Where German Hearts are Molded: Historical Memory and State Legitimation in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989

by

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<td>FDGB</td>
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<td>FDJ</td>
<td>Free German Youth (<em>Freie Deutsche Jugend</em>)</td>
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<td>FRG</td>
<td>Federal Republic of Germany (<em>Bundesrepublik Deutschland</em>)</td>
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<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic (<em>Deutsche Demokratische Republik</em>)</td>
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<td>KdAW</td>
<td>Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters (<em>Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer</em>)</td>
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<td>KPD</td>
<td>Communist Party of Germany (<em>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</em>)</td>
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<td>LAB</td>
<td>Berlin State Archives (<em>Landesarchiv Berlin</em>)</td>
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<td>MdDG</td>
<td>Museum for German History (<em>Museum für Deutsche Geschichte</em>)</td>
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<td>OdF</td>
<td>Victims of Fascism (<em>Opfer des Faschismus</em>)</td>
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<td>Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism (<em>Gedenktag für die Opfer des Faschismus</em>)</td>
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<td>SBZ</td>
<td>Soviet Occupation Zone (<em>Sowjetische Besatzungszone</em>)</td>
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<td>SED</td>
<td>Socialist Unity Party (<em>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</em>)</td>
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<td>SMAD</td>
<td>Soviet Military Administration in Germany (<em>Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland</em>)</td>
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<td>VVN</td>
<td>Association of the Persecutees of the Nazi Regime (<em>Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VVN-BdA</td>
<td>Association of the Persecutees of the Nazi Regime and Federation of Antifascists in the FRG (<em>Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten in der BRD</em>)</td>
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<td>ZMED</td>
<td>Central Marx-Engels Memorial (<em>zentrale Marx-Engels-Denkmal</em>)</td>
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1 For the many abbreviations in this work, I have chosen to use those most commonly used in the English language literature. Most often this has been the German abbreviation, with the exception of GDR in lieu of DDR and FRG instead of BRD, which seems to be a matter of personal preference rather than a matter of style.
Introduction

A new generation will transform the heroes’ monuments and commemorative groves into sites of pilgrimage for a new religion, where German hearts will be molded again and again according to a new mythos. At that moment art will suddenly conquer the world anew.

—Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*

Leading National Socialist theorist Alfred Rosenberg ended the second volume of his bestselling book *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* with the above thought. Opening a work on the Communist regime in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) with the words of one of Nazism’s most vitriolic ideologues would appear to be the beginnings of a rehashing of totalitarian theory. However, an equation of the Third Reich with the GDR is not the aim of this thesis, for as Margherita von Brentano eloquently expressed, “the mere comparison of the Third Reich with the GDR is a dreadful oversimplification. The Third Reich left mountains of corpses. The GDR left mountains of files.”2 Rather, Rosenberg’s words highlight a more subtle similarity between National Socialism and GDR Communism that this thesis hopes to examine: the desire to capture the hearts of their subjects, to create a new citizen, to assert a dominant worldview. Both regimes went to extraordinary measures to win the hearts and minds of the German people in order to secure and legitimate their rule. The power of national identity, public opinion, and state legitimacy is such that two dictatorships which ruled with varying degrees of violence, threat, and coercion felt that they could not afford to ignore these aspects of control.

Issues of state legitimacy and national identity were arguably of even greater importance for the GDR than for the Third Reich. The GDR utterly lacked any democratic legitimacy, having been created as a result of the post-war occupation of the eastern sectors of Germany by the Soviet Union. Alone among European nations founded after the Second World War, the German Democratic Republic had no previously defined borders, language, or culture separate from its negative mirror image in the west: the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Additionally, the ruling party of the GDR, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), faced a serious legitimacy crisis resulting from its dubious beginnings as the ally of a foreign occupier. The self-perception of the GDR was fundamentally shaped by the context of the Cold War and its competition with West Germany.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the methods by which the GDR’s leadership utilized self-conscious sites of memory to create a legitimizing historical metanarrative and how this narrative changed over time. To an unusually high degree, identity construction in the GDR was more about myth-making than about a critical evaluation of the past. The creation of national legitimacy was closely linked to the formation of historical narratives and modern myths. As the GDR was a creation of the Cold War, East German memory politics were continually dominated by a need to increase the population’s identification with the state and with its ruling party. At its core, the SED remained paralyzed by a fundamental tension, torn between an optimistic belief in its own power and its eventual and inevitable success, and a raging insecurity that perceived its position as perennially unstable. The careful

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3 Hermann Weber, Geschichte der DDR (München: Deutsches Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), 16.
cultivation of historical traditions by the SED was to serve several legitimizing functions: creating a correct ideological orientation for the domestic population, supporting the existing political and social order, and presenting the GDR to the international community. The GDR was an enigma, the complexity of which researchers are only beginning to appreciate: an artificial state that craved legitimacy and normalization; a ruling party that asserted its inevitable success yet was bound by timidity, vacillation, and uncertainty; an ideology that proclaimed revolution while relying on a traditional symbolic repertoire. This thesis hopes to give this puzzle a more nuanced examination, and to explore the evolving methods by which the SED attempted to shore up its waning power and authority.

There are few works dealing with national identity, myth-making, and state legitimacy in the GDR, and even fewer English language works. While the existing secondary literature on the topic portrays GDR memory politics as uniformly hegemonic and unchanging, in reality the narratives disseminated by the SED clearly evolved throughout the period 1945-1989 in response to external and domestic conditions. Most literature on the subject suffers from a tendency to over-generalize and homogenize the narrative presented by the SED, ignoring the substantial changes that occurred throughout the existence of the GDR. However, this thesis will demonstrate by analyzing the changing form and content of commemorative rituals,

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museum exhibits, official historical propaganda, and monuments that the narrative presented by the SED evolved over the period 1945-1989 in three distinct phases. Until these changes are understood, the reasons behind the creation of these narratives, their ineffectiveness, and what they reveal about the relationship between the SED and the East German citizenry will remain a puzzle. It appears that the GDR’s historical narrative was modified in order to create at least the illusion of popular support for the regime in an attempt to legitimate the state.

This thesis will demonstrate that the SED’s historical narrative was not as unchanging, static, or monolithic as has previously been argued. Rather, the evolving narrative can most easily be broken into three main periods, each of which will be discussed in separate chapters. The Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ) of 1945-1949 constitutes the first period, during which the chaotic aftermath of the war enabled a brief flourishing of popular involvement in East German memory politics. The second chapter outlines how the first two decades of the GDR, from 1949 to 1969, were a time of historical narrative creation and consolidation that left the “German Question” open in the hopes of reunification under socialist auspices. However, in the third and final period, starting in the early 1970s and ending in 1989 with the collapse of East Germany, the GDR leadership began to deny the existence of significant commonalities between the two Germanys and asserted that a separate socialist nation had developed in the East. All three periods share overarching narratives that were present throughout the existence of the GDR, but these master narratives were

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6 Herf, *Divided Memory*. 
substantially reworked in each of these periods in order to adapt to the current political context and the needs of the SED.

In this work I will utilize the term “memory landscape” to connote the entire range of self-conscious memory work that was exploited in political attempts at national identity formation and in state legitimation practices. It includes – but is not limited to – memorials, monuments, commemorative days, historical works, press reports, speeches, stamps, and government publications, among other things. While the term is a physical and landed concept for something that is non-spatial in nature, it is used in a context in which the topography of memory is shaped not only by monuments, but rather by the entire complex series of processes that combine to legitimate a government in the minds of its citizens. Furthermore, as Maurice Halbwachs has argued, “every memory unfolds within a spatial framework” for “we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is … preserved in our physical surroundings.”7

The memory landscape serves as an important political and historical indicator in an authoritarian society such as the GDR, where an almost non-existent public sphere and centralized memory politics make other indicators of social and political conflicts inaccessible. It also provides insight into the ways in which the SED chose to present itself publicly, both domestically and internationally. While such self-promotion may not necessarily be taken at face value, its form and content still reveal valuable information about the self-perception and motivation of those creating it. These self-conscious sites of memory link a created heroic past to an imagined

utopian future and generate the sense of a collective memory or national identity that enabled the GDR to remain fairly stable, even under relatively poor economic conditions and political repression. The creation and reinforcement of shared beliefs fostered integration and a continuation of the early legitimation and momentum that the SED enjoyed during the early years of the GDR.

This thesis conceptualizes national identity as part of a greater narrative or discourse by positing that individuals gain an identity by shaping their experiences as a coherent story. The experiences that make up the narrative can be rearranged and reinterpreted in order to resolve any identity conflicts that may arise. The idea of narrative construction of identity also applies to nations. Nationalist discourses aim to create a holistic concept of the nation and to place it within an unbroken historical narrative in support of an “imagined community,” which Benedict Anderson describes as a collective – if vague – sense of sharing a common language, history or culture within a territorially defined nation. In many respects, therefore, national traditions and identities have to be seen as types of modern myths and the processes of state legitimation that exploit these concepts are thus a form of myth-making.

National identity is able to be utilized for the purposes of state legitimation as it is a form of collective memory. “Collective memory” as a term has come to mean a great many things, but for the purposes of this thesis it will be defined as the idea that the past as such cannot truly be remembered; rather, it is only those elements of the past that are reconstructed by the group within its own cultural context that are

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memorialized. Collective memory defines the historical elements that compose the “formative sense of cultural knowledge, tradition, and singularity” that is shared by the members of the nation. Individual and group memories are made relevant to and resonant with the populace by tying these memories to cultural and national symbols and to rites of belonging. Memorials and monuments lend a physical presence and seeming permanence to insubstantial and temporal group memories and experiences, aiding in the construction of an apparently real and stable collective memory and national identity. This was particularly important for the GDR, as it was an artificial state that literally needed to build an identity from the foundations up. Political rituals – commemorations, dedications, anniversaries, and so on – are, in Durkheim’s terms, social practices that produce and reproduce symbolic goods along with moral and emotional attachments to a social order that have the effect of creating a sense of societal solidarity. These processes connect elements of the memory landscape, such as monuments and commemorations, to the experiences and memories of the population in order to create new national traditions that legitimate the state.

Monuments are some of the few surviving remnants that mark the rise and fall of the GDR. Lenin, Marx, and Engels remain long after the ideology that they represented lost influence as a political force. These memorials are now burdened with a double past: they recall not only their original subject, but also the failed

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9 Halbwachs, On Collective Memory.
regime that created them. The monuments of the GDR are symbols of forgetting as well as remembering, part of a self-deceiving process of choosing the past one can tolerate recalling and consigning the rest – the sorrow, the shame – to oblivion. During the immediate post-war era and the Cold War, a Hegelian narrative of Communist sacrifice and German liberation into socialism overwrote pesky questions of responsibility and guilt. Now these monuments are the markers of a failed attempt at state legitimation. The official memorials, monuments, commemorative rituals, and museums of the GDR played a unique role in this legitimizing process because they reflected how the political elite chose to represent East Germany publicly. By performing these rituals of remembrance in public spaces, the SED attempted to define the historical figures that became national heroes and to establish the historical events that became the formative moments of the GDR. An analysis of the memory landscape thus offers an ideal method by which to discern the continuities and discontinuities in the SED’s politics of state legitimation.
The cities were in ruins, and internally the people were in ruins too. At that time Germany was a “unity” of ruins, despair, and hunger. But there were also people who were not numbed with distress, who were beginning to ask the questions which were on everyone’s mind: What has happened? What made it happen? – That gave rise to the next question: What must happen to prevent this horror from ever returning?

– Anna Seghers  

The Germany of May 1945 was a nation on the brink of total defeat. Many of its highest leaders had committed suicide and the survivors had signed an unconditional surrender with the invading armies. Infrastructure and local government were often destroyed. Many citizens were homeless, displaced, or starving. As an East German historian recalled,

untold destruction, misery and suffering was what the fascist aggressors had left behind. The material damage was immeasurable … Industry, transport and communications had broken down, as had agricultural production in many areas. Many cities and towns had been reduced to a wasteland of rubble. Everywhere there was an acute shortage of the barest necessities: food, clothing, medicines, water, electricity, and gas.

Never before has a modern industrialized society been brought so close to complete collapse. The German surrender on May 8, 1945 became known as the “Zero Hour” (Stunde Null), a moment seen both as a final ending and a new beginning. However, this new beginning came at the price of enormous hardship. A German émigré returning immediately after the Soviet capture of Berlin observed that


it was only then, on our drive to Berlin, that we experienced the full extent of the destruction and the horror. Fires, rubble, people wandering about in ragged clothing; German soldiers who were completely at a loss and no longer seemed to understand what was going on … Berlin women carrying out the first stages of clearing-up work under the supervision of Soviet soldiers. From the buildings there fluttered white flags as a token of surrender or red flags as a greeting to the Soviet troops. Many people wore white or red armbands; the particularly cautious wore both at once.\textsuperscript{16}

In addition to the immense physical damage, the population suffered spiritually and emotionally. Many felt lost after the war, as if their foundations had been destroyed. Given these trying circumstances, many Germans felt they too were victims of a war beyond their control, and that they now suffered equally with the other victims of Nazi militarism.

In the Soviet Occupation Zone (\textit{Sowjetische Besatzungszone}, hereafter SBZ), the Soviet peoples and those of the eastern bloc were portrayed as the primary victims of Nazism and its wellspring, monopoly capitalism. A GDR historian would later state that “the Second World War, unleashed by German imperialism, had claimed 50 million lives, including 20 million Soviet citizens and 6 million Poles alone.”\textsuperscript{17} Walter Ulbricht contended that Hitler “inflicted the harshest fate on the Slavonic peoples.”\textsuperscript{18}

The Soviet Union had suffered more losses both in manpower and resources than any other nation. As the occupying power in the SBZ, the USSR reminded its conquered enemies of the sacrifices it made in Nazism’s defeat in order to gain some sympathy with East Germans. However, the changing international climate soon dictated that


\textsuperscript{17} Heitzer, \textit{GDR: An Historical Outline}, 10.

the eastern zones serve as a buffer and ally against the Soviet Union’s erstwhile partners. It became imperative to gain the support of East Germans, and the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland, SMAD) officials and their German Communist allies utilized a narrative of German victimhood to incorporate the USSR’s former enemies into the brotherhood of socialist states. As a result, the German people – and the working class in particular – were also cast as victims of imperialism and fascism. The same GDR historian would include Germans as its final named group of victims, remarking that “among the German people, too, the war had taken an enormous toll in human lives and wrought widespread devastation. Six and a half million men and women, children and old people had perished on battlefields and in air raids, in concentration camps and in prisons.”\(^{19}\) As this equation of civilian and battlefield casualties exemplifies, victimhood was often homogenized without regard to the potential responsibility or culpability of the so-called victims. Ulbricht proclaimed that “millions of dead and wounded, ruined cities, destroyed property, widows and orphans are an accusation. … Hitler has violated his own nation by his barbarous racial theories and the campaign of destruction against other peoples.”\(^{20}\) It was only Hitler and his Nazi elites that were accused for these millions of dead, not the millions of Germans who supported National Socialism. Even the racist theories of Nazism that placed Germans as a superior race and the atrocities committed against other nations in their name became yet another instance in which the Nazis victimized the German people. The hardships of the war and post-war period caused many

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\(^{19}\) Heitzer, *GDR: An Historical Outline*, 10.

\(^{20}\) Ulbricht, “Proclamation of the Founding of New Free Trade Unions, 15 June 1945,” 145.
Germans to feel that they were rightfully included among the victims of Nazism, a tendency encouraged by the Soviet occupiers.

The Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, or KPD) included spiritual corruption among the ways that the ruling group of capitalists and their fascist allies victimized the greater German population during the Third Reich. A GDR historian made a direct connection between the physical and spiritual hardships caused by National Socialism, declaring that “the ideological legacy of Nazism was no less disastrous” for Germany than its legacy of destruction, defeat, and death, for “while the Nazi regime had collapsed, its evil creed had not disappeared.” The Third Reich left behind ruined buildings, people, and worldviews. Communist observers noted that “chauvinism and anticommunism were still rife in the minds of countless people. Many had believed the lies of the Nazi clique to the last moment. Now they were in a state of despondency and hopelessness.”

The KPD implicitly acknowledged the deep resonance that National Socialist ideology had with the German people – even while distancing Germans from that claim by referring only to the lies of the “Nazi clique” – acknowledging as well that the sudden collapse of the Third Reich and the subsequent occupation by the “Jewish Bolsheviks” caused many to feel that everything they fought for until the bitter end was lost. Leading Communist theorist Anton Ackermann described the mood as that of “a people in agony” who “were paralyzed by the poison of despair, equally weighed down by the traumatic experience of nightly air raids and the other

21 Heitzer, GDR: An Historical Outline, 11.
22 Ibid.
horrors of war, [and] the carefully nurtured fear of Bolshevism."23 While the experience of defeat and occupation would be traumatic enough, Germans faced the collapse of their worldview as well, leaving an ideological vacuum that the SBZ elites were eager to fill. Germany was portrayed as a land led astray, one that suffered under Nazism just as the nations conquered by the Third Reich suffered. In a sense, Nazi Germany was an occupied country as well. The German people became victims that were liberated from the forces of capitalism and fascism by the Red Army. Any resentment towards the Soviets could be attributed to the enduring results of years of Nazi ideology.

The Soviets and German Communists were quick to utilize the widespread feeling of victimization to justify their rule and to explain how such horrors could have occurred. A Soviet delegate stated that “if we look back on the history of Germany, we shall have to note that along with social injustice and capitalist exploitation, the German people particularly had to suffer from such horrible disasters as fascism and militarism, those most abhorrent monstrosities of the monopolist bourgeoisie.”24 Here the German people are not only cast as equal victims of Nazism, but are considered to have suffered to an even higher degree. Furthermore, any questions of potential collective guilt were casually waved off, instead attributing the Third Reich solely to the machinations of a capitalist clique. Ulbricht maintained this position, arguing that “armaments industrialists, major landowners and other militarists joined in league with Hitler and his criminal clique and cold-bloodedly

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23 Quoted in Ibid.
sacrificed the German people to their hunger for power.”

The SBZ elites portrayed Germans as innocents led to the slaughter, sacrificed to the Nazi need for power, and completely omitted the fact that the same could be said – and more accurately, nonetheless – about the nations invaded by the armies of the Third Reich in the name and with the support of the German people. Rather, according to the victim narrative of the SBZ, the German people were casualties of capitalism and its outgrowths, fascism and militarism, rather than a group complicit in the rise of National Socialism. The Brown Book, a post-war accusation by the GDR that the FRG represented a continuation of Nazism in ideology and personnel, exemplified the SED party line, bemoaning that

> the German people were cheated of many decades of a happy life. Again and again they were driven into the vicious circle of boom – crisis – war. … This evil results from the conquest-mad German imperialism. The armament monopolies and the big banks – I-G Farben, Flick, Thyssen, AEG, Siemens, Krupp, Haniel, the Deutsche Bank, the Dresdner Bank, the Commerz-Bank and others decisively determined the policy of the Hitler regime and are primarily responsible for the war and Nazi crimes.

Here, Germans are portrayed as innocent victims: sheep-like they are driven towards slaughter time and again. A direct connection is drawn between the Third Reich and capitalism, attributing both the war and Nazi crimes to the ruthless search for profit.

The East German elites claimed that monopoly capitalism was the root of fascism, thereby transferring guilt to the capitalist western zones and willfully ignoring both the racial and popular aspects of National Socialism. While in the immediate post-war months the KPD was vocal in its assertion that Germans had a responsibility to

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26 National Council of the National Front of Democratic Germany and Documentation Centre of the State Archives Administration of the German Democratic Republic, Brown Book: War and Nazi Criminals in West Germany (Dresden: Verlag Zeit im Bild, 1965), 17.
answer for their part in the crimes of the Third Reich, political expediency and a need to curry popular support – or at the very least tolerance – dictated a vocabulary of innocence and misguided good faith.

Separating the majority of the German population from Nazi criminals and the imperialist bourgeoisie served several purposes. It helped to legitimate the rise of socialism by identifying the German people with the working class and thereby distancing the masses from their cooperation with the Third Reich. Instead of being the conquered murderers of millions, the German people became the liberated fellow victims of a group of Nazi perpetrators. Utilization of the feelings of victimization common among many Germans also helped the Soviets project resentment caused by post-war conditions away from the occupation authorities and towards an elite cadre of Nazi criminals. The Soviet command and its German Communist allies hoped to appear not as foreign conquerors and their puppets, but as fellow fighters against fascism. Portrayals of Soviet-German interactions in the SBZ were initially more honest, with descriptions of the “singing, celebrating, often drunken soldiers of the Red Army.” However, later reports quickly took a much different tone, instead focusing on the kindness and helpfulness of the Red Army in an attempt to counter the harsh realities that Germans – especially women – faced under Soviet occupation. Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgi Zhukov wrote in his memoirs that “the top priority of the Soviet troops stationed in Berlin was to extinguish the fires that were raging everywhere, make sure the corpses were recovered and buried, and to clear the city of mines. Berlin’s population had to be saved from starvation by organizing food

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supplies which had been discontinued even before the entry of Soviet troops into
Berlin.”  

In an implicit contrast to the Nazi leaders, the first concern of the Red
Army was the welfare of the citizens of Berlin. Where the National Socialists
callously starved their own people, the liberating Soviet forces immediately made
feeding the people of Berlin their highest priority. Statements very similar to this
became characteristic of accounts of the period. They served to highlight the
brotherly connection of the Soviet Union with the German people, as well as the
distance between normal Germans and the Nazi elite.

