-Socialist Tyranny," accessed February 4, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20140201195236/http://www.lmz-bw.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Medienbildung_MCO/fileadmin/bibliothek/weizsaecker_speech_may85/weizsaecker_speech_may85.pdf.

53. Ruth Wittlinger, "The Merkel Government's Politics of the Past," *German Politics and Society* 26, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 9–27, <https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2008.260402>.

54. Merkel's Knesset speech was extraordinary and historic because it was the first time a German chancellor had ever been invited to speak there. In fact, the Knesset had to change its bylaws to allow a head of government (and not a head of state, which had a precedent) to appear before the full plenary session. Further, the address was controversial because Merkel was permitted to speak in German, what Jewish critics refer to as the language of the murderers.

to the Jewish people, Europe and the entire world.” Continuing, she noted that though Germans had taken forty years to admit their guilt and their accountability to Israel, they were filled “with shame” over the Nazi Holocaust. She also said, “I bow my head before the victims” and “before all those who helped” the survivors.⁵⁵ Members of Knesset called out “Shalom!” as they gave the chancellor a standing ovation.⁵⁶ The moment marked a further affirmative shift in German-Israeli relations.

Merkel, like Weizsäcker and Brandt before her, achieved what scholar Robert Weyeneth says is the purpose of symbolic speech acts: “to be forgiven, to restore institutional integrity, to defuse volatile situations, to find closure, to establish accountability, to forestall retribution, and to point the way to a future relationship.”⁵⁷ These German leaders, by offering apologies for crimes of which none of them was personally guilty, but for which their country was accountable, have contributed markedly to Germany’s ongoing process of historical reconciliation.

6: Memorializing

“Monuments are not about history,” writes Susan Neiman. Monuments, she asserts, “are values made visible.” In choosing what it does and does not commemorate, a community honors certain values and dishonors others. “What is at stake” in choosing what to commemorate, Neiman warns, “is not the past, but the present and the future. When we choose to memorialize a historical moment, we are showing the values we want to defend, and pass on.”⁵⁸

Among the memorials that have been established are the “Stolpersteine” (literally, “stumbling stones”), six-inch brass-covered blocks of cement embedded between cobblestones throughout twenty-five European countries. I frequently spot them as I walk the tree-lined avenues of Bad Homburg, a suburb north of Frankfurt, where my family and I have lived for many years. Their metal surfaces bear engravings: the name, birthdate, date of deportation, and place of death—a skeletal life sketch—of someone killed in the Holocaust who once lived right

55. “Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to the Knesset in Jerusalem,” March 18, 2008, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/doc/speech_merkel_2008_eng.pdf.

56. Ulrike Putz, “Merkel in the Knesset: ‘We Would Never Abandon Israel,’” *Spiegel International*, March 18, 2008, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/merkel-in-the-knesset-we-would-never-abandon-israel-a-542311.html>.

57. Robert R. Weyeneth, “The Power of Apology and the Process of Historical Reconciliation,” *Public Historian* 23, no. 3 (2001): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2001.23.3.9>.

58. Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, 263.

where that stone has been installed. Going to the dentist, my steps freeze before the stone for a Dr. Bernhard Wiesenthal, deported in 1942 from this apartment, as the inscription states, and murdered in Sobibor. Picking up vegetables at the open market, I lower the kickstand of my bike near the edge of brass plaques for Eduard Rothschild and his family, deported in 1942 from this address and murdered in Mauthausen. And on my way home, I spot the muted sheen of two side-by-side stones: Robert and Frieda Altstuhl, both hauled off in 1942 to be murdered in Treblinka. Micromemorial by micromemorial, a chorus of witnesses surfaces from underground, silently attesting to Germany's Nazi legacy.

From small plaques like the nearly seventy thousand Stolpersteine that artist Gunter Demnig has placed across twenty-five European countries, to monolithic works stretching over acres (like the Holocaust Memorial in downtown Berlin and the concentrations camps—Ravensbrück, Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and others—that have been turned into museums), Germany has erected, mostly since the 1980s, hundreds of monuments memorializing the tragic realities, not the romanticized myths, of World War II. Christian leaders who lost their lives to Nazism are forged in bronze. LGBTQIA+ victims who are often forgotten in discussions and textbooks are remembered in stone. The heroic efforts of the underground resistance are brought into the foreground. The Villa at Wannsee, where racist ideology was written into a Final Solution, has been transformed into a museum exploring the Final Solution itself. And the former Gestapo headquarters were turned into a museum named the Topography of Terror.

As significant as what is visible and visitable is what is absent. There are zero monuments in Germany celebrating the Third Reich and its Nazi leaders, “however many grandfathers fought or fell for them.”⁵⁹ No Eichmann, Rommel, Göring, Goebbels, Heydrich, Himmler, or Hitler statues. All tributes to such criminals were removed anyway when the Allies outlawed those symbols in their denazification campaign immediately postwar. Significantly, every German leader since has adopted and maintained that ruling until the present time. It is likewise illegal to display a Swastika and other tokens of Nazism, and descendants of Nazi leaders know to not openly memorialize those forefathers. If one goes looking for the one-time Führer's gravesite, it is nowhere to be found.

59. Susan Neiman, “There Are No Nostalgic Nazi Memorials,” *The Atlantic*, September 14, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/09/germany-has-no-nazi-memorials/597937/>; see also Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, 264–65.

Appropriately, the bunker in which Hitler spent his final hours and eventually committed suicide is buried under the tons of cement pavement of a drab parking lot.

Rather than spotlighting Hitler and his co-aggressors, “Germany has raised monuments to World War II’s real heroes—those who risked or gave their lives to oppose the Nazis—as well as to the war’s victims” and to none of the aggressors themselves, writes Neiman.⁶⁰ A chief reason behind why that type of memorial is absent from the German landscape is as reassurance to its global neighbors that Germany can be trusted. That it has learned from and abandoned its poisonous past. That it has reformed itself.

7: *Reparations*

Reconciliation is not a static destination, but a dynamic, intergenerational, and ongoing process, and its ultimate objective, peace, as Chancellor Angela Merkel often said, requires constant self-reflection and self-criticism. Sometimes, too, it calls for material compensation. Such reimbursement, or reparations, “are not punitive,” writes American rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz. “They’re restorative.” They are, as he continues, a “means to a more just society, not an end to attain absolution.”⁶¹ Accordingly, reparations serve purposes larger than, but including, material compensation to any direct recipient. In the words of Joe Stewart, acting president of Descendants Truth and Reconciliation Foundation, the disbursement of material restitution is best viewed as “transformative rather than payback.”⁶² Reparations can signal the seriousness of the perpetrator’s contrition and can aid in cultivating a new relationship with victims while also providing victims (or descendants of victims) with capital to compensate for lost property, housing, employment, education, opportunities, and other elements central to their human dignity.

In the case of World War II and its accompanying brutalities, the Jewish community held a singular place with regards to reconciliation and reparations. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer approached Israel in the early 1950s, saying later, “I felt our duty to the Jews as a deep moral debt.

60. Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, 267.

61. Shmuly Yanklowitz, “A Rabbi’s Plea: We Need Slavery Reparations in Order to Move Forward,” *YES! Magazine*, June 30, 2015, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/make-right/2015/06/30/rabbi-s-plea-slavery-reparations>.

62. David Crary, “Jesuits in US Pledge \$100M for Racial Reconciliation,” *Washington Times*, March 16, 2021, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/mar/16/jesuits-in-us-pledge-100m-for-racial-reconciliatio/>.