This collapse and suffering had been brought about by capitalists and fascists,
but it also served a purpose: the building of socialism. It was argued that this process
had to be difficult as Nazism’s ideology had penetrated deep into German society.
While Germans were the victims of a false ideology and were not really to blame, the
process of rebuilding peoples’ worldviews – like the process of rebuilding
infrastructure – was a purifying process that would result in the construction of
socialism in a “better” Germany. GDR historians would later argue that “the material
and spiritual disruption wrought by Nazism was on a colossal scale. Yet the defeat of
Nazism afforded the German people an opportunity to break with the imperialist past
once and for all and to embark on the road to democracy and socialism.” 29 The end of
the Third Reich was not the only prerequisite for the liberation of Germany, however;
an equally crucial element was the aid and example of the Soviet Union. 30 German
Communists maintained that

29 Ibid., 11-12.
30 “The opportunity for a new departure in German history stemmed from the radical change in the
international constellation of forces brought about by the Second World War, notably as a result of the
for the German people it was a matter of historic importance that one of the
victor powers assuming supreme authority in Germany after the liberation was
the socialist Soviet Union … The vital interests of the world’s first workers’
and peasants’ state were in agreement with those of the German people. The
Soviet Union granted every possible assistance to the democratic forces
among the German people.31

Because of the liberation by and subsequent aid of the Soviet Union, the post-war
misery and suffering was transformed into a purifying process leading towards the
realization of a socialist state in a Hegelian narrative of rebirth and eventual victory,
changing the fires of military defeat into the victorious purgatory flames of a socialist
revolution.

The issue of collective German guilt and complicity with Nazi crimes was one
of the most difficult for the German worker’s parties to address. In the immediate
post-war months, many newly freed or repatriated German Communists drew
attention to the collective shame that they now perceived as Germany’s legacy. In
July 1945, German Communists declared that

Hitler has plunged Germany into the deepest catastrophe in its history.
Germany’s war guilt is obvious. Large sections of the German people were
under the spell of Hitlerism and its ideology and supported its wars of
conquest to the bitter end. There were very many Germans who followed
Hitler’s policies without evidence of a will of their own and who have thus
made themselves accomplices. In this way Hitler has plunged our whole
people into chaos and guilt and shame.32

The breadth and longevity of German support for the Third Reich was acknowledged,
as well as the impact of Nazi ideology even on those who simply stood by and did

31 Ibid.
32 “Communiqué on the formation of a United Front of the anti-fascist democratic parties, 14 July
1945,” in Politics, Society and Government in the German Democratic Republic: Basic Documents,
nothing. Although there was an emphasis on Hitler and his influence, in a significant way uncharacteristic of later discussions blame fell squarely on the shoulders of Germany and its people. Even antifascists were not spared in the initial criticism of Germans’ failure to resist Nazism. Walter Ulbricht argued in June 1945 that “the way to the abyss began even before 1933. The forces of democracy were split and too undecided to offer decisive resistance.”33 It was acknowledged that the rise of National Socialism was due in part to a failure to prevent it. In 1946, the feelings of historical responsibility for the rise of Nazism because of a divided pre-war workers’ movement would support the creation of a united workers’ party in the GDR. The intelligentsia was also not immune to blame. A proclamation of July 1945 stated that it has to be recognized that the German intelligentsia who should have given leadership to our people failed the test of history when the destruction of Germany could have been averted and the war could have been prevented. … We must confess that the great humanist legacy of German Classicism was also no longer sufficiently alive in the German intelligentsia to give them the unshakeable strength to resist the Nazi regime. While outstanding individuals demonstrated their steadfastness and strength of resistance, the intelligentsia in general submitted to seduction and terror. It is necessary to recognize this, however bitter it may be. … We recognize Germany’s war guilt. We have unspeakable things to compensate for.”34

According to this narrative, in the years prior to the Nazi rise to power, the German intelligentsia failed to uphold the traditions of Kultur. They felt that they had failed in their historical responsibility as a progressive class to resist reactionary forces. While still an antifascist and progressive group, the intelligentsia admitted that they too carried some responsibility for the actions of the Third Reich.

33 Ulbricht, “Proclamation of the Founding of New Free Trade Unions, 15 June 1945,” 145.
Even though the workers’ parties and the cultural elites failed to prevent the Third Reich, in their self-conception they still embodied humanistic and socialist traditions during the dark days of National Socialist rule. They fought when most Germans looked the other way. The Central Committee of the KPD proclaimed in 1945 that “a share of the guilt is borne by all German men and women who, without the will to resist, watched as Hitler claimed power for himself, smashed all democratic organizations, especially workers’ organizations, and locked up the best Germans, martyred them and beheaded them.”35 The KPD – and later the SED – acknowledged the guilt of the German people but at the same time set themselves apart from it through a conception of themselves as parties of antifascist resistance fighters. As longstanding enemies of Nazism, the parties of the left saw themselves as the only blameless Germans, and therefore as the only Germans suitable to lead and shape the future and character of a post-National Socialist Germany. In its 1945 “Appeal,” the KPD announced that it did not conceal the fact that the German people bore part of the blame for Nazism and war, underlining its obligation to help make good the damage. With unflagging energy, often swimming against the tide, the Communists explained why the … hardships and complications were necessary and justified. By the same token, the KPD was the only German party which … pushed vigorously for the establishment of antifascist and democratic conditions in all zones of occupation.36

The KPD depicted itself as an untiring and relentless force for progress and democracy, one unshakeable from its orientation towards a better future for Germany and for humanity. However, while creating an image of themselves as the unyielding antifascist fighters, the KPD and SED were also careful to not alienate the greater

36 Heitzer, GDR: An Historical Outline, 24.
population. Even the strongest declarations of German guilt still placed most of the blame on Hitler and the Nazi Party, softening the blow to the larger populace. The SED cast itself in the role of the victorious antifascist fighter, as it claimed to have totally driven fascism from its territories and across the German-German border. Soon accusations of Nazi crimes became entirely directed at the “other” Germany, as all East Germans who supported the SED could become antifascists as well.

As Cold War tensions increased, the declarations of German guilt began to become less and less common. Later discussions of collective responsibility cast the blame on a fascist elite and the monopoly capitalists that supported them, and drew a direct connection between these guilty parties and the governments of the West. The average German, so this line went, could not truly be held responsible for the Third Reich as they had been duped by the lies and poisonous ideology of the rich. It was “the imperialist bourgeoisie, with the owners of large industrial and banking concerns as its nucleus, [that] was the ruling class in the Kaiser’s Empire, in the Weimar Republic and in Nazi Germany. It bore most of the blame for Nazism and war.” 37 The roots of Nazism could be traced back before 1933 to the capitalist policies of the Second Empire and the militarism of Prussia. Focusing the blame on the bourgeoisie served the double purpose of absolving the average East German as well as creating a historical justification for the rise of socialism. Since fascism was a degenerate form of late monopoly capitalism, the next stage in the historical dialectic had to be socialism. The workers’ parties – as the only completely blameless Germans – were therefore the natural choice to lead the nation into a new socialist future.

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37 Ibid., 44.
In April 1946, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or SPD) and the KPD joined together to form the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, hereafter SED) despite strong reservations on the part of many SPD members. According to East German historians Joachim Heise and Jürgen Hofmann, “the will to unity [in the workers’ parties] grew in the antifascist defense front, in illegality, in the dungeons of the Gestapo, in the fascist prisons and concentration camps, in exile, in the trenches and in air-raid shelters. Unity was forged in common suffering, in the common struggle against the fascist enemy.”\(^{38}\) According to this narrative, the workers’ parties were united in their shared antifascism and suffering, just as the German people were portrayed as both the victims of Nazism and its victorious fighters. A GDR historian argued that

the founding of the SED marked a historic victory for Marxism-Leninism, the most important accomplishment in the history of the German labor movement since the proclamation of the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels and the founding of the KPD. As history has shown, the united revolutionary party of the working class provided the decisive safeguard against the restoration of imperialist conditions and the precondition for all future victories of the working people.\(^{39}\)

The creation of the SED exploited the guilt and fears of pre-1933 SPD and KPD members, who felt responsible for allowing the Nazi rise to power through their division and who feared National Socialism’s resurgence if that disunity was allowed to continue. Combining the SPD with the KPD thus brought all leftist activists under

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\(^{39}\) Heitzer, *GDR: An Historical Outline*, 42.
the control of Ulbricht’s group of Moscow exiles, thereby limiting opportunities for opposition.\footnote{Domination by the Moscow group did not necessarily mean that the SED – especially in its early years – was simply a Soviet puppet. In fact, the SED often interceded with the SMAD in order to improve quality of life in the SBZ, such as when an SED functionary pleaded with the Soviet commander to open housing currently reserved for the Soviets for the workers who were still homeless. That this happened entirely behind the scenes while publicly the SED always explained and supported Soviet actions caused a serious blow to the credibility of the party. “Letter to the Soviet Commander of Berlin-Mitte, Moissejenko,” June 14, 1949, LAB C. Rep. 105 60027.}

Throughout its lifespan, the SED portrayed itself as a thoroughly antifascist party whose credentials in the German resistance movement provided it with the legitimacy it needed to assume the leadership of East Germany. The antifascist covenant of the SED was symbolized by the 1945 “Oath of Buchenwald,” sworn by prisoners of the camp after their self-liberation: “On this parade-ground that has seen the horrors of fascism, we swear to all humanity that our fight will not be over until the people of the world have called each and every one of these criminals to justice! Our quest is to tear out the Nazi evil by its roots. Our goal is a new world of peace and freedom.”\footnote{Peter Sonnet, “Gedenkstätten für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus in der DDR,” in Gedenkstätten für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus. Eine Dokumentation, ed. Ulrike Puvogel (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1987), 779.} This “Oath” represents many of the often contradictory facets of the SED. It originated out of genuine idealism and antifascism and nevertheless became yet another weapon in the SED’s ideological arsenal. The power of the “Oath of Buchenwald” to legitimate the SED stems from its simultaneous utilization of several potent motifs: victorious Communist antifascist resistance, religious symbolism, and the concept of oaths themselves. Recitations of the “Oath” reminded the participants that they were swearing loyalty to a party built from the efforts of heroic antifascists.

According to the SED, antifascism was a coalition of “Communists, Social Democrats, trade unionists, Christians, and bourgeois democrats” who “stand up for
peace, democracy, friendship among peoples, and humanity; against militarism, imperialist war, terror, race-baiting, and mass murder.”\textsuperscript{42} Antifascism, as defined by the SED, basically asserted that the SBZ was the direct product of a popular anti-Nazi resistance struggle carried out under the leadership of the KPD with terrible loss of life. The struggle against National Socialism had had a purifying and uniting effect on the new socialist society that was emerging in the SBZ.

The interpretation of National Socialism as fascism offered an optimistic, progress-oriented perspective that many were more than eager to adopt.\textsuperscript{43} This Hegelian narrative gave meaning to the seemingly pointless death and suffering of the war. Instead of senseless hardship, people’s experiences of pain and misery became a purifying process in the inevitable progress towards socialism and a better future. By supporting the SED, Germans were able to rationalize their experiences as necessary costs in the struggle to create a better world, a struggle in which they were now a part.

Furthermore, Hannah Arendt astutely observed that popular support for dictatorships was due more to the fact that the proclaimed goals of the regimes were appealing, and was not primarily the result of ignorance or brainwashing.\textsuperscript{44} The GDR presented itself as a force for justice, truth, peace, and equality. It is unsurprising that many people identified with the progressive face of this authoritarian Janus, especially since government propaganda ceaselessly asserted the struggle toward these lofty goals. While many East Germans had reservations about the SED and the increasingly obvious Stalinization of the party, they in large part set those fears aside.


\textsuperscript{44} Hannah Arendt, \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism} (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951), xxiii.
in order to aid the one group that they felt had a chance to create a better Germany and to realize the ideals for which they had fought and suffered.

The SED claimed as its foundation the example of the “best Germans,” those who had resisted National Socialism, spent years in hiding, exile, or concentration camps, some of whom paid the ultimate price. Ulbricht asserted the KPD’s heritage of antifascism, observing that “after the German trade unions were smashed there were men who came together to take an active part in the struggle against Hitler’s fascism. Many of them became the victims of the Gestapo executioners.” It was these men – and only men, as women had little place in the masculine imagery of Communist antifascist resistance – who represented the spirit of the KPD and whose deaths legitimated the status of the party as one of the few groups untainted by Nazi associations. Brezhnev later applauded the Communist Party for its antifascist background, recalling how

the militant call of the German communists ‘Red Front!’ became at the time a veritable international watchword of the revolutionaries of the entire world … These words resounded as an oath to our great ideals even in the years when the filthy wave of fascism and chauvinist craze swept across Germany. Many thousands of convinced, selfless anti-fascists, steeled revolutionaries waged in the spirit of internationalism a heroic struggle under unequal conditions for the freedom of their people and other peoples enslaved by the Hitler fascists. According to this view, German Communists and their struggle against Nazism could become a point of pride for Germany, an example that not all Germans were a Hitler or Himmler. The political credibility of actual antifascist resistance fighters was immense. The image of the KPD and SED as the inheritors of a genuine antifascist legacy proved to be a powerful legitimating tool. These antifascist credentials were

important justifications for the SED’s assumption of power in the SBZ. GDR historians would later argue that

the opportunity for a new departure stemmed from the constellation of forces within Germany itself… The Communist Party of Germany (KPD), the most uncompromising opponent of German fascism and imperialism, acquitted itself honorably in the hardest test it had ever faced. It had been the only political force to conduct an uninterrupted, organized resistance struggle against the Nazi dictatorship. In the form of the KPD, although it had lost many of its members, the German working class, had, at the end of the Second World War, a tried and tested party of wide experience whose battle-hardened cadres had prepared thoroughly and with circumspection for the work that lay ahead in Germany after liberation. “

This legitimating vision of history posited several main points: that liberation came from within Germany, that the KPD was a group composed of genuine antifascists, that only the KPD emerged from the war untainted by associations with the Third Reich, and that these antifascist credentials justified their post-war leadership. In a nation eager to regain its reputation abroad, a government ruled by former concentration camp inmates and resistance fighters would help present Germany as a nation that had done away with its Nazi past. This antifascist image also made resistance to the KPD and SED harder to justify domestically, as GDR author Christa Wolf noted, remarking that many East Germans,

as young people growing up under fascism, were filled with feelings of guilt, and we were thankful to those who got us out. They were the antifascists and Communists that had returned from the concentration camps, from jail, and from immigration, and who played a larger role in the politics of the GDR than they did in the Federal Republic. We felt a strong inhibition towards carrying out a resistance against those that had spent years in a concentration camp during the Nazi regime.

For many, resisting the resisters felt wrong at best, and at worst it could be seen as supporting the revival of fascism. Especially in the SBZ, any appearance of sympathy

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with Nazism was to be avoided at all costs, as the SPD was genuine in its desire to prevent the resurgence of fascism and to create a new, better Germany along socialist lines.

**Commemorations**

Calling upon the legacy of the antifascist resistance was effective as a stabilizing and legitimizing narrative partially because the SED began to shift the definition of “victims” away from racial victims and towards Germans more generally, with a special emphasis on Communists persecuted for their political beliefs. According to the July 3, 1945 issue of the KPD mouthpiece *Deutsche Volkszeitung*,

the victims of fascism are a million people, and are all those who lost their home, their residence, their property. The victims of fascism are the men who had to become soldiers and were deployed in Hitler’s battalions; they are all those who had to give their lives for Hitler’s criminal war. The victims of fascism are the Jews, who as victims of fascist racist mania (*faschistischen Rassenwahns*) were hunted and murdered; they are the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the ‘work-shy.’ But we cannot stretch the term ‘victims of fascism’ as far as that. They suffered every cruelty, but they did not fight.49

Here the *Volkszeitung* combined several aspects of the changing term “victims of fascism.” First was the homogenization of victims, equating victims of air raids with Jewish victims of the Holocaust, and even including German soldiers under the mantel of “victim.” No recognition was made of the responsibility that Germans shared in beginning the war that led to the loss of so many lives – German or otherwise. The specific mention of Jewish victims is worth noting, as it was an

element of the official narrative which would soon become marginalized almost to the point of non-existence until a slight reappearance in the 1980s. Interesting as well is the inclusion of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the “work-shy,” but – like almost all other East German discussions of the Second World War – victims such as homosexuals, Sinti and Roma, and the disabled are excluded. The Volkzeitung’s definition also anticipated the rigid hierarchy of victimhood that came to characterize the view of the SED in which fighters were preferred over victims. By the time of the GDR’s founding in 1949, all of these groups would be pushed to the periphery by the hegemonic official narrative of antifascist Communist resistance and German victimization.

After the war, the victims of fascism (Opfer des Faschismus, OdF) organized themselves into OdF-committees; spontaneously created groups whose purpose was to help those who had suffered under the Nazis receive medical care, food, and financial and legal assistance. The OdF-Committees had a substantial KPD presence, but these were not the KPD members who had gone into exile in the Soviet Union with Walter Ulbricht. Rather, these were the survivors who had remained in Germany during the Third Reich and who indicated an early willingness to collaborate closely with a remarkable range of Nazism’s former opponents, a collaboration often established in the shadow of the concentration camps. With members from the KPD, SPD, Christian and bourgeois resistances, as well as those who had been persecuted as Jews, “the composition of the Berlin Main Committee symbolized the will of those who had opposed the Nazis or been persecuted to work together for a new beginning.

In many ways, the OdF-committees represented a grass-roots effort to create a better Germany that transcended class and ideological lines. It must be kept in mind, however, that from the beginning the highest circles in the SBZ planned to utilize this idealism in order to legitimate and strengthen their authority. In the days immediately following the end of the war, Ulbricht wrote that the KPD should support the spontaneously forming committees, in order for the party “to pull closer to us the antifascists, social democrats, trade-unionists, Zentrum leaders, people of 20 July.” While the early OdF groups may have represented the memories and experiences of the victims of fascism, they were increasingly co-opted by the elites of the SBZ.

Beginning in 1945, the OdF publicly commemorated their suffering and the huge loss of human life during the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism (Gedenktag für die Opfer des Faschismus, or OdF-Tag), observed on the second Sunday of September. The Days of Remembrance in the SBZ were characterized by the heterogeneity of victims and ideologies represented. Many groups that would later be almost completely eliminated from the OdF-Tag commemorations in the GDR had a substantial presence in the earlier events. The red triangle of the political prisoner still held a dominant position in the SBZ Days of Remembrance but had not yet become the symbol of all victims of fascism. A main function of the Days of

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53 In Nazi concentration camps, triangles sewn onto the prisoners’ uniforms served as a system of identification. Red triangles represented political – often Communist – prisoners. Jewish prisoners wore two yellow triangles, sexual offenders wore a pink triangle, “asocial” prisoners wore black triangles, and so on.
Remembrance in the SBZ was to provide the opportunity for the attendees to mourn the dead. It was a forum for collective grieving whose purpose had not yet shifted from mourning to political ritual.

The first Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism emphasized human loss and individual grief. Representatives came from all parts of Germany, and they brought with them lists of the dead, the missing, and the survivors from their regions.\textsuperscript{54} Memorial and religious services opened the day’s events, demonstrating the central role that mourning held in the 1945 OdF-Tag. The impending political instrumentalization of the Days of Remembrance could be seen, however, in the prominence of the red triangle and the continuation of the forms of public ritual that had been used to support regimes in Germany since the time of the Second Reich.

Having just witnessed the first rally, a \textit{Times} of London correspondent noted: “It was remarkable that, although the ceremony was essentially anti-Fascist, its trappings were those of any Nazi rally, minus the Swastika.”\textsuperscript{55} These similarities are most likely due to the short amount of time since the end of the war and the subsequent end of Nazi celebrations, as well as the already visible signs of the increasing instrumentalization of the Days of Remembrance.

The commemorations of September 22, 1946 in the Berlin Lustgarten showcased the ideological diversity of the German resistance. Representatives of several different victims’ groups shared their experiences at the event. Ottomar Geschke, the chairman of the Main Committee of the Victims of Fascism (\textit{Hauptausschuss Opfer des Faschismus}), declared at the 1946 rally in the Lustgarten

\textsuperscript{54} Monteath, “A Day to Remember,” 201.
\textsuperscript{55} Quoted in Ibid., 204.
that “the fight against anti-Semitism is not a Jewish struggle. It must be a struggle of all decent people around the world.” The Days of Remembrance were used to highlight that this fight was not over, that the lessons of the past should encourage action in the present. This would be a common theme in GDR Days of Remembrance, but the identification with the Jewish victims and the call to resist contemporary anti-Semitism was a unique feature of those in the SBZ as later commemorations focused more on casting blame towards the FRG than critically examining the situation in the GDR.

The OdF-Tag of September 14, 1947 was the first held by the OdF-committees’ successor organization, the Association of the Persecutees of the Nazi Regime (Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes, hereafter VVN). By the time of the 1947 commemoration, the mourning and remembrance functions of the event were increasingly subsumed under its use as political propaganda. However, the 1947 OdF-Tag still contained many elements of inclusiveness and collective grieving that had characterized the earlier events. For example, the central place of Jewish victims in narratives of the Second World War was strongly emphasized. Dr. Hermann Duncker, a founder of the KPD, declared that

the horrors committed on the German people by the Nazis during their twelve year reign of terror, was in addition to the unleashing of war and the murder of millions of peaceful and innocent Jews: women and children, men and the elderly. The German name is tainted for all time through the scale and systematic planning of this unimaginable atrocity committed by Hitler's bandits. Wherever one speaks about the victims of German fascism, the fate of the German and European Jews must therefore always be thought of first.

His statement is especially interesting as it contains many fundamentals of the post-war historical narrative. Germans are portrayed as victims of “Hitler’s bandits,” as the horrors committed on them were in addition to those unleashed on the Jews, but are not entirely equated with Jewish victims as they later would be. In fact, that the Jewish victims are mentioned at all – let alone described as the primary victims of Nazism – differs dramatically from the hierarchy of victims that was already being developed in the SBZ. That such speeches were made at the Days of Remembrance demonstrates how the Odf-Tag maintained some of its popular legitimacy and resonance even in the face of growing SED pressure. Two representatives of the Jewish community, Heinz Galinski and Julius Meyer, cautioned that a million Jewish victims demanded vigilance against an already openly reencountered anti-Semitism.\(^{58}\) Drawing attention to contemporary anti-Semitism in such a way would be impossible in later Days of Remembrance, especially a call for action against domestic anti-Semitism and not one directed only against the West. However, Geschke also demonstrated the increasing politicization of the events by calling for German unification: “Let us be united not only in commemorating the dead but in all questions concerning the German people. We are one Volk, one nation, we have one homeland, our Germany.”\(^{59}\) Deepening Cold War tensions and growing SED power were beginning to demonstrate a stronger influence over the Days of Remembrance.

The diary entry of Alfred Kantorowicz of September 15, 1947 demonstrates how the increasing instrumentalization of the Days of Remembrance for political

\(^{58}\) VVN-BdA and Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, “Der zweite Sonntag im September.”
\(^{59}\) Quoted in Monteath, “A Day to Remember,” 209.
legitimation actually distanced the events from the memories and experiences of the very people they were meant to commemorate:

Yesterday was the Day for the Victims of Fascism. Moving reunions with old comrades... It was no commemorative speech. We did not win. For us the fight goes on. We are few. Some are tired. But when we become only a potbellied few in veterans’ associations or plaster saints (Säulenheilige) fetched once a year from their niche and put out on view, then everything we have done and suffered was futile. Then those whom we remember and invoke also need not have died. Whoever now becomes too comfortable, surrenders, unconditionally bows down, marginalizes himself. One understands. OdFs that survived in camps and in Spain are poorly suited to becoming conformists, subservient legs (Kratzfüßler), assiduous yes-men.⁶⁰

Kantorowicz’s diary poignantly reveals how the political appropriation of historical memory in an attempt to legitimate the SED’s rule actually alienated the very people it claimed to represent. The political ritual of the OdF-Tag no longer resonated with a group that was becoming increasingly disillusioned and less trusted by their so-called comrades.⁶¹ In other words, the diversity, the emotional resonance, and the relevance to the actual historical experiences of the OdFs that was so evident at the 1945 Day of Remembrance were replaced by a commemorative ritual which focused on an analysis of contemporary political issues, which became ever more homogenous, and which relied on an increasingly tenuous connection to the experiences of those who the events theoretically were meant to honor.

That said, during the period of Soviet occupation, the official memory of the war was still influenced to some extent by the experiences and memories of the

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⁶¹ As the SED became progressively more Stalinized, it began to lose faith in the “old guard” of pre-1933 Communists who often held views radically different than the current party line and who were proving to be extremely difficult to control. The SED began in the late 1940s to replace older Communists with a new generation of apparatchiks who had been trained in the new party schools.
individual victims of fascism. Both increasing political instrumentalization and a continuing prominent place for Jewish victims coexisted into the 1948 Day of Remembrance. While the speeches in the 1947 OdF-Tag had drawn parallels between past and present, the appropriation of history for the political situations of the Cold War became blatant in 1948. The 1948 VVN called for Germans not only to honor the victims of fascism but also “to give the right response to the neofascist efforts in Berlin,” in a reference to the Berlin airlift.\textsuperscript{62} However, the victims still played a role in this commemoration. Note in Figure 1.1 how the flag of the newly created Israeli state had a prominent position among the flags representing nations victimized by

fascism. Even so, it was still dominated by the symbol for political prisoners. By 1949, almost every reference to Jewish victims or Israel had been eliminated, leaving only the ubiquitous red triangle to stand for all victims of fascism.

The identification of the SED with the antifascist resistance eventually expanded to include the entire population of the SBZ. Every citizen of East Germany was able to claim the legacy of the resistance as their own. The people of the SBZ were cast as the *Sieger der Geschichte* (victors of history) partly a result of the official association of fascism with monopoly capitalism. As the leaders of the SBZ had destroyed the roots of fascism by building socialism in East Germany, all of the Germans who supported the socialist project of the SBZ automatically became antifascists. GDR novelist Christa Wolf argued that these “‘victors of history’ ceased to engage their real past as collaborators, dupes or believers during the Nazi period.”

By incorporating the masses into the antifascist myth, the SED attempted to generate support for itself and its policies. The hope was that by absolving Germans of their guilt and transforming them into victorious antifascists, they would be motivated to support the regime.

The beginnings of this policy can be seen on August 16, 1947, when the SBZ authorities issued Proclamation No. 201 which maintained that there was a distinction between “Nazi activists” and “former nominal party members.”

Nazi criminals would be punished in the antifascist SBZ, but SED and SMAD leaders were sending the message that they did not believe in collective German guilt, to the point that guilt

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would not be assumed even if one had been a Nazi party member. The *Brown Book*—
whose sole purpose was to identify former Nazis—further emphasized that

the GDR has always clearly distinguished between the millions of former rank
and file members of the Nazi organization, who were themselves misled and
duped, and the odious group of supporters, initiators, and profiteers of the
Nazi crimes. We do not intend to blame anybody who once made a political
mistake and has since recognized his error and embarked on a new road.  

In reality, this translated into transference of blame and guilt to the still complicit,
capitalist FRG.

Denazification was officially ended in the SBZ on March 10, 1948. However,
the SED portrayed itself as a relentless seeker of justice, bragging that

in the period from May 1945 to December 1964 in the Soviet occupation zone
and in the GDR a total of 16,572 persons were charged with participation in
crimes against peace and humanity and for war crimes. … Of the 12,807
persons found guilty 118 were sentenced to death, 231 to life imprisonment
and 5,088 to imprisonment of more than three years.  

This was in contrast to the FRG, where “by far the greater part of Nazi and war
criminals had fled” and which “in respect of population is three times the size of the
GDR, [but] only 12,457 persons had been charged with committing war crimes up to
January 1964.”  

In this way the SED attempted to appear as both an antifascist party
devoted to punishing Nazi criminals, unlike the FRG, as well as an antifascist state in
which support of the socialist project absolved one of any complicity in the atrocities
of the Third Reich.

Although the SED may have allowed “fellow travelers” some leeway, the
party still had to deal with a population that had spent twelve years being shaped by

65 National Council of the National Front of Democratic Germany and Documentation Centre of the
66 Ibid., 11-12.
67 Ibid., 12.
Nazi propaganda and who had fought until the bitter end for the regime. Overcoming the widespread anti-Bolshevism and other remaining sympathies for the ideology of the Third Reich became one of the most crucial tasks for the SED during the Soviet occupation. A KPD communiqué of July 1945 noted that “only by a fundamental change in our people’s way of life and in their attitudes, only through the creation of an anti-fascist democratic order can the nation be saved.” Immediate indoctrination into Marxism-Leninism would only serve to create more hostility towards the SED, given the German people’s strong aversion to the Soviet Union and communism. Instead, the existing veneration of German Kultur (culture) was utilized as a middle-step between National Socialism and Marxism-Leninism. The great figures of the German classical tradition became the forefathers of the SED and the state developing in the SBZ. Propaganda in this period emphasized the humanistic and egalitarian commonalities between the SED and the traditions of German Kultur rather than the application of Kultur to socialism. It was believed by many SED elites that a reeducation of the German people on the basis of humanism was a prerequisite to learning about – and eventually building – socialism. Kultur avoided confronting the German population with socialism and communism in order to not hinder their receptivity to the SED. Wilhelm Pieck expressed the way in which Kultur was
utilized to draw on the idealism and nationalism of the people and to turn those feelings toward the building of socialism:

We must create preconditions and guarantees to ensure that the elevated ideas of the best minds of our people, the ideas we encounter again in the greatest minds of all people and all times, the ideas of genuine, deeply felt, militant humanity and true freedom and democracy, the ideas of international understanding and social progress, do now really become the dominant powers in our cultural life and at the same time become living forces forming and directing our whole political and social life.\(^70\)

By focusing on the universal ideals that socialism held as its foundation – humanism, freedom, equality, justice – rather than on socialism and Marxism-Leninism itself, the party hoped to create a broad base of popular support for its leadership and policies. The German population was not to be burdened with guilt or portrayed as defeated Nazis, but was to be included among the liberated; as the inheritors and defenders of a humanistic and progressive heritage that was the foundation of the “better Germany” being created in the SBZ.

*Kultur*’s utilization as a redemptive tradition was of vital importance during the SBZ. The complete lack of a substantial resistance movement gave the SED little faith in the anti-Nazi sentiment of the German people. Just as the immediate post-war months were characterized by harsher declarations of German guilt, so were the statements of trust in the population much weaker. This doubt extended even to the group of Germans that the left-wing parties considered the most progressive: the working classes. Walter Ulbricht wondered in August 1945 “how can anyone speak of party political neutrality after 12 years of fascist rule during which the poison of

Given these reservations, the SED felt that the German people was not ready yet for socialist ideology, and it became even more important for the party to take control of the SBZ non-democratically. As Walter Ulbricht declared to a group of KPD functionaries in 1947: “we must start to make them acquainted with German literature, with Heine, Goethe, Schiller, etc. Don’t begin with Marx and Engels! They won’t understand it. We must first get the ideology of Nazism out of their heads, and it has to become clear to them that National Socialism has nothing to do with Socialism.” The party’s only option was to counter years of National Socialist indoctrination in an attempt to prepare the population for the building of socialism in the SBZ. A KPD proclamation of 1945 asserted that “it is essential to develop German youth into honest, upright human beings who are worthy of a people which has brought forth such men as Goethe, Schiller, Heine, Marx, Engels, Beethoven, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Johannes R. Becher, and others.” Such expressions of traditional nationalistic themes were not uncommon in the SBZ or the GDR. The utilization of Kultur was also not simply a political calculation, but also a symptom of the SED’s true belief that it was the fulfillment of all of the best traditions of German history and Kultur. In order to accomplish its historical obligation to bring about a socialist society, the party first needed to create a socialist consciousness in the German people.

73 „Erlass der SMA, die Bildung antifaschistischer Jugendkomitees zu erlauben,“ Deutsche Volkszeitung, 1 August 1945. Quoted in Ibid., 39.
Since the nation being created in the SBZ was viewed by the SED as an “internationalist” state, this “better Germany” was heir to the best of world culture as well. As the League of Culture for the Democratic Renewal of Germany stated in its 1945 founding proclamation, “the German people must be provided with all the positive elements from its own history and the history of other peoples which are capable of keeping our people viable as such and preserving it once and for all from new imperialist adventures, so that it may be offered the possibility of being readmitted to the community of nations.”\(^{74}\) The therapeutic aspects of \textit{Kultur} were argued to be intimately connected with the humanistic internationalism of socialism, and the combination of socialism and \textit{Kultur} allegedly offered a complete break with Germany’s fascist past and the GDR’s entrance into a community of socialist nations. \textit{Kultur} served as more than a mere denazification tool in the SBZ, though that was one of its important functions. The idea of a German progressive tradition that stretched back centuries was a cornerstone in the creation of a new German national identity. As David Crew has astutely observed, \textit{Germans have had other pasts than the Third Reich and how they have understood themselves as a nation has depended on no small degree on the stories they have told themselves about these other pasts. After Hitler, after genocide, after devastating defeat in 1945, these other past were not simply displaced by the overpowering memory of Nazism and war. Indeed, this other history was frequently able to provide memories that seemed even more “usable” (and necessary) after 1945 than they had been in the years up to 1933.}\(^{75}\)

\begin{itemize}
\item German classical \textit{Kultur} enabled the elites of the SBZ to point to national traditions and individuals that represented a Germany not tainted by murder, war, destruction,
\end{itemize}

\(^{74}\) “Proclamation founding the League of Culture for the Democratic Renewal of Germany, 4 July 1945,” 302.

and hate. Figures such as Goethe, Schiller, Bach, and the like represented a historical heritage that legitimized the SED by placing the party in a greater national narrative that extended both before and after the Third Reich.

The immediate task that faced the SED was, as Ulbricht noted, to “make the best works of our classical authors and anti-fascists and progressive literature widely accessible to the people.” Only by widely disseminating the great works of German Kultur, according to the party, could they hope to build an antifascist consensus.

Popular support, or at least tolerance, was a requirement to create a new “antifascist order” in the SBZ. Ulbricht made it clear that “unless it storms the heights of culture, the working class will have difficulty in fulfilling its great tasks to lead socialism to victory.” Knowledge of Germany’s classical heritage was supposedly a critical first step to advance Germans from National Socialism towards socialism and to aid the SED in creating the appearance of a popular mandate.

Once this knowledge of Kultur was acquired and the antifascist consensus created, then the SED could begin to build socialism in the SBZ. While the post-war years were chaotic, the SED portrayed itself as the unwavering representative of the working class and German progressive traditions:

Contrary to what bourgeois historians allege, the collapse of Nazism had not created a vacuum. Faced with new, changed conditions, Communists acting in unison with class-conscious Social Democrats and antifascists from all walks of life set out to achieve those objectives for which the revolutionary German labor movement had been fighting for a hundred years and for which it had already made enormous sacrifices.

77 Ibid., 310.
78 Heitzer, GDR: An Historical Outline, 14.
Here the SED emphasized its immediate assumption of power in a popular coalition, as well as its antifascist credentials and its basis in a German revolutionary tradition. However, in order to accomplish its goal, the SED required at least a modicum of popular support. Ulbricht argued in 1945 that the new leaders of Germany “should bring together all previous tendencies” of antifascism in order to create a better nation. Many in the KPD and SPD – and later in the SED – were motivated by a genuine desire to create this better nation, as evidenced by the feeling that the workers’ parties had a historical duty to learn from the lessons of history, a feeling which permeated many early post-war declarations. For example, Ulbricht opined in 1945 that

the Nazi tyranny is dead! It is now up to us to set to work on the reconstruction, despite all the difficulties. Once more, as after 1918, the fate of our country lies in our hands. This time we must not fail. Let us show the world that, having learned from the past and conscious of its best trade union traditions, the united working population is of a mind to create an anti-fascist bulwark and that it is determined to turn its full efforts to the creation of a democratic Germany and to peaceful co-operation with other nations.

Genuine antifascism and belief in socialism inspired a decent proportion of the rank-and-file members of the workers’ parties. According to the official narrative, the working class refused to repeat the mistakes of 1918 and 1932 and united to form the SED. No longer weakened by division, the SED planned to aggressively destroy the capitalist roots of fascism by founding a socialist state in East Germany. Walter Ulbricht expressed the KPD’s enthusiasm and determination to create a new Germany from the ashes of the Third Reich when he declared that

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79 Ulbricht, “Proclamation of the Founding of New Free Trade Unions, 15 June 1945,” 146.
80 Ibid., 147.
not only the rubble of the destroyed cities but also the reactionary rubble from the past must be cleared away thoroughly. Let the reconstruction of Germany take place on a solid foundation so that a third repetition of catastrophic imperialist policies becomes impossible. With the destruction of Hitlerism it is now also time to carry to its conclusion the democratization of Germany began in 1848 in the democratic bourgeois reorganization, to remove completely the remnants of feudalism, and to eliminate the reactionary old Prussian militarism with all its political and economic ramifications.  

The socialist project in the SBZ would fulfill the historical obligation of the leftist parties that they had failed to complete in 1848 and 1918. However, while the SED proclaimed a clean break from the past, the traditions remained and history was used to legitimate the party’s rule.

For the SED, ideology was crucial. After the initial use of Kultur as a denazification aid, the party began to introduce explicitly socialist ideas. A shift in this policy took place after the 1947 Free German Youth’s (Freie Deutsche Jugend, or FDJ) “Meissen Parliament,” changing from a broad antifascist orientation towards the building of socialism. This modification of policy resulted in direct – if still cautious – indoctrination in the principles of Marxism-Leninism. However, the SED postponed the full-scale Marxist-Leninist indoctrination of eastern Germans until 1951 because of the uncertainty of the German question in the immediate post-war years. Ideology was a central part of the socialist project, as exemplified in the SED definition of a “worldview” as “a systematic and complete explanation of nature, society, the role of people in the world, and the formation of rules for the social behavior of human beings… The role of a worldview is to give a person full

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82 Nothnagle, Building the East German Myth, 50f.
orientation for all of his thoughts, behavior and practical activity.”  In this conception, ideological education becomes critical, as it shapes almost every aspect of a person’s thoughts and actions. Therefore, as Honecker would later maintain, “it is of the utmost importance to educate our young people in the spirit of the working class, generate and deepen their love and pride of their socialist homeland, educate them along the lines of proletarian internationalism and the unbreakable friendship with the Soviet Union, and inspire them to exercise active solidarity.”

Creating the new “socialist man” was a high priority for the SED, as an ideologically reliable population would be far easier to control and would be unquestioningly supportive of the party and its policies. Shaping historical memory was a central component of this goal, as the SED belief in a “worldview” demonstrates. Another vital aspect in the formation of a correct socialist worldview was a “historical consciousness.” The *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch*, a GDR political dictionary, defines historical consciousness as part of the social and individual consciousness in which knowledge and experiences of the historical development of the society and the resulting lessons for the future are expressed. … Historical consciousness and the conception of history both contain and create concrete historical valuations which, not least as a result of their extraordinarily powerful emotional effectiveness, are of the greatest importance for the ideological-political attitudes and the resulting actions of human beings. Socialist historical consciousness is based upon the scientific world-outlook of the working class,

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Marxism-Leninism; the historical conception acquired by historical scholarship forms its core.\textsuperscript{85}

The SED held the relationship between a society and its history to be a central component of the society’s self-conception. The development of a historical consciousness and of socialist ideology was inexorably linked for the SED. In order to create loyal citizens that supported the socialist project being created in the SBZ, the party felt that it had to construct a complete worldview that included a coherent and legitimizing relationship with German history, and then communicate this view to the masses.

Historiography was one of the most frequently utilized methods by which to begin to develop this socialist “historical consciousness.” The SED viewed “Marxist-Leninist historiography [as] an instrument of the Socialist society for the working out of a scientific Geschichtsbild [historical conception], as an essential element of Socialist ideology, which is formed in its entirety by Marxism-Leninism. It must thus be regarded in its practical-political and theoretical-ideological unity with the struggle of the working class and Marxism-Leninism.”\textsuperscript{86} The creation of a “historical consciousness” and of a socialist “worldview” exemplified why the SED exerted so much energy into building a comprehensive historical narrative. In SED thinking, conversion to socialist ideology created increased class-consciousness and aided the struggle of the working classes. According to this framework, an awakening into socialism would generate greater loyalty to the united party of the working classes, and lend legitimacy to the state by creating a popular mandate.

The SED made East Germans’ education into a socialist historical worldview their goal from the very beginnings of the SBZ. One of the first tasks of the Free Trade Unions was the “education of the working population in the spirit of anti-fascism, and democratic progress, and education towards the recognition of their social position.”\textsuperscript{87} The leftist parties were aware that creating an authentic and popularly resonating historical memory would help reduce resistance in the thoroughly anti-Communist German population. The KPD announced in July 1945 that certain figures needed to be honored in order to build an antifascist consciousness, including “the fighters for progress with special prominence given to those leaders of the masses who struggled against their oppressors as well as the pioneers of cultural advancement.”\textsuperscript{88} Combining remembrance of both the traditional cultural figures with socialist anti-fascists was a simple technique to build a historically grounded German identity based in socialist values.

One of the first instances of explicitly socialist political ritual was the May First celebrations of labor, also known as May Day. The first May Day celebration in the SBZ was the 1946 event put on by the SED and Free German Trade Union (\textit{Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund}, or FDGB) in Berlin’s Lustgarten.\textsuperscript{89} GDR historians would later brag that “working-class unity was the dominant theme of May Day in 1946,” as the newly-created SED attempted to exploit the as-yet not frustrated

\textsuperscript{87} Ulbricht, “Proclamation of the Founding of New Free Trade Unions, 15 June 1945,” 147.
idealism of its rank-and-file members.\textsuperscript{90} The slogans of the May First celebrations demonstrate the event’s utilization as a tool for political legitimation, claiming a mass support base for the regime’s economic policies: “For the divestiture of the capitalist monopoly! For a referendum on the transfer of the businesses of the war profiteers into the hands of democratic self-government!”\textsuperscript{91} The appearance of popular backing was of extreme consequence to the SED, as it had not yet solidified its power and many of its members genuinely hoped to create a socialist state from the ruins of the Third Reich. An official observer reported that

masses of people thronged the city centre. Hundreds of thousands packed the streets leading to Berlin’s Lustgarten. The square could barely hold the huge, enthusiastic crowd. The mood of joy and exuberance was indescribable. For many old friends and comrades who had spent many years working in clandestinity [sic] or had languished in prison or concentration camp it was a happy reunion. They embraced each other, joining the seemingly endless procession of Berlin’s working people. Leading the way were the leaders of the united working-class party, our Socialist Unity Party.\textsuperscript{92}

References to antifascists are not even clearly restricted to party members, as the SED attempted to include as much of the population as possible under the absolving umbrella of “antifascist” in an effort to generate approval or at least tolerance. The SED projected an image of overwhelming popular support in the hope that the facade of a popular mandate would legitimate both its existence and its rule.