. . . One of my chief aims . . . was to put in order our relationship to Israel and the Jews, both for moral and political reasons. Germany could not become a respected and equal member of the family of nations until it had recognized and proven the will to make amends.”⁶³

In 1951, Adenauer announced plans to repay Israel for the monstrous crimes committed in the name of the German people. However well-intentioned, those overtures were not immediately welcomed by Israel. Understandably, many Israelis, including Menachem Begin, Israel’s later prime minister, were insulted by the very idea of reparations. The indignant Begin tried to convince then-prime minister David Ben-Gurion to not entertain those discussions with Adenauer, saying, “In this generation of ours that we call the last of bondage and first of redemption—in this generation that we have been privileged to gain back our dignity, in which we emerged from slavery to freedom—you are ready, for few millions of contaminated dollars and for impure goods, to deprive us of dignity we have earned.” But Ben-Gurion persisted, knowing that the new Israeli state desperately needed extra funding, and, in the end, healing had to begin somewhere.⁶⁴ Over the course of the decades since, Germany has indeed paid reparations to Israel of more than \$8 billion, resulting in an income that supports fifteen percent of Israel’s current economy.⁶⁵ The material and pragmatic act of paying reparations, in conjunction with Germany’s frequently repeated public statements of guilt and shame, have transformed relations with Israel. A 2015 poll from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation revealed that, of one thousand Israelis surveyed, 70 percent claimed Germany as their favorite European country.⁶⁶

Germany’s attempts to atone for its past sins, however, have not always been met with acceptance and forgiveness. Although Germany apologized for what it termed “genocide” in its former African colony German South West Africa (now Namibia) and offered to fund projects worth more than \$1.2 billion in the country, Namibia’s vice president,

63. Konrad Adenauer, quoted in Lily Gardner Feldman, *Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 29.

64. Menachem Begin, quoted in Annabell Timsit, “The Blueprint the US Can Follow to Finally Pay Reparations,” Quartz, October 13, 2020, <https://qz.com/1915185/how-germany-paid-reparations-for-the-holocaust/>.

65. Feldman, *Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation*, 136–38.

66. Michael Borchard and Hans Maria Heyn, “The Holy Land and the Germans,” Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, January 12, 2015, <https://www.kas.de/en/single-title/-/content/das-heilige-land-und-die-deutschen>.

Nangolo Mbumba, said, “I don’t think that any Namibian would think that the money is enough to compensate for all that happened.”⁶⁷

Implications for the United States

Over generations, Germany has kept at its commitment to reconciliation by offering robust and ongoing reparations. That such commitment to reconciliation heals wounds both native and foreign and thereby dramatically transforms our global neighborhood is an incontestable fact. Germany is a world leader today *precisely because* Germany has been a reconciliation leader. As journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates writes in his vitally important essay “The Case for Reparations,” “Reparations could not make up for the murder perpetrated by the Nazis. But they did launch Germany’s reckoning with itself, and perhaps provided a road map for how a great civilization might make itself worthy of the name.”⁶⁸

And how is the United States doing at making itself worthy of the name “great”? Could the United States learn from Germany’s initiatives and convert markers and memorials that currently glorify our racist inheritance into symbols of reconciliation and peace? Social justice activist and author Bryan Stevenson believes so. Taking German holocaust memorials as a model, he converted a ten-thousand-square-foot former Alabaman slave house into the National Lynching Memorial, and his Equal Justice Initiative aims to build similar lynching memorials across

67. “German Colonial-Era Genocide Reparations Offer Not Enough—Namibia Vice President,” *Reuters*, June 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/germany-colonial-era-genocide-reparations-offer-not-enough-namibia-vice-2021-06-04/>.

68. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic* (June 2014), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

Coates reminds us that African slave Belinda Royall was awarded fifteen pounds and twelve shillings when she petitioned the U.S. government for reparations after her American master abandoned her. That was 163 years before the U.S. began paying Native American tribes \$1.3 billion for taking their lands, 168 years before Adenauer’s offer to Israel, and 205 years before the U.S. paid \$1.6 billion to Japanese Americans who had been interned during World War II. Royall’s petition was submitted eighty years before General Sherman promised freed slaves forty acres and a mule, a promise President Andrew Johnson revoked. In contrast to President Johnson, Congressman John Conyers Jr. of Detroit introduced an act he called HR40 (40 for forty mules) in 1989 and in every successive year thereafter until 2017, to form a task force for the study of the feasibility of reparations for slavery. Finally, in April 2021, a House committee advanced the bill, but as of this writing it has not been taken up for consideration by the full House of Representatives. See Juana Summers, “A Bill to Study Reparations for Slavery Had Momentum in Congress, but Still No Vote,” NPR, November 12, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/11/12/1054889820/a-bill-to-study-reparations-for-slavery-had-momentum-in-congress-but-still-no-vo>.

the United States. He believes that strong leadership—good government—educates its citizenry about the crimes for which its nation ought to feel shame. Elizabeth Alexander—scholar, Pulitzer Prize-nominated author, and president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which has recently focused on public monuments—concur. With a quarter of a billion dollars, the biggest donation in the Mellon Foundation’s history, this eminent educator and activist is leading a nationwide initiative that will support efforts like Stevenson’s Lynching Memorials, with the understanding that “what we see around us, what is ambient, is teaching us all the time.”⁶⁹ Alexander and her colleagues at Mellon are proposing a five-year project that focuses on repurposing, reimagining, and recontextualizing monuments that currently sanitize or glorify shameful passages of America’s past. As we look across the nation, we see an Emancipation Monument featuring two twelve-foot figures of slaves was unveiled in Richmond, Virginia, on September 22, 2021. And in Charlottesville, the Robert E. Lee statue that sparked a white supremacist rally in August 2017, where a neo-Nazi murdered an antiracism protester, was taken down. Charlottesville’s mayor declared that this was “a small step closer to the goal of helping . . . America grapple with its sin of being willing to destroy black people for economic gain.”⁷⁰

And where does the United States stand with regard to reparations? Though comprehensive programs are still in their embryonic stages, momentum appears to be building. Evanston, Illinois, has announced a reparation initiative that promises to spread \$10 million over a decade to Black residents whose families were discriminated against in the housing market. Allocation of funds begins with \$400,000 that will pay for residents’ home repairs and mortgage payments.⁷¹ U.S.-based Jesuits have promised to raise \$100 million that will go to the posterity of those once enslaved by their Roman Catholic order with a long-range goal of raising \$1 billion.⁷²

69. Elizabeth Alexander, in “Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Pledges \$250 Million to Reimagine Monuments in U.S.,” NPR, October 8, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/08/921782086/andrew-w-mellon-foundation-pledges-250-million-to-reimagine-monuments-in-u-s>.

70. Andrew Webb, “Charlottesville Mayor and Activist Address Statue Removal,” NCB29, July 10, 2021, <https://www.nbc29.com/2021/07/11/charlottesville-mayor-activist-address-statue-removal/>.

71. Julie Bosman, “Chicago Suburb Shapes Reparations for Black Residents: ‘It Is the Start,’” *New York Times*, March 22, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/22/us/reparations-evanston-illinois-housing.html>.

72. Rachel L. Swarns, “Catholic Order Pledges \$100 Million to Atone for Slave Labor and Sales,” *New York Times*, updated May 10, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/15/us/jesuits-georgetown-reparations-slavery.html>.

From Los Angeles to Tullahassee, Oklahoma, eleven mayors calling themselves MORE (Mayors Organized for Reparations and Equity) have initiated small-scale reparation programs for the Black residents of their communities. They hope to demonstrate that such a program is indeed possible on a federal level.

Despite America's rethinking of public memorials, offering reparations, and acknowledging the gains of the civil rights movement, the United States still lags far behind its European neighbor in doing the same with its history of slavery and the slaughter of indigenous peoples, Jim Crow, and the broad spectrum of racial injustice that now spans centuries. The results of that negligence are far-reaching and irrefutable. According to the best statistical research, today's America is in many ways as racially polarized as it has ever been. And signs forewarn that the situation is worsening precipitously.⁷³ Far-right hate groups in the United States are on the rise, outstripping a global trend to which Germany is not completely immune.⁷⁴ In both the United States and Germany, white supremacists have recently been linked to if not openly welcomed by major political parties. By all accounts, however, the prognosis for this trend in the United States is uniquely problematic and far-reaching and deserves scrutiny within the context of a Germany-U.S. comparison that this paper presents. Complex factors like some that prefaced the rise of the Third Reich and several other elements peculiar to twenty-first-century America converged on January 6, 2021, when armed mobs, including white supremacists and neofascists, breached police barriers at the U.S. Capitol, killing one officer and assaulting other law enforcement personnel and journalists. This homegrown militia, some of whom waved Confederate battle flags while others wore "Camp Auschwitz" and "6MWE" (Six Million Wasn't Enough) T-shirts, rioted and stormed, occupied, and pillaged the federal seat of government while terrorizing elected representatives, their staffs, and their families. Besides spreading human feces through the Capitol's hallways and vandalizing memorial artwork, they

73. See Darrell M. West, "Our National Crisis," in *Ways to Reconcile and Heal America*, Brookings Institution, 12–41, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Reconciliation-v3.1.pdf>.

74. The Anti-Defamation League found that nationally the "distribution of racist, anti-Semitic and anti-LGBTQ fliers, stickers, banners and posters" more than doubled from 1,214 in 2018 to 2,713 cases in 2019. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has documented that hate crime violence rose to a two-decade high in 2019 and included sharp rises in physical assaults, shootings, and other forms of violence targeting religious and racial minorities. "White Supremacists Double Down on Propaganda in 2019: A Report from the Center on Extremism," Anti-Defamation League, February 2020, 5, <https://www.adl.org/media/14038/download>.

erected gallows where they threatened to hang Vice President Mike Pence and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. The insurrection cost over \$30 million, injured 138 police officers, and resulted in the loss of five human lives.⁷⁵ Yet those domestic terrorists were permitted to leave unrestrained. With the entire world agape in utter shock and revulsion, America was yanked awake—yet again—to the truth about how fragile the state of democracy can be, and how that fragility is inextricably linked to race relations that have smoldered for centuries and can flare at any time, burning and blistering across the land of the free.

A Pew Research Center survey conducted across thirteen countries outside the United States in the summer of 2020 revealed that “positive views of the U.S. are at or near an all-time low” in the twenty years of Pew’s existence.⁷⁶ And most see racial and ethnic problems as greater in the United States than in their own countries.⁷⁷ At a time when the United States seems to be struggling with its place as a world leader, it is worthwhile to consider the ways that Germany recovered its leadership role just a few decades after driving the globe into a war generated by racism. The sharp drop in global confidence and trust in the United States ought to spur us to reflect on the steps Germany has taken to foster solid and mutually respectful foreign ties, redeeming itself in its own and in the world’s eyes.

The societal splintering and poor global image that plagues the United States can be countered as we cease romanticizing elements of our troubling history and instead face, admit, and repent of our original sin, namely racism. We start by asking ourselves unsparing questions. Have we protected ourselves from discomfort by whitewashing, deliberately distorting, or burying many of our nation’s racial injustices to

75. Emily Cochrane and Luke Broadwater, “Capitol Riot Costs Will Exceed \$30 Million, Official Tells Congress,” *New York Times*, February 24, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/24/us/politics/capitol-riot-damage.html>; Editorial Board, “Opinion: The Jan. 6 Capitol Attack Was, in Fact, a Violent Insurrection,” *Washington Post*, July 10, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/07/10/jan-6-capitol-attack-was-fact-violent-insurrection/>.