Another early commemorative event utilized by the SED was the 1948 one hundredth anniversary of the 1848 revolution. The SED viewed the anniversary as an effective means to mobilize support for the national movement the party sought to unleash. An SED member from Berlin, Richard Weimann, encouraged the party to

\textsuperscript{90} Heitzer, \textit{GDR: An Historical Outline}, 43.
\textsuperscript{91} Quoted in Ranke, “Linke Unschuld?,” 95.
\textsuperscript{92} Quoted in Heitzer, \textit{GDR: An Historical Outline}, 43.
differentiate between the March anniversary of the uprising in Berlin and the May anniversary of the Frankfurt Assembly to separate the revolution of 1848 from its bourgeois and parliamentary aspects, as well as to contrast the emerging West Germany from its socialist eastern counterpart. At the event, Walter Ulbricht spoke extensively about the nation being developed in the Soviet Zone, positioning them both as an example and hope for the entirety of Germany: “We are convinced that the example of development in the Eastern Zone will encourage the working people of western Germany so that the working people of the West [das schaffende Westvolk] in western Germany will respond to the colonization measures with the national resistance that has become necessary,” referring to the alleged colonization of Germany by the Western allies. The example of the revolution of 1848 was used in a plea to resist the capitalist oppressors that still plagued Germany one hundred years later. The SED continued this call, reminding Berliners how

on the 18th of March 1848 – 100 years ago – Berlin gave the signal to struggle for the indivisible democratic German republic. The Berlin population's battles on the barricades were the high point of the 1848 Revolution. All progressive forces working for German unity today continue this battle launched by 1848's heroes of freedom. The People's Movement for Unity and a Just Peace is the heir of the 48er-Revolution. … Berlin is once again the focal point of the struggle to create a free German nation. Once again all Germany will look to Berlin on March 18 and hear our cry for freedom.

Filled with rhetorical optimism, this appeal drew on the promises of the SBZ elites to finish the task of the bourgeois-democratic 1848 revolution. The SED hoped to mobilize the populace in support of German unity under socialist auspices in the spirit of the events of 1848. However, while the party promoted the moderate democratic

94 Quoted in Ibid., 424.
95 Quoted in Ibid., 447.
aspects of 1848, in reality it had already begun to impose a Soviet-style system in the SBZ. The attempts to camouflage this Stalinization reveal the inherent insecurities of the SED and its dependence on Soviet power.

The SED attempted to repackage its reliance on the SMAD by casting the relationship between the conquered and the conquerors as a socialist brotherhood, which was the result of the Red Army’s emancipation of the innocent Germans from Nazi criminals. GDR historians would describe the events of 1945 as “liberation,” stating that “the victory of the Soviet Union … freed the German people from the savage dictatorship of fascist German imperialism that had lasted twelve years.”

After their liberation, the KPD, and later the SED, immediately began to rebuild, as “in conjunction with the Soviet occupation authorities the officials serving on the new administrative departments worked to restore life to normal and to get production going again. They organized the struggle against hunger and cold, misery and homelessness. They purged the administration and the economy of Nazis and war criminals.” The SED presented an image of itself as a party from, of, and for the German people, and as a party that worked tirelessly with the most powerful representative of the working class, the Soviet Union. They claimed that in “the Soviet zone, Communists, Social Democrats and other antifascists, together with the SMAD, created new organs of power rooted in the people and used them in the best interests of the working population to remold society.” The party argued that a socialist revolution would be possible because of the assistance of the SMAD. As a

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98 Ibid., 27-28.
slogan coined by the SED proclaimed, “To learn from the Soviet Union is the key to victory!”

**Monuments**

The Soviet Memorial in Treptow Park, Berlin combined elements of several foundational East German historical narratives. This monument, completed in 1949, is especially interesting in a discussion of GDR memory, as it is a memorial for and by the Soviet Union, but with a German audience. The sheer size of the monument suggests how heavily it drew on a Soviet tradition in which Communist history was transformed into an overpowering myth. The statue of the *Soldier-Liberator* in particular was the central image of the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union for the entire postwar period. The Treptow Park memorial symbolized the Soviet army’s struggle against fascism and contained the graves of five thousand Soviet soldiers and officers who died in the battle of Berlin. Even though the Treptow Park site was not the largest - the Pankow memorial included the remains of more than 13,000 Soviet soldiers - the memorial was to become the chief Soviet war memorial and the focal point of *Siegestag* (Victory Day), – after 1950 called *Befreiungstag* (Liberation Day) – commemorative celebrations.

The form of the memorial represents a Soviet effort to inscribe its version of victory on a conquered territory, and demonstrates how the political context of the Cold War helped produce a historical narrative defined, in many ways, by what it

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99 Quoted in Ibid., 86.
does not discuss. The silences in the narrative of the monument speak clearly to the tensions inherent in the creation of a victor’s memorial in a defeated territory, in this case further exacerbated by the brutality of the fighting and the racial anti-Slavic element of the propaganda. However, the changing international climate and increasing East-West tensions necessitated a shift in position and a redefining of the enemy. The Soviet Union needed East Germany as a buffer from the West, but both the Soviet and SED authorities were faced with the difficult task of countering years of anti-Soviet and anti-German propaganda. The Treptow memorial is an excellent example of how the memory landscape was utilized for contemporary needs and was shaped by its historical context. The monument created a symbolic history of WWII that was both openly propagandistic and subtly diplomatic. It helped define and regularize the Soviet-German relationship in a way that would allow a former mortal enemy to be considered a fellow nation in the brotherhood of socialist states as well as an ally against the West.\textsuperscript{103}

The creators of the Treptow Park monument were presented with a difficult task: they needed to both sufficiently honor the many fallen Soviet soldiers as well as avoid alienating the German people.\textsuperscript{104} Their solution was to utilize well-placed ambiguity in order to allow interpretations to vary with differing audiences. The lack of definitive statements on key issues gave the memorial a semantic flexibility that enabled it to remain a focal point of commemorative activity for decades.

\textsuperscript{103} This attempt to regularize relations – and the difficulties it faced – can be seen in the letters between the Berlin authorities and the SMAD regarding the construction of the memorial. See “Letter from the SMAD asking for German stoneworkers,” August 29, 1948, LAB C Rep. 120 1442; “Letter on the construction of the Treptow Memorial,” August 3, 1948, LAB C Rep. 120 1442.

\textsuperscript{104} Stangl, “The Soviet War Memorial in Treptow, Berlin,” 213.
The physical shape of the memorial complex is designed so that visitors must proceed through well-defined spaces in choreographed movements, as is typical of ritualistic spaces. A victorious tone is set from the very beginning, when the visitors enter through a triumphal arch inscribed with Soviet iconography and a brief inscription acknowledging the heroes who died liberating the “socialist homeland.” The sculpture, *Motherland*, is visible through the arch. The initial feeling of victory and heroic sacrifice is somewhat dampened upon reaching *Motherland*, which represents a mother mourning for a son lost in battle. It is unclear for whom the statue is grieving, whether for the Soviet or German dead, or whether it is simply a general portrayal of the mourning and loss that accompanies battle for both sides. The statue also demonstrates the gendered aspects of Communist memorialization, as it is the
women who grieve and the men who fight. From the statue, the visitor then turns ninety degrees and is overwhelmed with the scale and triumphalism of the memorial complex itself. Two large stone structures representing Soviet flags – built with stones taken from Hitler’s chancellery – flank the view of the statue of the Soldier-Liberator.105 A bronze statue of a Soviet soldier kneels in front of each stone flag. A series of stone sarcophagi depicting the course of the war in bas-relief and text flank the central lawn, which contains the soldiers’ remains in several mass graves. Eight sarcophagi on each side bear matching pairs of bas-reliefs and quotations from Stalin, with Russian text on the north side and German text on the south side. The focal point is the giant Soviet soldier at the end of the central lawn, who has one hand gripping a lowered sword resting above a smashed swastika and the other bearing a small girl. The statue rests on a steep hill that represents a kurgan, an ancient Russian burial mound.106

E. V. Vuchetich’s Soldier-Liberator dominates the scene and its vague iconography allows for multiple interpretations appealing to many different audiences. The soldier is stepping on a swastika, the symbol of Nazism, and not on something like the German eagle, a well-recognized symbol for the German state. The enemy is thus not portrayed as being either Germany or the German people, but as the National Socialist party specifically. As a Soviet soldier, the figure stands for both the Red Army and Soviet Union as a whole. The statue maintains that it was the Soviets who trampled the swastika and became the destroyers of fascism, liberating Europe from the terror of the Third Reich. The sword imagery is noteworthy, as the

105 Ibid., 217.
106 Ibid.
Second World War was the most highly mechanized war to date. As Rudy Koshar observed, the sword gives the struggle against fascism a premodern quality, drawing on “medievalist” traditions of war memorialization that were prevalent after World War I. Moreover, the figure of the girl can be seen as either future generations liberated into socialism by the Soviet Union, or even as the Germans themselves; innocents saved from the machinations of an evil foreign force. The use of a female child to represent Germans serves the additional purpose of taking away East Germans’ agency: they become a vulnerable girl-child in need of protection and

107 Koshar, From Monuments to Traces, 191.
supervision. This semantic flexibility allowed the relationship between the USSR and the GDR to change into one of socialist fraternity when the changing conditions of the Cold War dictated this shift. The SED was able to write in its party program that “the Soviet Union and its glorious army contributed decisively to the crushing defeat of German fascism, and thus to the liberation of the German people from fascist servitude, thereby paving the way for its advance towards democracy and progress” without any alterations in the monument being necessary.\textsuperscript{108} While the Treptow memorial is a victor’s monument in a defeated nation, the ambiguity of the imagery enabled it to remain a center of commemoration, regardless of a changing political climate.

The Treptow Park memorial also gives socialism, the Party, and Stalin a reduced role, when they are mentioned at all. It situates the commemoration of the Red Army in a dialectic progression from fascism through liberation to freedom and equal rights for all while avoiding direct references to socialism in an attempt to present a vision of a humanistic future. The monument was not even affected by de-Stalinization since it already gave Stalin a minimal role. He was never directly honored, as his name appeared only in citations, and the main focus was on the efforts of the Soviet people. The Stalinist elements that are usually the central focus of Stalin-era Soviet memorials are downplayed in the Treptow Park memorial in order to appeal to the widest range of values, and perhaps are even a reluctant nod to the widespread anti-Soviet and antisocialist feelings in Germany.

The narrative of war depicted on the sarcophagi also maintains some ambiguity by the avoidance of certain topics. The sarcophagi’s repetition of key themes in an unbroken narrative presents a more specific, if still reductionist, account of the events of the Second World War. The narrative of the sarcophagi can be summarized as follows: Hitler and the Nazi party invade the peaceful Soviet Union, killing many innocents. The Soviet army and people fight heroically to achieve liberation for themselves and the other peoples of Europe. After the victory over fascism, the fallen fighters are honored for their sacrifice. The narrative of the war as presented in the Treptow memorial implies a continuing advance towards freedom, but reminds the viewer that such progress demands sacrifice.

Vuchetich, the architect of the Treptow Park monument, contended that “in order to explain the enormous role of the Soviet army in the liberation of humanity from the danger of enslavement through fascism and to show our army as a new type of army, as a liberation army, as an army of peace, progress and humanism, we strove to depict the course of the Great Patriotic War in concrete episodes.” The episodes of the sarcophagi follow in the tradition of the Hermann monument and the Leipzig monument by representing and symbolizing the nation in arms courageously defeating foreign threats. Like the enemies depicted in these older monuments, Nazism is treated as a foreign occupying power and the Soviet army is portrayed as a heroic defender who defeated this alien force. While the Treptow Memorial proclaims revolution and liberation from the legacies of the old Reich, in form it closely follows old nationalistic traditions. Furthermore, although “Hitler’s Germany,” “Hitler’s

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109 See the Appendix for the full text of the sarcophagi.
111 Koshar, From Monuments to Traces, 35, 43-44.
rouges,” and “the Hitler-fascist ideology” are all mentioned on the sarcophagi, the text of the memorial contains no direct reference to the German people. The relationship between Hitler, his rouges, and his ideology and the German people is kept ambiguous. By omitting the German people entirely, the memorial avoided making a statement regarding the link between the Nazi state and the German nation and therefore avoided assigning guilt or innocence to the German people. Homogenizing Germans and Nazis would have estranged the non-Communist German population from the Soviet-supported SED, but a universal amnesty of the German people would infuriate the Soviet population and undermine the usefulness of the concept of the “Great Patriotic War.” In fact, the German people are simply never mentioned at all, almost as if it was hoped that their presence in the narrative could simply be forgotten. It appears that even the creators of the monument were not certain whether to portray the German people as a conquered nation or as co-victors over fascism.

The Soviet war memorial in Treptow Park symbolizes how the meaning of place is shaped and reshaped through time to symbolize social values and political ideologies. The memorial’s semantic flexibility was utilized during commemorative ceremonies to suit the current political needs and aims of the Soviet and German leadership.\textsuperscript{112} For example, the 1949 \textit{Siegestag} celebration at the Treptow memorial reflected the increasing tensions between East and West, which resulted in a shift in official interpretations of both \textit{Siegestag} and of the memorial itself. The humanist

\textsuperscript{112} For an excellent example of ritual forms and of GDR and Soviet solidarity at Treptow Park commemorations, see “Gefallene sovjetische Helden wurden in Berlin feierlich geehrt: 45. Jahrestag des faschistischen Überfalls auf die UdSSR,” June 23, 1986, SAPMO BA arch DY 30/9507, Bl. 306.
emphasis that had been stressed prior to 1949 was replaced by appeals to socialist values and the focus of the ceremony shifted from an emphasis on reflection alone to an emphasis on reflection as a source of present political activism, including direct support for Soviet policy and animosity towards the West. The significance of the memorial was situated within a greater narrative of a world progression towards socialism. A speaker at the 1949 Siegestag commemoration stated that the Treptow memorial “is a symbol of the battle of the world’s people, led by the Soviet Union, for the sovereign rights of the nations, for socialism and democracy, and against slavery and the arbitrary use of power, and against the arsonists of a new war.” The lessons of the past and the examples of the heroes who came before were to be directly applied to the political situation of the day. The ambiguity of the memorial enabled the Soviets and the SED to utilize it and the historical narrative it promoted during commemorative events to the benefit of current policy needs.

114 Quoted in Ibid.
Chapter 2
Memory and the Building of Socialism, 1949 -1969

Unhappy the land that has no heroes! . . . No. Unhappy the land that needs heroes.
– Bertolt Brecht, Life of Galileo

The founding of the GDR on October 7, 1949 marked a shift in the historical narrative of Germany’s eastern zones. The relative openness of the discourse in the SBZ was distilled to an ideological hard line, especially after the SED became “a party of the new type” and the Stalinization of the GDR began in earnest.115 The early years of the GDR were shaped by a deepening of Cold War tensions, intraparty purges of “cosmopolitans,” and continuing severe economic difficulties. Additionally, alone among the post-war European nations, the GDR had to “set about defining a historical tradition and creating the iconography and symbolic landscape for a newly invented state with no previously accepted physical, cultural, or linguistic boundaries.”116 The founding of the GDR also began the aggressive indoctrination of the new GDR citizenry into the worldview of Marxism-Leninism. The SED hoped to create a “new socialist man” from the ruins of the Third Reich and its Übermenschen.

The creation of a socialist state in the GDR transformed it into a country with a special relationship with history.117 The SED claimed that “the socialist German nation that is evolving in the GDR is the product of the entirety of German history. Its origins reach back centuries; it is linked to the traditions of the progressive classes, in

115 See Eckart Förtsch and Rüdiger Mann, Die SED (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1969), 26-29.
117 It would be false to imply that the GDR was a backward-looking regime, however. While the SED’s GDR saw itself as a nation looking forward towards the achievement of communism, it faced a constant legitimacy crisis that caused a search for historical and cultural roots in order to justify the existence of a newly invented state with no previously accepted foundations.
particular the working class, and is allied with the progressive traditions of all nations.”118 The SED cast the GDR as a true German nation, as the culmination of centuries of national traditions. East Germany was not only legitimated by its founding generation of antifascists and its basis in German *Kultur*, but also by its role as the next step in the historical progression towards socialism. The socialist revolution that took place in the SBZ had been made possible only with the aid and guidance of the USSR, and antifascism fundamentally changed the way that the Soviet victory over the Third Reich was presented in Germany. The Soviets liberated Germans from the Nazi oppressors, but the defeat of fascism itself was brought about by the destruction of its economic root: capitalism. That victory was led by the SED and was one all East Germans could celebrate their part in. Article 6, paragraph 1 of the GDR constitution states that “the German Democratic Republic has, true to the interests of the people and international commitments, wiped out [*ausgerottet*] German militarism and Nazism on its territory.”119 Not the Soviet Union or even the Allied Forces, but the GDR itself in its role as an antifascist state had wiped out National Socialism. East Germany’s constitution placed the GDR solidly on the side of the victors, and helped to preempt awkward questions about guilt and wrongdoing. That was instead projected over the border to the West, the land of monopoly capitalists and fascism. The GDR became a nation of heroes, resistance fighters, and victims.

The SED claimed that it had eradicated the roots of fascism and militarism within the GDR, thus transforming it into an antifascist society. Soviet General

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Secretary Brezhnev would later congratulate the SED on this achievement, recalling that “within a short period of time democratic Germany did away with the burdensome heritage left by Hitler fascism in the souls of people, in their consciousness and morality to say nothing of the elimination of the material roots of fascism, the domination of big monopolies which has fostered Nazism.”

The GDR claimed not only to have defeated the economic basis of fascism, but also the lingering taint of Nazi ideology in the German people, thereby liberating them into socialism. In contrast, the alternative to the GDR, the capitalist FRG, represented a continuation of fascism in leadership, policies, and beliefs. Thus the decision to support the GDR and fight the FRG was presented not merely as a choice between two governments, but rather as a choice between war and peace, fascism and freedom. The struggle against both the imperialistic, capitalist West as well as opposition within the GDR itself was portrayed as a direct continuation of the antifascist resistance struggle. Supporting the socialist project of the GDR became a moral imperative within the antifascist framework.

The understanding of antifascism in the GDR was based on the conception of certain material preconditions that were supposed to prevent the resurrection of fascism. As fascism was merely the most extreme and degenerate form of monopoly capitalism, the socialist East Germany was inherently antifascist. As Brezhnev noted in an address to the 1967 Seventh Congress of the SED,

> it is precisely on the question of war and peace, the question of how to safeguard the German peoples and the peoples of all Europe from a repetition of the horrors of fascism and war, that the historical superiority of socialism has found a particularly striking manifestation. Only the socialist system was

able to ensure the GDR’s development along the path of peace and democracy, to block the way forever not only to fascism but also to the revival of militarism and new military adventures.\textsuperscript{121}

Thus, the very existence of the GDR helped prevent the return of fascism by destroying its economic foundations. The Program of the SED declared that “an anti-fascist and democratic revolution was carried out and the socialist revolution led to victory in a continuous revolutionary process and in fierce struggle against imperialist reaction and its henchmen.”\textsuperscript{122} The conception of fascism in the GDR as being causally linked to monopoly capitalism and certain exploitive classes – and also therefore, to the West – placed mass extermination and the racist elements of fascism outside the antifascist framework. It also served to block the touchy subjects of individual guilt and responsibility by attributing the rise of fascism to the final decay of late capitalism as explained by the historical dialectic. The identification of fascism with capitalism served to legitimate the existence of the GDR by describing it as the natural next stage in the historical progression towards a humanistic and socialist future, as well as linking a past victory over National Socialism with a continuing struggle with the FRG.

Aside from antifascism, another cornerstone of GDR national identity was the idea of \textit{Kultur}. After the founding of the GDR, the SED’s emphasis shifted from a use of \textit{Kultur} as a denazification aid towards its use in building a national culture which would reinforce socialist ideology. Beginning in 1949, the party began a campaign that combined an incongruously bourgeois conception of \textit{Kultur} with conventional anti-Americanism and a manipulation of German war resentment. In the SBZ, most of

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{122} “Programme of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany: 1976,” 93.
this war resentment was actually aimed at the Red Army, which had not been a generous conqueror. The SED attempted to generate support for the East Germans’ new socialist brothers by portraying Americans – and the imperialist, neo-fascist West in general – as fundamentally destructive forces and as the embodiment of Unkultur (barbarism). In stark contrast was placed the Soviet Union, the humanistic and socialist defender of Kultur. In 1949 the youth magazine Neues Leben emphasized this point, as “the Amis [a derogatory slang term for Americans] with their bombs and their pressed-trouser soldiers did not finish off Hitler-Germany, it was the ‘destroyers of the West’ who did it, the same ones who today are restoring the Zwinger, one of the wonders of Western Kultur – which Ami bombs smashed to bits. It was the Russians with their guns and their blood.”

American Unkultur was tied to Germans’ traumatic memories of the bombings. Plaques began to appear all over the GDR starting in 1949 marking the sites of buildings destroyed in the war, simply stating that the building was “Destroyed by Anglo-American Bombs” (Zerstört durch anglo-amerikanische Bomber). The following explanation for the destruction of Berlin from the official FDJ magazine Junge Welt was a fairly typical example, as it cast blame on the West while disregarding the large percentage of damage caused by Soviet artillery: “On 3 February 1945 at 12:30 the air raid sirens wail in Berlin. Bombers hurl their death-bringing cargo onto apartment houses, onto women and children. Valuable German Kultur monuments crumble into ruin. The air

125 Ibid., 54.
pirates rage for over three hours. On the wings of death birds the American emblem glints sneeringly.” The American barbarians held nothing sacred, not the lives of civilians nor the priceless treasures of one of the bastions of Western culture.

The use of anti-Americanism in relation to the bombings demonstrated how the positive idea of Kultur was supported by its opposite, the Western “barbarians at the gate.” The SED often compared the situation in the 1950s across the inner German border with the condition of the whole of Germany during the horrific and thoroughly barbaric Thirty Years’ War. The FDJ’s “Manifesto of German Youth” of May 1950 proclaimed that “the youth of West Germany is to be poisoned by the Kulturbarei of the so-called ‘American way of life.’ They are, through American trash and smut [Schund und Schmutz], to forget their own misery and the misery of the German people.” A FDJ slogan from 1950 called for its members to “defend the great German Kulturerbe [cultural heritage] against the disgrace of American cultural and moral degeneracy!” Western culture had only corruption and degeneracy to offer to German Kultur. According to this official conception, the continuation of the exploitive capitalist system in West Germany was a direct result of the influence of American barbarism, as the humanistic and progressive traditions of German Kultur would support the creation of a state like the GDR, not the FRG.

The SED asserted that

in the great struggle of democratic Germany’s National Front for the unity of our Fatherland, for peace and against the danger of a new

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127 Ibid., 54.
129 “Losungen zum Deutschland-Treffen der Jugend, 12.4.50,” SAPMO BAch NL 36/727.
imperialist war, the struggles for the renewal of our nation’s cultural life play a meaningful role. The renewal can only be fulfilled on the basis of the great German cultural heritage, the free and progressive cultural traditions of the German people. Only in fiercest struggle against all the influences of the corrosive American *Kulturbarbarei* can and will the democratic renewal of our cultural life be realized.\textsuperscript{130}

German *Kultur* and Americanism here are cast as absolutely mutually exclusive sides in a binary in which one must choose between good and evil, civilization and depravity. The traditions of Germany’s cultural heritage were said to hold the keys to a national awakening into socialism, whereas a shift to the West would result only in the moral degeneration that characterized the FRG.

The SED campaign against *Kulturbarbarei* was not just a result of a whole scale rejection of everything Western, but was also a reflection of the actual threat that Western culture posed to the SED’s legitimacy. A 1984 report of the Institute for Youth Research in Leipzig found that 80% of East German youth listened to or watched West German media, stating that “a central finding for previous research is the strong relationship between high consumption of Western media and lower political consciousness, lower societal activity, a lower significance of socialist values for one’s life orientation, and so on.”\textsuperscript{131} Anglo-American popular culture often drew attention to the less idealistic aspects of human existence as well as highlighting the economic disparity between the two Germanys, which inhibited the creation of a militant, class-conscious GDR society. An SED party member argued that “the socialist cultural revolution is increasingly becoming an inseparable part of the

\textsuperscript{130} “Nationales Bekenntnis zu Bach,” in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, ed. Elimar Schubbe (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1972), 134.

socialist transformation in all spheres of society. At the same time the socialist national culture developing on the territory of the German Democratic Republic has become a significant factor in the struggle against imperialist reaction and Unkultur in West Germany."¹³² The idea of Kultur served to legitimate the SED as the natural outgrowth of a German progressive tradition, and to justify opposition to the potentially problematic Kulturbarbarei of the West.

Another common formula following the idea of Kultur in opposition to Unkultur was that of “Our Goethe, your Mengele.”¹³³ The progressive traditions of German culture – represented by Goethe – were appropriated by the GDR and juxtaposed with the abominable medical experiments carried out on Auschwitz camp inmates by Josef Mengele that were ascribed to the unredeemed policies of the FRG. Socialism was to be associated with Kultur and humanism, and to stand in stark contrast to the inhumanity perpetrated by the fascist forefathers of West Germany.

Similarly, the two major external enemies that were a reoccurring theme in National Socialist propaganda were “Amerikanismus,” an “‘obsession with economics’ and instinctual ‘oppression’ linked to mass production and consumption,” and “Bolshevism,” which represented the destruction of all human values.¹³⁴ Both drew on the tradition of the exemplary nature of German Kultur. By 1945, both anti-Bolshevism and anti-Americanism were widespread throughout the former Third Reich due to pervasive wartime propaganda. The FRG portrayed itself as the defender

¹³³ Brinks, “Political Anti-Fascism in the German Democratic Republic,” 210-214.
of *Kultur* against the “heathen hordes” of the Bolshevik East, utilizing rhetoric with a long history in Germany, most recently used to justify the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, and put into service during the Cold War. The GDR also used what appeared to be warmed-over Nazi propaganda, substituting the FRG’s anti-Soviet focus with an anti-American one. The SED hoped to exploit the anti-Western remnants of National Socialist indoctrination in order to redirect German war resentment away from itself and towards the other Germany. The SED used this rhetoric in its campaigns for German reunification under socialism, against the FRG’s relationship with the United States, and for friendship with the Soviet Union against West Germany’s entrance into NATO.\(^\text{135}\) However, the similarities between FRG and GDR propaganda and that of the Third Reich can easily be overstated. As Sam Keen has shown, the depiction of one’s enemies as barbarians, vermin, pestilence, and death is a commonality between all propaganda everywhere.\(^\text{136}\) The point to emphasize here is that there were many continuities between pre- and post-1945 propaganda and techniques of political legitimation. This is largely because German governments both before and after the Third Reich drew on the same cultural tropes and methods of self-legitimation. For the SED, it was important to remember “that ‘marching, drumming, and trumpeting’ are not reactionary [or] subversive in general, but that it all depends on what one trumpets, marches, and drums for.”\(^\text{137}\)

Some of the similarities, however, were due to more than merely drawing from the same cultural pool. Continuities in personnel existed between the GDR and

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\(^\text{135}\) Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, 53.


\(^\text{137}\) Quoted in Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth*, 106.
the Third Reich, even in SED newspapers. According to Simon Wiesenthal’s 1968 report on the GDR press, there were even groups of former Nazis among the writers and editorial staff of such prominent newspapers like *Neues Deutschland* and *Deutsche Aussenpolitik*.\(^{138}\) Wiesenthal had noticed that the writings of the GDR press during the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 were different from those of other socialist nations, but in some cases the exact same as remarks in National Socialist papers. Further investigation revealed that the same people had written both the anti-Israeli articles under the GDR as had written anti-Semitic articles under the Nazis. For example, Dr. Richard Arnold was the general editor of *Der nationale Demokrat* in the GDR. He had joined the Nazi Party in 1933 and from 1939 to 1945 he worked for the Reich Ministry for Science and Education (*Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung*), and had stated in his curriculum vitae that he was “responsible for the total Entjudung (dejudiaization)" of German cultural life.\(^{139}\) Kurt Herwart was another example of a Nazi party member who also worked for the East German press after the war and even collaborated with the GDR’s propaganda ministry in 1968. Herwart had been the general editor of the SS journal *Hammer*, and his writings had been praised by the Nazis as “fighting words of the northern spirit.”\(^{140}\) As the editor of the *Waldheimer Tagblatt*, Johannes Caspar had defended the Nuremberg racial laws and after the war he too found employment in the GDR as the editor of the *Mitteldeutsche Neueste Nachrichten*.\(^{141}\) In 1968 Dr. Karlheinz

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\(^{139}\) Brinks, “Political Anti-Fascism in the German Democratic Republic,” 213.

\(^{140}\) Ibid.

\(^{141}\) Ibid.
Gerstner was a top-ranking reporter with the Berliner Zeitung and had received the Medal of Merit of the GDR (Verdienstmedaille der DDR), even though he had been a Nazi Party member since 1933 and had written a brochure entitled Verniggertes Frankreich during the war. The similarities to the Nazi regime were obvious to the GDR’s journalists, who secretly called Heinz Geggel, the SED Agitation Department official in charge of the press, “Dr. Geggs” (an unmistakable reference to Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister).

Even without the presence of former Nazis in the GDR’s propaganda machine, similar themes and techniques can be observed in the GDR and in preceding regimes. The SED utilized nationalist forms in its attempt to create a socialist culture in East Germany. Ulbricht argued that “our literature, our art, the fine arts in general must be given a new socialist content and must be made accessible to the whole people.” The classics of Kultur needed to be connected to socialism, and a new socialist culture needed to be produced. The SED “want[ed] to shape the culture of the new Germany, that culture which in its form is national and in its content is a socialist culture.” Germans’ pride in their nation and national traditions was to be exploited in order to legitimate the existence of the GDR.

**Commemorations**

Commemorative days in the GDR did not revolve only around the events of the Second World War. They also tapped into the positive and legitimating aspects of

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142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
Kultur, and celebrated the GDR’s status as “the heir to all that was progressive in the history of the German people.”\textsuperscript{146} The SED maintained that

the socialist national culture of the German Democratic Republic includes the careful nurturing and assimilation of all humanist and progressive cultural achievements of the past. The socialist culture of the German Democratic Republic is indebted to the rich heritage built up throughout the history of the German people. Everything great and noble, humanist and revolutionary is preserved and continued in the German Democratic Republic with an eye to its contemporary relevance. The revolutionary cultural traditions of the German working-class movement and the rich cultural heritage of the German Democratic Republic itself are among the reasons for the patriotic feelings of pride we have for our socialist country.\textsuperscript{147}

The socialist and progressive GDR was the fulfillment not just of the inevitable historical development towards socialism, but also the uniquely German progressive tradition. In order to connect its citizens with the state, the ruling elites of the GDR hoped to create not just socialism with a human face, but also with a German one. It was hoped that pride in national cultural heritage and traditions would also be transferred to the state that embodied them.

The first full-scale Commemorative Year (Gedenkjahr) of this type was the 1949 Goethe Celebration of the German Nation (Goethe-Feier der deutschen Nation). In the commemorative year celebrations, Johann Wolfgang Goethe was cast as an intellectual pioneer of Marxism and a symbol of German unity. The SED was obsessed with Goethe, even suggesting that the Neue Wache (New Guardhouse) in Berlin become a central Goethe memorial.\textsuperscript{148} The SED lavished money and scarce resources and manpower to rebuild the destroyed Goethe house in Weimar, creating a national monument on the site in 1952 in order to cultivate Goethe’s memory and

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\item[147] Ibid., 320.
\item[148] Koshar, From Monuments to Traces, 193.
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Furthermore, GDR and Soviet relations were often exemplified with the image of Red Army soldiers carefully removing the protective wall surrounding the Goethe-Schiller monument put up by the Nazis in order to protect it from air raid damage. GDR propaganda asserted that the Soviets liberated not only the physical nation, but also the cultural traditions of progressive Germany from National Socialist corruption and repression.

Part of Goethe’s appeal to the SED was his usefulness as a spiritual grandfather of Marxism-Leninism. The Goethe-Feier celebrated that “Goethe was inspired by the conviction that progress is the law of human development. That is why he labored his entire life to fathom the developmental laws of nature and society.” Furthermore, “Goethe towered over the greatest of his contemporaries through the knowledge that his work was not the isolated accomplishment of an individual, but a product of collective character.” While Goethe may have still been a thoroughly bourgeois writer, it was claimed that he foresaw the later developments of socialism and thus represented a progressive forefather of German socialism. Erich Honecker outlined the SED’s interpretation of Goethe and his legacy at the Goethe-Feier of March 21, 1949, proclaiming that “the progressive, peace-loving people all over the world honor in Goethe not only the inspired master of German classical literature, but at the same time also the brave champion of a militant humanism, for a just and enlightened social order, for the dignity and development of mankind, and

149 Nothnagle, “From Buchenwald to Bismarck,” 97.
152 “Manifest zur Goethe-Feier der deutschen Nation.“ Dokumente der SED, vol. 2. 333. Quoted in Ibid.
the incorporation of the individual into the community.”

Goethe was especially useful as a legitimating example, as he was both a spiritual grandfather of German socialism, as well as the central figure of German progressive and humanistic Kultur.

Goethe’s legacy was also applied to the issues of the day, including decrying Western Unkultur. At the ceremonies, Otto Grotewohl argued that the FRG’s claims to be the defender of Kultur were invalid, as capitalist systems are inherently destructive. Instead, Grotewohl contended that “what it defends is not Kultur but property. That is nothing other than the path from humanity to bestiality. … Today, those who want to defend Kultur, those who want to defend the living world of Lessing and Goethe, Heine and Thomas Mann, must stand on the other side of the barricade. The rule of inhumanity, the rule of the threat of the atomic bomb must be broken if humanity is to triumph.” As a humanistic and progressive socialist state, only the GDR could lay claim to the Kultur of Goethe and all who desired to not only honor those traditions but also to apply them to contemporary society had no choice but to support the defender of Kultur, the GDR. Walter Ulbricht maintained that “‘Only he has truly earned his freedom and his life, Who every day does conquer it in strife.’ This saying by Goethe is taken seriously in the daily life of the German Democratic Republic.”

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have been foreseen by Goethe. East Germans were told that they lived that struggle everyday in the spirit of Goethe.

As already suggested in the case of Goethe, the concept of culture was not always a negative mirror image of the FRG. The ruling elite of the GDR also wanted to lay claim to the positive traditions in German history and culture. The SED proclaimed that “one cannot create power, courage and confidence in the history of their own people if one portrays only the wrong paths of a nation or an untimely fatalistic lament about German misery.”\(^{156}\) The SED also attempted to present a positive image of itself as the fulfillment of the historical process towards socialism and humanism. This idea of Kultur basically asserts that Goethe, Schiller, Bach and Beethoven, among others, are in fact representative of Germany as a whole rather than exceptional individual Germans. They were examples of a heritage and legacy fulfilled in the GDR that every citizen could identify with and find pride in. Walter Ulbricht further emphasized the connection between the new GDR citizen and Kultur when he claimed that “the people, liberated from capitalist exploitation and oppression, are shaping a higher culture, a socialist culture which at the same time contains a systematic development of the best humanistic ideas and traditions of our people.”\(^{157}\) For Kultur is profound, authentic, and organic. “It is firmly rooted in the German soul and in German soil, as opposed to the superficial Zivilisation of the Western world.”\(^{158}\) The SED endeavored to legitimate the GDR as an authentic


\(^{157}\) Ulbricht, “Closing speech at the Authors' Conference of the Mitteldeutscher Verlag Halle/Saale, 24 April 1959,” 311.

\(^{158}\) Nothnagle, Building the East German Myth, 41.
German nation based in centuries of tradition and, furthermore, to legitimate it as the only German worthy nation to have this heritage.

The Bach Ceremony of the GDR in 1950 attempted to portray the GDR as the defender and inheritor of the humanitarian legacy of Johann Sebastian Bach, and as the natural conclusion to a long history of German progressive thinking. German history and cultural traditions had been leading to the creation of the GDR and the victory of socialism, aided by the Soviet Union, and the Bach celebration represented that theory of history:

First the armies of the socialist Soviet Union brought about the divestiture of German fascism and the defeat of German imperialism, freeing the way to a true, objective evaluation and appreciation of Bach. The working class, as the agents of the struggle for the unity of our people and therefore also for the unity of German Kultur, sees in Bach one of the best-known representatives of German Kultur, whose work is of the highest and most masterful creative power as well as an expression of the all-German cultural consciousness and represents a significant contribution of the German people to world culture.159

The commemoration of Bach in the GDR was meant to highlight the fact that only the socialist East Germany could truly honor the inheritance of Bach and other great classical figures. However, the hope was also held out that by uniting Germany under socialism and the antifascist SED, West Germans too could claim their cultural heritage and become part of the “better Germany.” Unlike the government of the FRG, “the party executive committee of the SED greets the implementation of the 1950 Bach-Year as an important contribution towards the democratic education of our people, as a meaningful event in our struggle for the nurturing and the democratic renewal of German Kultur, as a medium for the consolidation of the cultural bonds

159 “Nationales Bekenntnis zu Bach,” 135.
with all freedom and peace-loving peoples.” The therapeutic aspects of *Kultur* were offered by the SED as a means to help liberate the oppressed of the FRG.

The GDR claimed to be the only German state able to fully recognize the meaning of Bach, not just as a composer, but also as a role model for the politics of the present. The SED asserted that “Bach was a great trailblazer in the field of music. To avow oneself to his works is to avow oneself to the free and progressive traditions of our people.” At the Bach Ceremony of the GDR, it was maintained that

Bach’s greatest national significance lies in that he used the traditions of German music at that time and merged them with the achievements of other nations’ music into a completely new musical language. Bach’s great significance lies in that he demolished the bonds of church music and substituted dead formulas with human experience and sensation, in which the middle-class and humanistic opposition came to expression vis-à-vis the disappearing feudal society. Bach’s great significance lies in that he, closely associated with the people, interweaved folksongs and folkdances into his treasure of melodies [Melodienschatz] and through the handling of folksongs and other secular melodies secularized hymns and other church music.

Bach was presented by the SED as a profoundly popular composer who struggled against the reactionary Protestant church and who fought the concept of “formalism” with his incorporation of peasant melodies in his music. It was argued that the historians of the FRG misinterpreted Bach and his legacy, as did the bourgeois historians of the past. The SED claimed that “the liberal bourgeoisie saw in Bach exclusively a church musician, [and] every relationship with the people was deliberately overlooked or covered up. In the period of imperialism, the bourgeoisie bastardized Bach into a formalist or a representative of unsubstantial, cold pomp.”

The rescue of Bach’s inheritance from the manipulations of the West was presented

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160 Ibid.
161 Ibid., 134.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid., 135.
as representative of the greater struggle against Unkultur. For the SED made it clear that in celebrating “the Bach-Year of 1950, we protect our national Kultur against all of the corruption and division of American imperialism.”164

The 125th anniversary of Ludwig von Beethoven’s death was celebrated in the GDR on March 26, 1952 in order to honor the great influence he had on the entire German people and their culture.165 According to the official narrative, “Beethoven’s historical significance is based on the fact that his accomplishments were tightly bound with the democratic efforts of the progressive people of his time. Out of the struggle for these revolutionary goals, he obtained his preeminent artistic greatness and the high humanistic ideas of his works.”166 Although he was from the bourgeoisie, the SED claimed that Beethoven was greatly influenced by the ideals of the French Revolution, and incorporated the “struggle for the unity of our nation and the peaceful cohabitation of the people” in his music.167 The GDR regarded Beethoven as a spiritual grandfather, as he represented the humanistic and progressive legacy of which the young socialist nation was both product and heir. The SED celebrated Beethoven as “the inspired son of our people, the fearless champion of progress, the singer of the brotherly solidarity of nations, the passionate emissary of peace,” goals which had been fulfilled “through the Great Socialist October Revolution, though Soviet Power.”168 By contrast, “the American cultural barbarians

164 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., 232.
168 Quoted in Nothnagle, “From Buchenwald to Bismarck,” 97.
and their lackeys desecrate Beethoven’s memory by misusing Bonn, his birthplace, for the most depraved national degradation.”\footnote{169}

The Beethoven commemoration emphasized that this was a time of great turmoil for the German people, and that the potential for failure was high, especially if the humanitarian legacy of figures like Beethoven was ignored or manipulated. Germans needed to keep in mind that

this remembrance day takes place in a time in which the American imperialists are preparing a new war and in which militarism once again arises in West Germany. For our people this means civil war, destruction, and death. This gravely endangers the existence of the German nation. In order to reach their goal, the American imperialists seek to poison German national consciousness, to destroy German \textit{Kultur} and especially our national cultural heritage.\footnote{170}

\textit{Kultur} is depicted as the lifeblood of the German nation, a nationalist trope used by regimes from the time of the Second Reich. As it would poison German \textit{Kultur}, the influence of the West and especially of America held only yet more death and misery for the German people. The GDR claimed to offer a better, more authentic solution and by honoring the nation’s heritage, the East German state declared that it was the true representative of the German people and the fulfillment of all the best traditions of national history and culture. The citizens of the GDR were reminded that “Beethoven’s humanistic works, his powerful music, [and] the aggressive example of his life encourage us to the highest results in this just struggle of our people” against the \textit{Unkultur} of the West.\footnote{171}

The Johann Friedrich Schiller remembrance day of May 9, 1955 emphasized many of the same themes as the Goethe, Bach, and Beethoven commemorations:

\footnote{169}{“Zum 125. Todestag Ludwig von Beethoven,” 232.}
\footnote{170}{Ibid., 231.}
\footnote{171}{Ibid., 233.}
German cultural unity, American *Kulturbarei*, and German cultural heritage and tradition. Other SED sponsored mass cultural events included, but were not limited to: the Handel celebration of 1959, the Heine Tribute of 1972, the Kleist commemoration of 1977, the Lessing celebration of 1981, the Goethe Tribute of 1982, the Richard Wagner Days of 1983, and the 750th anniversary celebration of the founding of Berlin in 1987. Honecker bragged that “commemorations of historical anniversaries are high points in the social life of the German Democratic Republic,” and he seems to not have been entirely wrong. Otto Grotewohl summarized the position of the SED vis-à-vis the great figures of German history and culture when he declared that

> our duty must be to free the works of the great Germans – such as Münzer and Luther, Herder, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller and Heine, Bach and Beethoven, Leibniz, Kant and Hegel, Marx and Engels, Bebel and Liebknecht, Zetkin, Luxemburg and Thälmann – from the purposeful distortions [Zweckentstellungen] of the imperialist play swordsmen [Klopffechter] and to fix their bright example into our people and our youth, as they were the first fighters to nurture the true, peaceful, and national interests of the German people.