76. Richard Wike, Janell Fetterolf, and Mara Mordecai, “U.S. Image Plummets Internationally as Most Say Country Has Handled Coronavirus Badly,” Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project, September 15, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/09/15/us-image-plummets-internationally-as-most-say-country-has-handled-coronavirus-badly/>.

77. Laura Silver, “More People Globally See Racial, Ethnic Discrimination as a Serious Problem in the U.S. Than in Their Own Society,” Pew Research Center, November 2, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/11/02/more-people-globally-see-racial-ethnic-discrimination-as-a-serious-problem-in-the-u-s-than-in-their-own-society/>.

the point that white supremacy and myriad iterations of its venomous ideology have seeped into our common bloodstream? If, as I argue, the inequities and violence accorded racial minorities in the United States are not a passing fringe phenomenon but are calcified in our culture and in too many instances enshrined in institutions, what can we do?

Church History and Church Present

We might begin by seriously studying our own Church history, including fraught issues like policies that banned Blacks from receiving the priesthood and entering the temple (reversed in 1978), which had been justified by the mythologized and, thankfully, now disavowed folk doctrine that Blacks carried a curse of Cain and had not been sufficiently valiant in the pre-existence. As an aid to that study, we can reference and share the Church's Gospel Topic Essays that address some more ambiguous, misunderstood, or thorny doctrinal and historical issues including one written specifically on "Race and the Priesthood"⁷⁸ and another entitled "Peace and Violence among 19th-Century Latter-day Saints."⁷⁹ In that second essay, one of the most sinister events in the history of our faith, the Mountain Meadows Massacre, is introduced. The 1857 premeditated and unprovoked slaughter of 120 emigrants by sixty Mormon militiamen who then tried to blame local Paiute Indians for the butchery provides an example of heinous racial exploitation as well as a case where today's Church leadership has issued a retrospective public acknowledgement of "collective extirpatory violence" committed by Church members under another generation's institutional watch.⁸⁰ At the memorial event held on the site of the carnage in southern Utah in 2007, President Henry B. Eyring offered these words: "We express profound regret for the massacre carried out in this valley 150 years ago today and for the undue and untold suffering experienced by the victims then and by their relatives to the present time."⁸¹ That President Eyring

78. "Race and the Priesthood," Gospel Topics Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://abn.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

79. "Peace and Violence among 19th-Century Latter-day Saints," Gospel Topics Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/peace-and-violence-among-19th-century-latter-day-saints?lang=eng>.

80. Robert A. Goldberg and others, "Roundtable on Massacre at Mountain Meadows," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42, no. 1 (2009): 114.

81. "Mountain Meadows Massacre," Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://news-uk.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/mountain-meadows-massacre>.

and other ecclesiastical leaders also made the institutional decision to fling wide open the doors to all Church archives for researchers to produce *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, an exhaustive volume on this episode, suggests not only a significant shift in Church scholarship and LDS culture, but a definitive step toward working-through-our-past.⁸²

For similar definitive steps we can look to President Russell M. Nelson, who has said that we must “do the rigorous work of building bridges of cooperation rather than walls of segregation and alienation.” In an effort toward reconciliation for the Church’s problematic racial past, he has forged strong partnerships with the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), with whom he authored an op-ed on racial unity.⁸³ He has also worked closely with the UNCF (United Negro College Fund), to which the Church, under President Nelson’s direction, has donated substantially in the form of scholarships and fellowships.⁸⁴ We can heed the counsel voiced by President Dallin H. Oaks that “racism is probably the most familiar source of prejudice today, and we are all called to repent of that,”⁸⁵ and the exhortations of countless other twenty-first-century Church leaders who in so many words have called upon members across the globe to root out xenophobia and bigotry and “unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form.”⁸⁶ We can echo their words in a spirit of love and patience in Church courses and callings while citing accurate history and personal experiences around the topic of race. Where possible, we can donate to organizations or initiatives that educate about racial issues and labor toward interracial reconciliation. My eighty-seven-year-old parents have recently made donations

82. Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

83. Russell M. Nelson, Derrick Johnson, Leon Russell, and Amos C. Brown, “Locking Arms for Racial Harmony in America,” Medium, June 8, 2020, https://medium.com/@Ch_JesusChrist/locking-arms-for-racial-harmony-in-america-2f6218oabf37.