The SED effectively prepared itself to usurp German culture and history by constructing a national historical narrative that linked classical figures such as Goethe and Beethoven with leading Communists like Thälmann and Luxemburg. In order to

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“rescue” the great Germans from the corruption of the FRG, the SED connected them with the great German socialists in an attempt to transfer adoration of *Kultur* to socialist figures so that East Germans would identify with both.

In 1950 the name of the *Siegestag* (Victory Day) celebration was changed to *Befreiungstag* (Liberation Day), corresponding with a shift in the narrative of the end of the Second World War that emphasized a socialist fraternity with the Soviet Union. Instead of a Soviet victory over the Third Reich, the day instead commemorated the liberation of the German people from the Nazi criminals. These events were held at the Treptow memorial almost every year until the end of the GDR. The narrative presented remained essentially intact until 1989: the Soviet army had liberated the German people from fascism and the two states were now bound in socialist friendship and brotherhood. The change of name reflected the increasingly hostile international climate, and the greater desire of the Soviet Union to shape the GDR into a strong buffer state against the West. The focus was changing from the oppositional discourse of the military victory of the Red Army over the Wehrmacht to the more unifying narrative of liberation by the Soviet Union and a future of socialism and peaceful coexistence. In the early 1950s, commemoration of *Befreiungstag* was heavily politicized as thousands of East Berliners participated in mass processions, laid wreaths at the base of the Soldier-Liberator, and carried banners with political slogans, however, by 1968 the military parade was entirely abandoned and the ceremony became purely commemorative. ¹⁷⁶ This change

reflected decreasing Cold War tensions and the growing disconnect East Germans felt from military displays.

Like the Befreiungstag commemorations, the OdF-Tag that began in the fall of 1945 were increasingly put into the service of the regime beginning in 1949. The increasing alignment of the VVN with the politics of the SED influenced the redesign of the “Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism” as the “International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascist Terror and Day of Struggle Against Fascism and Imperialistic War” (*Internationaler Gedenktag für die Opfer des faschistischen Terrors und Kampftag gegen Faschismus und imperialistischen Krieg*) after the foundation of the GDR. The elements of collective mourning present in the Days of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism in the SBZ receded to the background, as did the acknowledgment of German guilt and responsibility for Nazi crimes through complicity with the regime. In September 1950, for example, the day of remembrance was marked by a huge peace rally in Berlin. The VVN declared that this Day of Remembrance would be a protest for peace directed “against the Anglo-American warmongers and the rebirth of fascism in West Germany.” The commemorations of the fifties maintained that the legacy of the antifascist resistance was fulfilled in the fight against the survival of fascism and militarism in the FRG and in a commitment to the reunification of Germany under socialist auspices. By 1951, the VVN was characterizing the day of remembrance as a “day of struggle [Kampftag] against war

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177 “Kundgebung für die Opfer des Faschismus in Berlin vor dem Alten Museum, Sept 1950,” SAPMO BArch, ZPA Photoarchiv 713/71N.
and fascism.” According to the VVN, the commemorations should both emphasize the “legacy of the millions brutally murdered in the fight against Hitler fascism” and ensure that it “live on in the present unavering, decisive struggle for peace.” Even though “eleven million men and women of all European nations fighting against Hitler fascism went to painful and tortured deaths,” they died “confident that they were doing so for the cause of peace and humanity. … All who opposed fascism … were in the first place fighters for peace.” This characterization of the Days of Remembrance effectively transformed senseless tragedy into a redemptive martyrdom that contributed to the victorious progression of history towards socialism. Past heroism and suffering took on an ideological purpose to justify the current “struggle for peace” of the Soviet Union against the capitalist and fascist West. The types of victims honored were reduced to the Communist resisters.

The increasing use after 1949 of the red triangle at events commemorating victims of National Socialism signaled the start of “political functionalization” of survivors’ memory by East German Communists. The range of antifascists being remembered was limited even further, excluding not only those who had “merely” suffered, but also those fighters who held incorrect political ideologies. In addition, because of the influence of the increasing anti-Semitism originating in Moscow, Jewish suffering was basically eliminated from the Day of Remembrance.

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181 Quoted in Ibid.
182 Quoted in Ibid.
Representatives of the Jewish community, the Roma and Sinti, deserters, euthanasia victims and other victims of the Nazi regime were still asked to attend the rallies, but not to speak. The story of their anguish often went unremarked. The focus of the Days of Remembrance shifted dramatically from a commemoration of past suffering and loss to a historical justification of current actions and policies. The attempts to utilize the political capital of the antifascist resistance were often not subtle, such as when the Remembrance Days of the 1950s began to feature large-format portraits of SED Politburo members situated next to portraits of resistance fighters. This appropriation of the suffering of the past to legitimate the struggles of the present became a defining characteristic of the Day of Remembrance commemorations, celebrated every second Sunday of September for the entire forty years of the GDR’s existence.

The shift away from the early downplaying of Marxist-Leninist ideology is visible in the 1958 celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the KPD. Like the commemorative years celebrating German cultural figures, the fortieth anniversary celebration emphasized the superiority of the East German state and the amount of progress it had made in overcoming the Nazi past. A new trend was an increased focus on the role of the party of the working class – either the KPD or SED, depending on the period – in defeating fascism, creating the GDR, and liberating the German people from the miseries of capitalism and fascism. A 1958 pamphlet providing materials for the celebration included refrains that entire factories were to


\[186\] Ibid.
read in unison. One such refrain emphasized the antifascist and revolutionary heritage of the KPD: “Since the days of the Spartacus movement /It has led the battle. /It gave us Thälmann's strong fighting heart /And gave us courage while in prison. /It led us out of blackened ruins, /When all there was was hope, nothing to eat, /And where we felt its helping hand /There vanished injustice and need.”¹⁸⁷ Not only was the KPD the leader of the antifascist struggle, but it was also the guiding light in the terrible post-war years. The antifascist character of the KPD membership was further highlighted by the leader of the ceremonies, declaring that “Theo Neubauer, Ernst Schneller and other teachers found their way to the party of the working class, making the cause of the fighting proletariat their own, remaining true and sacrificing their lives in the underground struggle against Fascism and war.”¹⁸⁸ Socialist rule was legitimated by the blood of the antifascist fighters who had given their lives in the struggle. The Party’s current leadership drew authority from this tradition of resistance, even if they personally had not spent time in a concentration camp. The commemoration also focused on the suffering of the German people under fascism, and their eventual liberation by their socialist brothers, the Soviets. The participants intoned that “The time came when we were beaten down. /We had to hide the flags. /Bestial murder made many silent... /Yet invisibly over the coffins /The flag flew through the long night. /It burned in our hearts and minds /Until the glimmerings of a new morning /Shone in the East.”¹⁸⁹ Propaganda aimed to show that even though it

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.
¹⁸⁹ Ibid.
seemed that all of Germany had been swept up in a wave of Nazi fervor, really the traditions of German socialism were simply dormant and awaiting their awakening by the Soviet Union and the Party.

The role of the KPD and SED in leading the German people to liberation in socialism was also emphasized in later commemorative events. The events of May 5, 1968 to mark the 150th birthday of Karl Marx were a “high point of the Party’s political-ideological and theoretical work” for the year.190 This event was yet another example of the increasing Marxist-Leninist indoctrination that the SED undertook beginning in the late 1940s. Aside from its more blatant socialist focus, in many ways the Marx commemorations were very similar to those honoring cultural figures. One of the most important points of the celebration was to emphasize the current relevance of Karl Marx and his ideas to contemporary issues; for “in Marx we honor the founder of scientific communism, the scientist of genius and ardent revolutionary, the greatest son of the German people. His ideas have stood the test of history. The personality and the work of Karl Marx are therefore not only history, but the living present.”191 The examples of Marx, Goethe, and all the other great figures of German history were not simply to be remembered, but rather emulated and applied to the building of socialism in the GDR. 1968 also saw the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the November Revolution of 1918, which underlined similar themes as the Marx commemorations of the same year. The SED noted that “this significant anniversary is an important occasion to prove in a convincing manner that imperialism and militarism are the mortal enemies of the German people and that the

190 Hager, Report to the Fourth Session of the Central Committee, 17.
191 Ibid.
working class together with its allies has the historic task of taking the destiny of the nation into its hands. These lessons taught by the November Revolution, which are of burning actuality for West Germany, have been implemented in the GDR.” Again, the lessons of history have a direct and vital application in the present. These valuable examples were not only to shape domestic GDR policy, but also lead the lost people of the FRG to the socialist German state in the East, the embodiment of these lessons.

Monuments

True to its self-image as the heir to the antifascist resistance fighters, the GDR soon created an immense memorial complex to honor these forefathers. After its dedication in 1958, the Buchenwald memorial became the GDR’s central commemorative site at which to remember the sacrifices of antifascist resisters. The site of the concentration camp at Buchenwald already had a deep national significance. Established in 1937 near Weimar, the Buchenwald camp was created with the legendary “Goethe oak” as its center. This site in the cultural heart of Germany was also a place of terror, misery, and death. During its use as a Nazi camp from 1937 to 1945, the camp housed 239,000 inmates; 56,500 of whom lost their lives there. That Ernst Thälmann, the prewar leader of the KPD, was one of the 56,500 made Buchenwald even more important for regime ideology.

However, it was the “self-liberation” of the camp on April 11, 1945 that gave Buchenwald its prominent place in the GDR’s national historical narrative. The “uprising” occurred after the SS’s rushed evacuation of prisoners left more than

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192 Ibid., 27.
193 Koshar, From Monuments to Traces, 208.
twenty thousand inmates behind and after control had formally been handed over to a committee of prisoners.\textsuperscript{194} Inmates seized weapons and drove the remaining guards out of camp at 3:15pm.\textsuperscript{195} The takeover would later be commemorated by freezing the camp clock at this time. This “self-liberation” by antifascist Communist prisoners would become the central narrative remembered at Buchenwald, omitting the greater context of impending German defeat and approaching American troops. That the majority of Germans in the camp (who made up less than 10% of the total at liberation) were political prisoners from the Communist and Social Democratic parties further solidified the status of April 11, 1945 in the ideology of the GDR.\textsuperscript{196} As a 1983 Buchenwald brochure stated, “the first inmates were German anti-fascists. Unyielding, firmly convinced of the justice of their cause and of its ultimate triumph, they did not abandon their struggle. They embodied the better Germany, they saved the honor of the German nation.”\textsuperscript{197} The SED argued that it was a group of true antifascist resisters who liberated the camp, and that these Communists and Social Democrats would later go on to found the GDR, adding their antifascist credentials to the legitimacy of the regime.

Commemoration in the immediate post-war period was made nearly impossible due to the camp’s use as a Soviet “Special Camp” from 1945 until 1950, but the first traditional monument to commemorate the suffering experienced at the camp was a wooden obelisk erected on April 21, 1945. This wooden memorial had begun to rot by 1948, and the prisoners’ association campaigned for an official

\textsuperscript{194} Overesch, \textit{Buchenwald und die DDR}, 38.
\textsuperscript{195} Koshar, \textit{From Monuments to Traces}, 209.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 208.
\textsuperscript{197} Quoted in Bytwerk, \textit{Bending Spines}, 34.
replacement for the decaying obelisk. In 1949 a memorial grove (*Ehrenhain*) was constructed at the nearby Bismarck monument in memory of the inmates who died in Buchenwald, as urns containing ashes of camp victims had been placed in the vault under the statue and there were several mass graves around it.

The initiative for a permanent memorial at the Bismarck monument site came from the Buchenwald Committee of the VVN, which originally wanted to maintain the Bismarck monument and integrate it into a memorial complex. The Bismarck monument and its site had been used as a site of nationalist allegiance to Bismarck, a tourist spot, an SS festival space, and a focus of commemoration of concentration camp victims. Nevertheless, due to considerable pressure from the SED, the VVN decided to destroy the Bismarck monument. Although the old Bismarck memorial was removed in 1949, a combination of technological problems, political infighting, and labor and supply shortages delayed the construction of the new memorial. It wasn’t until September 1958 that the bell tower and surrounding elements were dedicated.

The first camp museum was erected in 1958, and in 1964 this institution was expanded to include material on the establishment and history of the GDR and on the relationship between monopoly capitalism and fascism. A year later a library was constructed, and in 1971 the Buchenwald Archive opened. The Curatorium for the Building of National Memorials in Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, and Ravensbrück

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was founded in 1955 to ensure both ideological correctness as well as uniformity between the exhibits of three sites.\textsuperscript{203} The concentration camp memorial complexes were to focus on three main subjects: fascism and monopoly capitalism, persecution and resistance, and liberation and education through historical knowledge. The research division of the GDR’s national curatorium for memorial sites began its work in 1971 as well, focusing on the themes of fascism and big industrial concerns, the resistance struggle in Buchenwald and its satellites, the exposure of Nazi crimes, and imperialism and neo-fascism in the present.\textsuperscript{204} Fascism was to be linked with capitalism, the GDR was to be presented as an antifascist state, and these two elements were to be combined to support Cold War policies. History was to inform, warn, and serve the present. This applied especially to Buchenwald, as it was the central memorial of the GDR, so much so that the official history of the memorial at Buchenwald was entitled “Inheritance as Mission” (\textit{Erbe als Auftrag}).\textsuperscript{205}

One contemporary policy served by historical memory was the potential unification of Germany under socialism. Both the ideas of antifascism and \textit{Kultur} were utilized at Buchenwald to further this aim. At the dedication ceremony in 1958, GDR president Otto Grotewohl emphasized the importance of the Buchenwald memorial to both the GDR as well as to the entire German people. Grotewohl argued that “Buchenwald lies in the center of Germany,” and the duty to remember what transpired in the camp was “an obligation of the entire German \textit{Volk}.”\textsuperscript{206} Drawing on the tradition of viewing the area around Buchenwald and Weimar as the cultural heart

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\textsuperscript{203} Koshar, \textit{From Monuments to Traces}, 207.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 281.
\textsuperscript{205} Wegner, “In the Shadow of the Third Reich,” 135.
\textsuperscript{206} Quoted in Sonnet, “Gedenkstätten für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus in der DDR,” 780.
\end{flushright}
of Germany, remembrance was portrayed not only as the duty of the antifascist GDR but as the duty of all Germans. The implicit assumption was that this would be done under the leadership of the SED and focus on the antifascist resisters.

The Buchenwald site became known as the “Kyffhäuser of the GDR,” as the linkage of antifascist resistance in the concentration camp with a national memorial at the former site of the Bismarck monument symbolized the world-historical struggle for peace and socialism.\footnote{Overesch, \textit{Buchenwald und die DDR}, 235.} Just as the Kyffhäuser Monument symbolized the national themes of decline and rebirth, Buchenwald represented a phoenix-like rise from the ashes of imprisonment, suffering, and defeat into the glorious nation of the GDR. In the tradition of national and war monuments of the German past, the Buchenwald memorial was to be visible for miles and surrounded by a square large enough for
mass commemorations and it was an example of what Nietzsche termed “monumental history,” avoiding abstract iconography in favor of direct and figurative representations.\textsuperscript{208} In contrast to the stark remnants of the camp, the Buchenwald memorial emphasized spectacle and monumentality, its key referent being the Soviet Treptow Park monument. The Buchenwald memorial was also reminiscent of the Treptow monument in that it would not primarily be a mournful representation of death but rather a triumphant monument to a German victory over fascism. As James Young observed, “the most prominent architects in the country were enlisted to enact a vision of great roads of blood and sacrifice leading to landscaped mountainsides, crowned by victory monuments overlooking the beautiful Ettersberg Valley.”\textsuperscript{209}

The memorial was built just outside of the actual camp on a hill that overlooks the Thuringian landscape. The site itself was informed essentially by a Christian symbolism of pilgrimage and salvation. Visitors were instructed to begin their tour of the complex along the “blood avenue,” the approach to the camp built by the prisoners themselves. The lower section of the memorial site consists of three ceremonial round spaces, or \textit{Ringgräber}, dramatic reminders of the cost of fascism. The reconstructed ring graves are connected by a long “Street of Nations” flanked by long stone blocks, each labeled with the names of nations whose citizens had been imprisoned in the camp. Upon each block stands a ceremonial brazier. The steps leading up the hill are edged by a series of stone relief structures depicting the history of Buchenwald from the construction of the camp in 1937 to the 1945 self-liberation.


At the top of the hill the visitors encounter Fritz Cremer’s 1958 bronze statue *Revolt of the Prisoners*, which depicts eleven heroic concentration camp prisoners, each symbolizing a stage in the growth of antifascist consciousness. The statue looks out over the green Saale River Valley below and implores all visitors to further action. Initially Cremer had arranged the figures into a wedge shape, but his final version positions them as a human wall of resistance standing before the bell tower.
crowning the memorial complex.\textsuperscript{210} The faces and bodies of the figures have been ravaged by their struggle. In the center a resistance fighter raises his right fist in the “Oath of Buchenwald.” Near him one man raises a rifle, symbolizing the self-liberation, and another man wears a Basque cap, symbolizing the Spanish Civil War.\textsuperscript{211} One figure falls in the struggle, others stand hopelessly, and one turns cynically away from the fight. The most significant figure is perhaps the small child, who symbolizes both the new antifascist generation and a Jewish boy saved by the Communist inmates.\textsuperscript{212} The flag of the working classes waves gallantly over the entire ensemble.

The dialectics of the complex – the concentration camp and the memorial, darkness and light, night and day, the graves and Cremer’s heroic statuary, death and resurrection – amounted to a monument to the future as much as to the past, a status reaffirmed constantly in the GDR in commemorations. From the viewpoint of the SED, fascism was not ended throughout Germany in 1945, but rather continued on in the FRG under the guise of capitalism and imperialism. At the Buchenwald dedication ceremony, Otto Grotewohl asserted that the GDR was the successor to the antifascist resistance, while the FRG was a continuation of Hitler-fascism. Although fascism had been eliminated in the GDR, where “the ideas of the antifascist resistance


\textsuperscript{211} For more on East German remembrance of the Spanish Civil War, see Josie McLellan, \textit{Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering the International Brigades 1945-1989} (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2004).

\textsuperscript{212} Thomas C. Fox, \textit{Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust} (New York: Camden House, 1999), 57. The boy’s name was Stefan Zerzy Zweig and he became something of a disappointment to the GDR in terms of his usability for propaganda purposes. His application to immigrate to Israel was approved around 1970, although he finally settled in Vienna. His life after Buchenwald was never mentioned at the exhibit, as the SED did not consider him to be an appropriate example of socialist development.
fighters were realized in a state of peace,” fascism continued unchecked in West Germany. According to Grotewohl, the memorial at Buchenwald was a “manifestation of the struggle against preparation for an imperialist atomic war which today, especially from West Germany, threatens the German people and humanity.” Only by uniting under socialism and fulfilling the Oath of Buchenwald would Germans be able to finally cast off fascism and rejoin the community of peaceful nations.

There were limits to what would be remembered at places like Buchenwald. The focus on antifascist commemoration not only ignored Nazi racial policies; it also purposely shut out the history of certain kinds of political persecution by the Soviets.

In 1958, the city of Weimar erected a statue of the murdered KPD leader Ernst Thälmann on the “Square of the Fifty-Six Thousand” to commemorate his murder at the nearby Buchenwald concentration camp. No marker memorialized the other 59,999.

Another site at which the SED shaped and reduced what could be memorialized was the former concentration camp of Ravensbrück. A camp primarily for women, it was constructed north of Berlin in 1938. By end of WWII, some ninety-two thousand women and children had died behind its walls. Rosa Thälmann, a Communist party deputy as well as the widow of the murdered KPD leader, began to push for a memorial at the site in the early 1950s. Although she had the support of the

214 Quoted in Ibid.
216 Koshar, From Monuments to Traces, 217.
SED, a large part of what had been the camp was taken over by the Soviet army after the war. Thus the memorial, opened in 1959, was a reduction and reconstruction of the original site consisting of the original commandant’s headquarters, the camp wall, the crematorium, and the camp prison.

While the exhibits and museums at the camp attested to women’s antifascist resistance, they also reaffirmed a male bias by portraying women in traditional gendered roles. Instead of weapons and political pamphlets, the tools of masculine resistance, the exhibits showed needlework and dolls fashioned secretly by female inmates. An SED resolution on the memorial at Ravensbrück included the instructions that the “former German women of Ravensbrück are honored for their co-operation during the anti-fascist democratic revolution, and the building of socialism in the GDR, and also for fighting for the preservation and safeguarding of the peace. The anti-fascist basis of the GDR as a socialist state of working men and farmers [should be] emphasized.”

The women of Ravensbrück cooperated, not struggled. Instead, that is the province of the “working men and farmers,” on and for whom the GDR was based. Monuments at the camp also depicted women less as active historical agents than as stubborn survivors. Will Lammert and Fritz Cremer’s statue Two Women at Ravensbrück, in contrast to Cremer’s work at the Buchenwald monument, depicts two exhausted and frail women who stubbornly survive the horrors of the camp. But unlike the male figures in Revolt of the Prisoners, the two female figures are not active or heroic. “In the historical iconography of GDR

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217 Quoted in Brinks, “Political Anti-Fascism in the German Democratic Republic,” 208.
sculpture, heroic males resist and women (if depicted at all) persevere." But this is only a single example of a broader tendency to ignore or downplay the experiences and role of women under National Socialism, a tendency seen in both popular representations and historical scholarship.

Along with Ravensbrück and Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen was the third main camp memorial site in East Germany. Built near Berlin in 1936, Sachsenhausen was the second largest reconstruction of a concentration camp site in the GDR after Buchenwald. Almost one hundred thousand prisoners died at this site under the Nazis and as many as another thirty thousand died under the Soviets when Sachsenhausen was used as a Special Camp after the war. In the final days of WWII, six thousand

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prisoners died in a death march from the camp towards the Baltic, where the guards intended to drown them.\textsuperscript{219}

The Sachsenhausen memorial was dedicated on April 23, 1961. Upon arriving, visitors would read that “the KPD was the leading political force which organized the anti-fascist and national opposition against the Nazi regime.”\textsuperscript{220} Besides maintaining several original buildings that were still intact, officials reconstructed two prisoners’ barracks, complete with their stark interiors. A museum documented

\textsuperscript{219} Farmer, “Symbols that Face Two Ways,” 108.
\textsuperscript{220} Quoted in Wegner, “In the Shadow of the Third Reich,” 134.
the antifascist resistance of prisoners from nineteen nations, most of whom were members of the Communist party. A huge memorial forum and a Monument of Nations would later be erected.\footnote{Frank, Antifaschistische Mahnmale in der DDR. Ihre künstlerische und architektonische Gestaltung, 18-19.} The statue portrays a Soviet soldier comforting two emaciated inmates and enveloping them in his cloak. Like the monument at Buchenwald, the Sachsenhausen monumental complex is in an open space large enough for several thousand people. This open space was created so that the memorial at the camp could be used for mass commemorative events. The focus was on collective mourning and remembrance, and not on individual memory. Similar to the Marxist-Leninist emphasis on economic classes, the SED preferred collective remembrance ceremonies as a method of national identity formation.

A 1961 directive outlined the purpose of the site, and its duty to present and comment on

the struggle of the German working class and all democratic forces against the Fascist danger; the role of the KPD as the strongest and leading force in the struggle against the criminal Nazi regime; the antifascist resistance in the years 1933-45; … the common struggle of representative of the European nations, in particular the battle of the Soviet prisoners, against the SS terror; the particular significance of international solidarity in this struggle and the measures which led to the liberation of the camp; the re-emergence of Fascism and militarism in West Germany; [and] the historical role of the German Democratic Republic.\footnote{Quoted in Peter Monteath, “Buchenwald Revisited: Rewriting the History of a Concentration Camp,” The International History Review 16, no. 2 (May 1994): 269.}

The memorial at Sachsenhausen emphasized international antifascist solidarity and the role of communists in the resistance. The main memorial complex at Sachsenhausen is the Monument of Nations, which depicts a Soviet soldier and two inmates. The names of the nations who had citizens imprisoned in the camp are
etched on the base of the monument. The Sachsenhausen memorial also utilized the antifascist resistance as the foundation on which the GDR was based, and contrasted this with the continuation of fascism in the FRG. A 1974 brochure asserted that “the murderers are known. Their bloodstained track leads to Bonn. No West German court has sentenced them.” In contrast to the antifascist credentials of the GDR, the FRG inherited the legacies of Nazism because of its continuities of elites and its preservation of the exploitive system of monopoly capitalism.

At its inauguration ceremony Walter Ulbricht directly connected the antifascist resistance in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp with the current tension with the FRG. Ulbricht stressed that “comrades and friends died together in Sachsenhausen so that we, together, could complete their work and secure freedom, democracy, and peace for humanity.” The “we” Ulbricht refers to are the successors to these antifascist fighters, the SED, and, by extension, the loyal citizens of the GDR. At the ceremony it was also proclaimed that “we fighters against fascism, military, and war vow at this holy place to engage all our powers for a general and comprehensive world disarmament and for lasting international peace.”

Similar to the “Oath of Buchenwald,” the language of “oaths” and “vows” was utilized to create a masculine history of victimization, resistance, and triumphal struggle for socialism. Figure 2.5 shows Ulbricht leading a triumphant procession out of the gates of Sachsenhausen at the inauguration of the memorial. Instead of a contemplative or mournful atmosphere, the image depicts a triumphant march.

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223 Quoted in Ibid., 281.
towards socialism with the camp rising behind it, solidly in the past. The memorial at Sachsenhausen, like those at Buchenwald and Ravensbrück, was meant to inspire GDR citizens to become “fighters for peace” and to take part in the contemporary antifascist struggle.

In the absence of popular legitimation, the existence of the GDR was justified through symbols. Buchenwald, Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen became the churches of the Socialist religion in Germany. The 1961 law designating the memorials at Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, and Sachsenhausen as “National Sites of Memory and Warning” (Nationalen Mahn- und Gedenkstätten) codified the purpose of the former
concentration camp sites for the GDR.\textsuperscript{226} As their very name suggests, these memorials were not meant only as sites of remembrance and mourning, but also as a warning for the future. The memorials served to legitimate the existence of the GDR as the inheritor of an antifascist legacy, as well as to justify current policies. It was especially crucial that the younger generations without a direct experience of fascism understand the message of the camp memorials. Beginning in 1954, one of the main methods to inspire new generations to join the antifascist struggle was the \textit{Jugendweihe}, or secular state “confirmation” ritual.\textsuperscript{227} The \textit{Jugendweihe} would often take place at antifascist memorials and former concentration camp sites. At the Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and Ravensbrück camps, history and civics teachers could get instruction on the history of the camps and on the antifascist resistance. Starting in 1965, new members of the FDJ, the Society for Sport and Technique, and other youth groups were initiated at Buchenwald, and since the late 1960s many GDR universities held their ceremonies for newly matriculated students at one of the three camps.\textsuperscript{228} The experience of a youth consecration group in 1962 was fairly typical, and demonstrates what effect the trips to the camps were hoped to have on the young members. A \textit{Jugendweihe} group leader reported that:

\begin{quote}
the excursions to the former concentration camps Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück deeply impressed the participants. The Fascist cruelties were inconceivable to them. … In the clarifying conversation the girls and boys were forced to recognize the danger which comes from the West of Germany, where a Globke and many infamous Nazi blood judges can live and spread slander with impunity. In this connection with the GDR the participants realized why the GDR is the fatherland of German youth.”\textsuperscript{229}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{226} Farmer, “Symbols that Face Two Ways,” 99.
\textsuperscript{227} Koshar, \textit{From Monuments to Traces}, 282.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid.
Buchenwald also became the preferred site for the induction of National People’s Army personnel, who recited the following: “with the antifascist resistance fighters as our model, we love and protect our socialist Fatherland.” All such ceremonies combined the antifascist resistance narrative, the tradition of rites of passage, and the concept of the socialist nation together in order to create a socialist state religion.

Otto Grotewohl stated that the most important goal of the memorials at Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen was “to place the shame and disgrace of the past before the young generation so that they can draw lessons from it,” and that the camps and their memorials must also “indicate the path toward the future and give expression to the will for life and struggle which developed among the prisoners” in their “resistance to Nazi barbarism.” While the memorials would also commemorate the suffering of the victims of National Socialism, “above all they bear witness to the indefatigable strength of the antifascist resistance fighter.” The memorials at the former concentration camps in the GDR limited and defined what and who could be officially remembered there. The focus on antifascism was an attempt to legitimize the East German state by reference to impeachable moral credentials.

Antifascism in the GDR was based upon an ideal unity of the oppressed. This homogenization of victims was represented in the “Memorial to the Victims of Fascism and Militarism” (Mahnmal für die Opfer des Faschismus und Militarismus) in the Neue Wache in East Berlin. The Neue Wache’s long history began as a symbol

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232 Ibid., 96.
of anti-Napoleonic military victory for the Prussians, later becoming a site of national mourning after the First World War under both the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. The Soviet authorities pushed for the creation of a memorial at the Neue Wache and mandated that it be one representing the losses of the Second World War, rejecting a 1953 proposal to create a national Goethe monument at the site.\textsuperscript{233} The Soviet officials saw it as a symbol of German-Russian friendship because of its association with the anti-Napoleonic coalition of 1813, and wanted to utilize that historical connection to build on the idea of a socialist brotherhood and antifascist partnership between the Soviet Union and the GDR.\textsuperscript{234} The new “Memorial to the Victims of Fascism and Militarism” created by the architect and planner Hermann Henselmann was dedicated in 1960. Originally the rear wall was to have Bertold Brecht’s line “Mothers, let your children live,” but for reasons still unclear the inscription “to the victims of fascism and militarism” was chosen instead.\textsuperscript{235} This choice perhaps reflects the message of the Neue Wache memorial that only diligent antifascist awareness of the threat posed by militarism and fascism would preserve the hard-won peace made possible by German Communists and their Soviet brothers. Human grief and collective mourning were not the main focus of the memorial. Beyond that, the memorial reflected a general tendency toward blurring the distinctions between various victim groups. The Neue Wache memorial pointed to a homogenizing tendency of German public remembrance that would begin to characterize the memory landscapes of both East and West in later decades.

\textsuperscript{233} Koshar, \textit{From Monuments to Traces}, 193.
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 194.
The Neue Wache memorial became an important stop in Berlin tourism, and after 1962 – the year in which the GDR instituted universal military conscription – visitors would organize their itinerary in order to be able to observe the change of the guard before the memorial. The Neue Wache had evolved from an imperial guardhouse into a socially conscious memorial meant to remember those who had suffered under fascism, which the SED described as an outgrowth of that very same imperial system. The GDR, as the heir to the antifascist fighters and to the heritage of German culture, created a memorial in a building that was a physical reminder of the old Reich. The choice to use the Neue Wache was an attempt to appropriate German history and to place the GDR in a natural historical progression towards socialism through the protection of a German cultural monument. The Neue Wache monument evolved even further in 1969 when it was renovated, partly as a result of the GDR’s

236 Ibid.
new sense of its own authority, as well as to a concession to international taste. Several additions were made to the memorial, including the East German state symbol (a hammer and compass embraced by sheaves of wheat); an eternal flame housed in a glass cube, urns for the Unknown Soldier and the Unknown Resistance Fighter, and earth from nine concentration camps and nine WWII battlefields.\(^{237}\) The almost complete non-existence of the Holocaust in East German discourse on the Second World War is demonstrated by the failure to include a victim of Nazi racial policies. In swallowing up all the dead – those who died for their politics with those who died for their race – the Neue Wache embodied an act of forgetting. It became possible at least for some Germans to forget that history allowed a choice. Instead, the suffering of Germans in camps and as a result of the war was equated with the suffering created by the regime that represented them.

**Landscape**

Monuments and the greater memory landscape are nothing if not aids to memory, identity, and cultural meaning. Places, objects, and days become culturally resonant symbols that embody the values and self-perceptions of the societies in which they are created. In many ways, the Berlin Wall has become one of the most recognized symbols of the GDR and the Cold War. Even before 1989, the Berlin Wall represented a state and a system to both its own citizens and to the world at large. During the existence of the GDR, the Wall had to be justified domestically and internationally. The Wall both stabilized and delegitimized the GDR, as it

dramatically slowed the loss of human capital to the West while simultaneously undercutting the government’s assertion that it was the “better Germany.” The arguments through which the SED attempted to normalize the existence of the Wall reveal much about the self-perception of the regime and the ways in which it utilized history and memory to legitimate itself and its policies.

Antifascist ideology required historical perspectives, and the GDR searched for historical antecedents for its political and cultural endeavors. The Wall itself was justified through the utilization of history: in the 1950s Erich Honecker, who later led and administered the building of the “antifascist protective wall,” likened the situation in East Berlin to that of the Paris Commune of 1871. According to Honecker, the Commune was massacred because they failed to seal themselves off physically from the surrounding society.238 Walter Ulbricht also made historical comparisons to justify the building of the Wall, claiming that the Wall was an attempt to prevent a repeat of what had occurred in 1933 and 1939. He argued that if the German working class had been as well prepared in 1933 as it was in 1961, “what misfortune would the German people and the world have been spared!”239

The Berlin Wall was a physical expression of the antifascist narrative, as well as an example of how the two Germanys were negative mirror images of each other. The existence of the Wall was justified under the assumption that the neo-fascist FRG presented a real threat to the still developing socialism in East Germany. It was

claimed that the Wall needed to be built as “West German and West Berlin intelligence centers have organized a systematic campaign for defection (Abwerbung) and regular trafficking in humans (Menschenhandel).”\textsuperscript{240} The Wall’s official status as a shield against the fascist FRG resulted in the melodramatic title “Antifascist Protective Wall” (Antifaschistischer Schutzwall) or the euphemistic “State Border of the GDR” (Staatsgrenze der DDR). The Wall existed “to prevent hostile activities of revanchist and military forces of West Germany and West Berlin, [and therefore] such controls will be instituted at the borders of the German Democratic Republic, including the borders of the Western sections of Greater Berlin, as are customary at the borders of every sovereign state.”\textsuperscript{241} The construction of the Wall was officially described as the “securing of the GDR state border to West Berlin” (Sicherung der Staatsgrenze der DDR zu West-Berlin). Since every state secures its borders in one way or another, the term expressed the normality that the SED longed for. While the Wall itself was to be normalized or euphemistically described, however, crossing the Wall was portrayed not as Flucht (escape) but rather as Republikflucht (state desertion), in analogy with Fahnenflucht (military desertion). A successful border crosser was therefore not a Flüchtling (refugee), but a Republikflüchtling (deserter).\textsuperscript{242} This is because the Wall existed also to protect loyal GDR citizens from the lies of the imperialists and militarists across the border and to protect East Germans from themselves if they fell prey to western propaganda. This necessitated the creation “at Berlin [of] a reliable guard and effective control … in order to bar


\textsuperscript{241} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{242} Nothnagle, \textit{Building the East German Myth}, 30-31.
subversive activities (Wültätigkeit).” Such efforts were said to be necessary due to the fascist menace on the other side of the German-German border.

The Wall was depicted in the East German press as a necessary and laudable measure to secure the border and protect the young socialist state from the threat presented by West Germany. The magazine *Frau von Heute* quoted a physician as saying that “I think our government’s actions are wonderful. The provocations from West Berlin have stopped, and life is normal again. Our doctors and nurses are happy that our state has finally put an end to the trade in human beings and the kidnapping of children. … The actions of our government are a contribution to peace.” The GDR was securing its borders just as any nation would, especially when threatened by its neighbor. But the SED did not just hope to normalize the existence of the Wall, it also attempted to use the Wall as evidence that East Germany was the better Germany. The GDR cared for its citizens and for world peace more than the FRG, as demonstrated by its securing of its state border. This idea was further emphasized in the party paper *Neues Deutschland*: “A year later, we can conclude: The protective wall we built against the aggressors has proved secure and preserved peace. … Our state is stable, strong, unassailable, and the Revisionist in Bonn will not find even among their NATO partners anyone willing to support them in desperate actions.” Instead of viewing the Berlin Wall as a despite effort by an illegitimate state to prevent it from hemorrhaging manpower, East Germans were to see the Wall as a socialist victory for peace over the militaristic, imperialist FRG and its allies.

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244 Quoted in Bytwerk, *Bending Spines*, 103.
245 Quoted in Ibid., 104.
Commemorative days and memorials were not the only places in which the young GDR attempted to create a new socialist national narrative and identity. One of the most important tools to this end was the Museum for German History (Museum für Deutsche Geschichte, hereafter MfDG), which opened in the eighteenth-century Berlin Zeughaus in 1952. The SED argued that its decision to reconstruct the Zeughaus was an example of its strong commitment towards the protection of German cultural heritage, much like its use of the Neue Wache. This choice of location also represented the GDR’s attempt to locate itself solidly in Germany’s national identity and history. According to the State Secretary for Higher Education, Gerhard Harig, the new Museum for German History shall utilize the struggle of the progressive forces of the past for our present-day national struggle … Today, faced with the attempts by the American warmongers to extinguish the national traditions and characteristics of the German people, it is more important than ever to rewrite German history, free of all falsifications and distortions … For in the maturation process of our people’s national consciousness, knowledge and mastery of history play a decisive role.246

The purpose of the MfDG was thus to educate the German people about their cultural heritage by clearly illustrating that the nation’s humanistic traditions provided the foundation for the GDR. The MfDG’s exhibits also aimed to articulate a Marxist-Leninist ideology and to place the new East German socialist society within that scientific-historic worldview.

This was made a more difficult task given the seeming arbitrariness of the GDR’s borders and the continual competition with the FRG. At the museum’s founding, Otto Grotewohl asserted that the reactionary history written in Germany

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246 Quoted in Nothnagle, “From Buchenwald to Bismarck,” 104.
until 1945 had “obliterated all of the humanitarian, revolutionary, and democratic traditions from the consciousness of the people” and that the MfDG had a responsibility to educate the German people about their history. The SED contended that it alone represented the German people and that it held an exclusive claim on the truth. West German historical narratives could not be trusted, as they were lies told by the fascists and capitalists that still controlled the FRG. The GDR, in contrast, had been liberated into socialism, and therefore represented only the best interests of the German people.

The exhibits in the MfDG further elaborated this point, and were used to illustrate the crucial role played by the progressive classes, especially by the working class, in shaping the events of German history. Wolfgang Herbst, the director of the MfDG, remarked that “history museums also used commemorative days, especially through special exhibits and in retrospect and in appreciation of respective historical events support the politics of the SED. They also helped focus the visitors’ view on the next goals for the building of socialism.” Georg Schirmer noted that “through the special exhibits, the Museum for German History made a contribution to socialist patriotism and proletarian internationalism, especially the spread of friendship with the Soviet Union.” All of these points were important in SED historical memory, and their presentation in a museum added further legitimacy to their claims.

The exhibits also emphasized how the reactionary elites oppressed the people and used force, coercion, and manipulation to continue their control over Germany. For example, “Ten Years of the German Democratic Republic” was a special exhibit

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248 Quoted in Ibid., 359.
249 Quoted in Ibid., 364.
created to mark the October 7, 1959 anniversary of the founding of the GDR. This exhibit presented the official historical narrative of the GDR, describing its rise from the ashes to its current status as a nation of happy workers and peasants.\textsuperscript{250} The director of the MfDG described the goals of the exhibit, describing how it would

in an interesting and clear format convince the visitor of the necessity, the correctness, and the superiority of our Socialist method. The visitor must recognize that the construction of a socialist society represents a step towards a better future, in which constantly rising prosperity, happiness, and enduring peace announces that humankind has learned to master the laws of societal development and to break away from the imperialistic death cycle \textit{(Todeskreis)} \ldots With that we provide a valuable contribution to the development of a socialist consciousness.\textsuperscript{251}

Placing the GDR in the historical development from oppression towards freedom was part of the attempt to convince East Germans that the GDR was the better Germany and to build loyalty to and enthusiasm for the socialist project. Another early exhibit of the MfDG centered on the 1952 celebration of the 70\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Marx’s death. The presentation of the exhibit had a schoolbook character and the materials were arranged for the best ideological affect; in fact, many of the objects were models or recreations rather than authentic items.\textsuperscript{252}

The MfDG offered guides for teachers that broke the exhibit down room by room and provided a clear interpretation of history that should be taught to students, and individuals were encouraged to take one of the guided tours, which utilized many of the same techniques.\textsuperscript{253} These guides and tours helped insure that the message

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\textsuperscript{251} Quoted in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{252} Vorsteher and Deutsches Historisches Museum, \textit{Parteiauftrag}, 393.
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presented by the exhibits was uniform and gave the ideologically correct interpretation of the GDR and its history. Visitors leaving the MfDG were meant to come away with the knowledge that the GDR had a historically founded German legacy and identity.

However, even with widespread efforts to utilize historical memory for the benefit of the GDR, not every citizen identified with the version promoted by the government. Individual memories often disagreed with the official versions. For example, discontent with SED policy within the VVN was present in the SBZ, and continued into the GDR. In 1950 the VVN set “the fight against sectarianism in the VVN for the purpose of removing ideological weakness for the successful achievement of political goals” as one of its central tasks. As the VVN included in its ranks not only the antifascist elite but also the “mere” victims, it can be assumed that not all of its membership was pleased with the increasingly dogmatic, manipulated, and exclusive memory promoted by the SED. While they made up the largest percentage of the VVN, Jews became increasingly alienated from the organization during the early years of the GDR. The VVN had become almost completely co-opted by the regime and was therefore affected by the Stalinization of the SED. The period’s mounting anti-Semitism is exemplified in a 1953 statement by the General Secretary of the VVN, in which he declared that it was imperative to remove the “Zionist traitors and agents from the ranks of the antifascist resistance

fighters.” He then appealed to all members of the VVN “to increase the vigilance in the struggle against all the warmonger’s agents,” including Jews. Even though as of May 1946, the victims outnumbered the fighters almost three to one within the association, they became increasingly marginalized by the growing anti-Semitism of the SED and the shrinking definition of a “victim of fascism.”

It is safe to assume that a majority of the VVN members were dissatisfied with the direction that the policies of the group – and the SED – were taking. Instead of attempting to enforce ideological conformity, the SED simply dissolved the VVN in 1953, allegedly because its aims were now official policy. After the disbanding of the VVN, its commemorative activities were taken over by organizations more easily controlled by the SED, including the FDJ. The SED created a Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters (KdAW) to replace the VVN, which officially established political resisters as the symbol for all victims of Nazism and replaced the remembrance of victims with a hegemonic memory of antifascist resistance. This resulted in an even greater marginalization of those who had “only suffered.”