84. Sarah Jane Weaver, “President Nelson Joins Senior Leaders of NAACP in Calling for Racial Reform; ‘Solutions Will Come as We Open Our Hearts,’ They Write in Op-Ed,” Church News, June 8, 2020, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2020-06-08/president-nelson-naacp-leaders-racial-reform-solutions-open-hearts-medium-op-ed-186115>; Tad Walch, “Church Provides Millions to NAACP, UNCF for Scholarships and Humanitarian Aid,” *Deseret News*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2021/6/14/22530395/latter-day-saints-give-to-uncf-naacp-provide-scholarships-to-black-students-lds-mormon>.

85. Dallin H. Oaks, “A Cause for Celebration,” address at the fortieth anniversary celebration of the 1978 revelation on the priesthood, June 1, 2018, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2018/08/be-one/a-cause-for-celebration?lang=eng>.

86. “Race and the Priesthood.”

supporting such efforts and have read, cover-to-cover, many of the texts cited in this paper, demonstrating that it is never too late for us to educate ourselves and work to make amends. We can gently correct in ourselves first, and only then in others, racist thinking, language, and behavior that can creep into our everyday interactions. We can openly support and vote for politicians who embody, and policies that embolden, antiracist values. (Better, we can *be* those politicians and civic leaders, ourselves.) And finally, we can actively seek to forge relationships with Latter-day Saints and those of other faiths from racial or ethnic backgrounds different from our own, sharing our most priceless commodity, our time.

Conclusion

It took generations of Germans to fight to repair the scourge of hatred that found its full, foul expression in the Holocaust. It is long since time for our generation to elevate and intensify the fight against racial injustice, wherever we might live in the world. No, the postwar generation of Germans did not actually commit the crimes of Nazism, but they knew their world was still contaminated with inherited racist values and behaviors that, to be eradicated, needed first to be exposed, owned, and challenged. Similarly, Americans of today did not own slaves, write the tyrannical Jim Crow laws, or hurl the stones, metal pipes, and fire torches in the riots of the Red Summer of 1919.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, we know our world is diseased and that God calls us to be its healers. In the words of Isabel Wilkerson, we might not have built it ourselves, but we bear responsibility for this home we have inherited and inhabit:

Many people may rightly say, “I have nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves.” And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now. And any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands.⁸⁸

87. See Abigail Higgins, “Red Summer of 1919: How Black WWI Vets Fought Back against Racist Mobs,” *History*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.history.com/news/red-summer-1919-riots-chicago-dc-great-migration>.

88. Wilkerson, *Caste*, 16.

This house—glorious, promising, but in many ways collapsing under its own onerous historical weight—is in desperate need of moral repair. It will not mend itself. We cannot simply groan and ignore the damage, shoving buckets under leaky ceilings and plastering over asbestos-filled walls. We need inspectors who explore the flooring, plumbers who probe the pipes, and even excavators with radars, sensors, shovels, and trowels, who unearth hidden and knotted root systems snaking through the surrounding property, exhuming what might be pressing against and cracking our foundation.

Working-through-our-past, like caring for our inherited home, is intergenerational spiritual schooling, with each age focused on recognizing, calling out, and preventing new forms of evil. In that spirit, I concur with Susan Neiman, who writes that the moral training of acknowledging and owning our national sins helps us “recognize complex forms of evil as well as simple ones and prepares us to begin to prevent them. It is training that should not be confined to historians but must become a matter of shared public memory—history no thinking man or woman can honorably ignore.”⁸⁹

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89. Neiman, *Learning from the Germans*, 19.