Although veteran anti-Nazi resistance fighters made up no more than one percent of the total GDR population, they were seen as the ideological elite and the “founding fathers” of the new state. However, the majority of the non-Communist resistance fighters lacked any influence on the activities of the KdAW. The regime had drastically restricted even further the memory of the scope and meaning of the

256 SAPMO BArch, SED, V 278/1/2, Bl. 102.
257 Ibid.
260 Young, The Texture of Memory, 75.
261 Brinks, “Political Anti-Fascism in the German Democratic Republic,” 209.
262 Schüttrumpf, “Antifaschismus in der DDR,” 151.
experience of antifascist fighters, defining resisters only as those who acknowledged the SED’s leadership and continued to support the GDR. The Party declared that “the title ‘Resistance Fighter’ belongs only to those who acknowledge the leadership of the party of the working class, defend the unity of the Party, and do everything to build socialism in the GDR.” Entrance into the ranks of victims and resisters was retrospectively determined on the basis of current political affiliation. By presenting the GDR as an antifascist state, the SED created a system in which – regardless of their past actions – anyone who disagreed with government policy could not be a true antifascist fighter.

\[263\] Quoted in Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 76.
Reality does not shape theory, but rather the reverse. Thus power gradually draws closer to ideology than it does to reality; it draws its strength from theory and becomes entirely dependent on it.

– Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless

With the signing of the Basic Treaty with the Federal Republic of Germany and the official acknowledgment of the existence of two German states, the German Democratic Republic began to regularize its relations with the West. The Helsinki Accords, the final act of the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, were another attempt to improve relations between the Soviet bloc and the West. Increasing interaction with the GDR’s western neighbor was seen as a necessary evil by the SED: while it brought in badly needed money, it also brought the less desirable exposure to western ideas. A reformulation of historical identity was needed in response to these treaties. In officially closing the “German Question,” the GDR had to justify its existence as a distinct creation of shared German traditions. The organs of GDR propaganda began to churn out a progressively more national historical narrative to demonstrate that it was the only legitimate German state vis-à-vis its capitalist and prosperous counterpart. Erich Honecker emphasized the need to foster new traditions born on our socialist development and related to socialist construction in the GDR. What we must bear in mind here is that with the German Democratic Republic having existed for more than 30 years the majority of our people have had first-hand experience of socialism, but not of capitalism. Born into a new society, these citizens take the advantages and values of socialism so much for granted as a feature of life that the full extent of these advantages can only be appreciated if seen in historical perspective.  

Officially, the SED claimed that any attraction felt by the GDR’s youth towards the West was simply the result of the high quality of life they enjoyed under socialism. GDR propaganda maintained that its incessant attempts to justify its own existence were only steps taken to counter the lies of western propaganda, to which the inexperienced and naïve citizens of the GDR were supposedly extremely susceptible, having never experienced the hardships of capitalism firsthand.

The most important method used to foster new socialist traditions was the creation of a legitimating historical narrative that simultaneously placed the GDR in the greater stream of German history and provided the foundation for a specifically East German identity. Honecker observed the value of this narrative in relation to the policy of demarcation (\textit{Abgrenzung}) from the FRG:

> Historical propaganda, which has experienced a great upsurge in recent years, is of great value for raising the level of socialist awareness. The outline ‘History of the SED’ and other works such as the life of Ernst Thälmann have become immensely popular. Mention should also be made here of such television productions as ‘Karl Marx: The Young Years,’ serials devoted to Marx, Engels and Scharnhorst, documentary film entitled ‘From the Ruins Newly Risen’ and other programs. They enable the citizens of our country, notably the rising generation, to draw important lessons for coping with the revolutionary challenges of our day. This is not least the case because we give an authentic account of historical events.\textsuperscript{265}

At this time the GDR had to compete with the growing West German heritage industry and the proliferation of historical novels, films, events, and memorials. The growing western discourse on the German past combined with increased interaction between the two Germanys resulted in a greater need for the GDR to demarcate itself from the FRG. The SED abandoned its attempts to link the two Germanys and instead

\textsuperscript{265} Ibid.
focused its efforts on legitimating the existence of the GDR as a separate, unique socialist state.

One of the SED’s chief ideologues, Kurt Hager, justified the policy of *Abgrenzung* in 1971, arguing that “we must not leave one single progressive thinker or writer, nor one single humanist to the enemy. History must be written in such a manner that it becomes evident that the GDR is the socialist state in which all the great progressive and revolutionary traditions of our people are preserved.”\(^{266}\)

Everything positive and German had to be associated with the GDR and – after the Basic Treaty – only with the GDR. The influence of the generation coming of age in 1968 and the Chancellorship of Willy Brandt and his new eastern policies (*Neue Ostpolitik*) resulted in a growing West German engagement with the past.\(^{267}\)

Consequently, the SED became increasingly concerned in the 1970s that the FRG was incorporating the same elements of German history into its self-conception that the GDR claimed as its foundation in an attempt to broaden the “historical legitimate basis for imperialist conditions of power.”\(^{268}\)

Competition with the FRG thus took on a new dimension in this period, as it became crucial for the legitimacy of the GDR that it become not simply the better Germany, but rather a completely different type of state.

In an attempt to utilize as much of German culture and history as possible – given the large number of thoroughly bourgeois people, events, and movements that

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\(^{268}\) Quoted in Brinks, *Paradigms of Political Change*, 205.
made up classical *Kultur* – the SED created the distinction between German cultural heritage (*Erbe*) verses its cultural tradition (*Tradition*). Tradition incorporated those aspects of the past that led directly to the creation of the socialist East German state, whereas *Erbe* described the ideologically less desirable elements of the German past which nevertheless were part of national history and therefore had laid the groundwork for the GDR. This formula enabled Ulbricht to argue that in all periods in the history of humankind, writers and poets have been proponents and harbingers of the new. There is no great work of art which does not in some sense have as its content what is new and progressive. In the period of the decline of feudalism and the beginning of the capitalist era, at the time of the rise of the bourgeoisie, it was the great bourgeois writers who created humanistic works and carried on the struggle against feudalism.

Regardless of the class origins of the great figures of German culture, according to the GDR’s leadership they still represented the inherently German traditions of humanism and progress. This theory was based in Marxism-Leninism, as Lenin argued that “socialism cannot be built unless we utilize the heritage of capitalist culture. The only material we have to build communism with is what has been left us by capitalism.” In his book *Kampf um die Nation*, SED theorist Albert Norden further outlined this concept, arguing that it was not incorrect to incorporate all those figures in German history who, regardless of their own class background and position

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270 Ulbricht, “Closing speech at the Authors' Conference of the Mitteldeutscher Verlag Halle/Saale, 24 April 1959,” 308-309.

or their personal beliefs, had contributed to the strengthening and unification of the German people through their actions or works.\textsuperscript{272}

According to this narrative, all of Germany’s cultural traditions and heritage aided the historical progress towards socialism and the GDR, in which all of the best aspects of \textit{Kultur} were fulfilled. Honecker argued that “it is a basic feature to our relationship to our historical inheritance that we take up the work and legacy of all who have contributed to progress and the development of world culture, and cultivate and develop them in accordance with our socialist and humanist ideals.”\textsuperscript{273} A GDR historian argued in 1985 that the most important goal was “the further development of a vision of heritage and tradition and to cultivate and extend a corresponding understanding of heritage and awareness of tradition as indispensable parts of a socialist conscience amongst GDR citizens and as part of their national identity.”\textsuperscript{274}

For example, as part of the wider rehabilitation of Prussia sparked by the 1980 West German exhibit entitled “Prussia: an Attempt at Taking Stock” (\textit{Preussen: Versuch Einer Bilanz}), Daniel Rauch’s statue of Frederick II was returned in the same year to its place on Unter den Linden in East Berlin, supposedly only “for cultural historical reasons to round off the Forum of Unter den Linden,” as it had “no symbolic importance, was not sensational nor a political demonstration of an attempt to found a ‘new image of Prussia,’ even if opinion makers in the West are making great efforts to claim this.”\textsuperscript{275} In truth, the SED could not allow the FRG to monopolize the

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\item Nothnagle, “From Buchenwald to Bismarck,” 102.
\item Honecker, “Interview with Erich Honecker on Luther and church-state relations in the GDR, 6 October 1983,” 161-162.
\item Quoted in Brinks, \textit{Paradigms of Political Change}, 204.
heritage industry of Prussia, especially since much of Prussia’s former territory was in the GDR. Ideologically this was a difficult maneuver for the SED, which they alternately justified via the concept of Tradition or simply by denying that they were attempting any such rehabilitation.

Commemorations

This new inclusive approach was most obvious in the expanding range of commemorative events that were held after 1970. For example, in 1978 the GDR celebrated the 600th anniversary of the death of Emperor Charles IV, and drew an explicit connection between the peace policies of this medieval king and those of the SED.276 Another example of this trend was the 450th anniversary of Peasants’ War in 1975, which was to be celebrated along with the 30th anniversary of the end of the war, and the 30th anniversary of the land reform (Bodenreform), representing a “unity of revolutionary tradition” between the distant past and the socialist present in the GDR.277 From the SED’s perspective, the anniversary of the Peasants’ War marked an important point at the beginning of Germany’s revolutionary tradition.278 A GDR historian argued that Thomas Müntzer, the radical Reformation theologian, stood “as the embryonic form of the ideology of a future class, as the inspired anticipation of future history,” who should be “brought to the forefront as a protocommunist and

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276 Brinks, Paradigms of Political Change, 268.
277 During 1945-1946 in the SBZ, land reform was undertaken in which the property of large landowners with more than 100 hectares of land and owners who were classified as war criminals or active Nazi party members was taken without compensation. The expropriated land was initially transferred to the relevant local land fund, which then redistributed it among landless peasants and workers.
278 Quoted in Brinks, Paradigms of Political Change, 222.
revolutionary.” The SED thus attempted to project its self-assumed leading role into the past to the figure of Müntzer.

While the 1975 commemorations were more traditional ideologically, the effort put into the 1983 Luther celebrations demonstrated how seriously the SED was promoting the concept of heritage and tradition and was pursing the policy of demarcation. The 1983 commemoration was held in Berlin on November 10. Many historic Luther sites in the GDR were also restored during that same year in honor of the anniversary. The official SED pamphlet on the Luther commemorations stated that “the GDR’s obligation to preserve Luther’s legacy is derived not only from his significance for German and world history, but also from the fact that many sites associated with his life and impact are situated within the territory of the GDR.” As a result, Martin Luther was completely integrated into the revolutionary line of tradition in the GDR by the time of the 1983 celebrations. Honecker vehemently denied that any ideological reorientation had taken place, instead claiming that there was “a living stream of knowledge … which cannot and will not ever stand still.”

The party also claimed that “the progressive achievement of Luther has its firm place in the cultural tradition of the German Democratic Republic” as proven by Erich Honecker’s chairing the commemorative committee. The SED also attempted to justify the Luther celebrations on a more personal level, in an effort to have its citizens identify more intimately with the regime, asserting that “for historical reasons

279 Quoted in Ibid., 223.
281 Quoted in Ibid., 235.
that are due to the work of Luther and the Reformation, the Protestant creed is well and truly dominant in the GDR.”

Instead of viewing East German’s lingering religiosity as the leftovers of capitalism – as Marxism-Leninism suggested – the SED portrayed the population’s Lutheranism as a sign of their alignment with the government’s ideology, values, and historical roots. The unusual position of the Lutheran Church in the power structure of the GDR made co-opting it into the regime a critical task, as churches provided a rare non-political meeting place in which the SED asserted a weaker influence. By the time of the 1983 Luther celebrations, the churches had become spaces of discontent and anti-regime agitation. While these impulses were masked by a focus on the environment and were aided by Ostpolitik and the Helsinki Accords, the potential threat these dissident church groups posed to SED rule was clear. The Luther commemorations represented one of the GDR leadership’s efforts to draw their Lutheran citizens into the socialist fold by attempting to claim the theologian as an ideological predecessor.

In order to aid this effort, the SED released the “Theses about Martin Luther” in September 1981 in several publications, including the *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* and a separate brochure. The first thesis declared that the Reformation resulted from Luther’s struggle against the feudal system, becoming “the ideological support for the highly different class forces behind it,” which finally

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284 For more on SED control of the public sphere, see Ernst Richert, *Macht ohne Mandat* (Köln: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1958), 142-145.
culminated in the German Peasants’ War of 1525.\textsuperscript{285} According to this reading of history, Luther’s primary historical function was as the initiator of an early bourgeois revolution, which was a precondition for the peoples’ reformation, led by Müntzer, which created an opportunity for progress against the feudal system.\textsuperscript{286}

The \textit{Theses} attempted to explain Luther’s utterly anti-revolutionary stance, remarking that “the tragedy of Luther” was the tension between his revolutionary potential and the limitations presented by his bourgeois worldview.\textsuperscript{287} Honecker defended the SED’s seeming reversal in its appraisal of Luther, maintaining that it is important for the historical and traditional consciousness of our people in socialism that Luther and Müntzer are not placed in contrast to each other as opposites irreconcilable right from the start. They have to be treated dialectically as the two figures of the first great German revolution. Luther unleashed a movement which made Müntzer necessary and possible. In this sense both Luther and Müntzer are an indispensable part of our inheritance and our tradition. … Even if the Marxist view of Luther in the GDR has meanwhile developed further, there was no need to correct this basic position.\textsuperscript{288}

These ideological gymnastics attempted to co-opt the legacy of Luther and thus neutralize the space for dissent and agitation represented by the Lutheran Church, all without sacrificing Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Honecker undertook this nearly impossible task, placing Luther in the concept of tradition and heritage by remarking that the success of socialism enabled a fair assessment of Luther’s revolutionary and progressive inheritance, and that East Germany honored all those whose struggles led

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\textsuperscript{285} \textit{Thesen über Martin Luther}, 880. Quoted in Brinks, \textit{Paradigms of Political Change}, 233.
\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., 885. Quoted in Brinks, \textit{Paradigms of Political Change}, 234.
\textsuperscript{288} Honecker, “Interview with Erich Honecker on Luther and church-state relations in the GDR, 6 October 1983,” 162.
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to the creation of the GDR.\textsuperscript{289} Whereas imperialist historians exploited the legacy of Luther, the SED claimed that it was only under the auspices of “real existing socialism” that the truth was able to be revealed. The SED was explicit in its aims in celebrating Luther: it sought “to contribute to the firming up of the historical and political consciousness of the GDR population” and “in making use of what is primarily a church occasion, to strengthen the common bonds of Marxists and Christians and, using this particular event, to further the state consciousness of confessionally rooted citizens, in that the Reformation ceremonies will be carried out together, but with a clear demarcation of world views,” as well as “further developing the process of differentiation within the church leadership of the GDR” from the church leadership of the FRG.\textsuperscript{290}

Another event utilized for contemporary political needs was the 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the fascist book burning at Bebelplatz in Berlin on May 8-10, 1983, on which occasion a book bazaar was held to commemorate the event.\textsuperscript{291} Other events included the “Week of Books” and an exhibit in the Berlin city library.\textsuperscript{292} The foundational myth of antifascism was overtly present, as parallels were drawn between the regime and those who suffered under the Nazis. This was true even down to the selection of books available for purchase: “The Ministry of Culture guarantees that books of co-operating [mitwirkenden] authors as well as a selection of those

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\textsuperscript{289} “Theses Concerning Martin Luther: the 500th Anniversary of the Reformer’s Birth; the official quincentenary brochure, 1983,” 164.
\textsuperscript{290} Quoted in Mary Fulbrook, \textit{German National Identity After the Holocaust} (Polity Press, 1999), 88; See also Hartmut Lehmann, “Die 15 Thesen über Martin Luther,” in \textit{Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR. Band II: Vor- und Frühgeschichte bis Neueste Geschichte}, ed. Alexander Fischer and Günther Heydemann, vol. 2 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1990), 233.
\textsuperscript{291} SAPMO BArch DY 30/3904, Bl. 12.
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burned and forbidden by the fascists will be available in sufficient number for sale.” 293 Additionally, public readings of ideologically orthodox books were held. 294 The SED emphasized that “this reading is dedicated in remembrance of those individuals that the fascists stopped, burned or drove into death and it serves at the same time as a contribution to the current struggle against imperialism, neo-fascism, and the NATO arms buildup.” 295 While the SED’s historical narrative evolved in many ways, this type of legitimizing discourse remained fundamentally consistent throughout the life of the GDR.

By contrast, the annual commemorations of *Reichskristallnacht* on November 9th changed dramatically after 1945. Similar to the Days of Remembrance, the early incarnations of the event gave a larger room for remembrance of Jewish victims of the pogrom. At the commemoration of the November 9th pogrom in 1946 the participants waved Zionist flags and sang Hebrew songs. 296 However, by the time of the GDR’s founding, such demonstrations of solidarity with Jewish victims were replaced by a legitimating discourse of antifascism. A 1978 exhibit in the MfDG commemorating the pogrom declared that “when the most reactionary parts of German finance capital brought the Hitler fascists to power, it was clear to them that they were dealing with a Party that was extremely anti-Communist, anti-democratic, and aggressive. They were also aware of the brutally anti-Semitic character of this Party.” 297 The exhibit mentions the racial aspect of the pogrom, but to a large extent shifted the emphasis from a portrayal of Jewish victimization to one of Communist

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293 Ibid., Bl. 9.
294 Ibid., Bl. 10.
295 Ibid.
296 Fox, *Stated Memory*, 10.
297 Quoted in Ibid., 14.
suffering and resistance. Nevertheless, by 1978 Jews began to regain a prominent place in East German discussions of the November 9th pogrom.\footnote{Angelika Timm, “Der politische und propagandistische Umgang mit der "Reichskristallnacht" in der DDR,” in Die geteilte Vergangenheit: zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten, ed. Jürgen Danyel (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), 219-221.} This was due, in part, to a lingering stereotype of “Jewish finance capitalists” who held enormous political and economic power in the West and who the SED was attempting to approach. Much of the GDR’s leadership felt that courting this “Jewish lobby” through a greatly expanded emphasis on Jewish suffering would bring international favor and desperately needed Western funds. In an acknowledgment of the Jewish community’s ties to the West, many representatives of western states and their Jewish communities were invited to the ceremonies.\footnote{Robin Ostow, “Imperialist Agents, Anti-Fascist Monuments, Eastern Refugees, Property Claims: Jews as Incorporations of East German Social Trauma, 1945-94,” in Jews, Germans, Memory: Reconstructions of Jewish Life in Germany, ed. Y. Michal Bodemann (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 234.}

On the fortieth anniversary of Reichskristallnacht in 1978 churches throughout the GDR hosted discussions about Nazi persecution of the Jews for the first time. In a statement encouraging such discussions, the Conference for Evangelical Leadership proclaimed that “we call to the attention of the churches the fortieth anniversary of Kristallnacht and remember it with shame. An enormous guilt lies on our people. ... In light of the failure and guilt of Christianity revealed by [Reichskristallnacht], today everything must be done to spread knowledge about historic and contemporary Jewry.”\footnote{Quoted in Michael Meng, “East Germany's Jewish Question: The Return and Preservation of Jewish Sites in East Berlin and Potsdam, 1945-1989,” Central European History 38, no. 4 (2005): 628-629.} Thus for the first time since the immediate post-war period, Jews were once again placed at the center of conversations about the pogroms. Since the FRG had a lively public discourse on the Holocaust, the GDR’s
claims to have better addressed the Nazi past were ringing increasingly hollow, given the almost complete marginalization of Jewish victims in East German narratives.

The evolution towards a greater place for Jewish suffering continued at an exponential rate over the next decade due to reliance on Western banks and credit, leading towards the 50th anniversary of the pogrom in 1988. This commemoration had a dual purpose: to draw in Western tourists in its own right, and to generate goodwill with the United States in an endeavor to gain Favored Nation status. The extravagant efforts put into the 1988 anniversary of Reichskristallnacht were such a marked change in SED policy that the (West) Berliner Zeitung ran an article entitled “Did the GDR Just Now Discover the Jews?” The 50th anniversary events were observed with a flood of ceremonies, publications, proclamations, films, and television programs. Plaques commemorating the victims were unveiled throughout the country. On November 8th, the GDR convened a special session of the Volkskammer, during which memorial speeches were given in the presence of Honecker. The SED gave more attention to the pre-1945 history of the Jews, but still did not turn a critical eye to their fates in the GDR. On November 8, Erich Honecker expressed the party line, claiming that “our country became a home for all those fellow Jewish citizens who survived the fascist inferno or who returned from emigration. Many of them served as activists in the building of a new society. Respected, appreciated, and honored, they made lasting contributions to our socialist fatherland.” Officially, anti-Semitism did not exist in the GDR.

301 Fox, Stated Memory, 15.
302 Ibid., 89.
303 Quoted in Ibid.
Of all of the many events that could have been utilized for this purpose, *Reichskristallnacht* served the GDR’s leadership especially well. In the events of November 9th, Jews could be portrayed as passive victims – in keeping with the SED’s hierarchy of victims – and the victims involved were German Jews, making the events theoretically more resonant with non-Jewish East Germans. Not only did the commemorations of *Reichskristallnacht* aim to present the GDR internationally as a state that remembered the fate of Jews under National Socialism, but they were also important in encouraging all GDR citizens to identify with the myth of antifascism. By emphasizing the suffering of Jews on *Reichskristallnacht*, the SED attempted to make the event a part of the antifascist historical narrative. According to the GDR leadership, German Jews were victimized by the Nazis on German soil, just as Germans were victims of the same National Socialist clique.

While Jewish suffering in the past may have gained a more prominent place in the GDR’s historical narrative, anti-Semitism in the present remained a taboo subject. The SED wanted to focus not on contemporary problems such as lingering anti-Semitism, but rather on a discourse of ever increasing historical progress. This was apparent in propaganda directives for the 35th anniversary of the GDR in 1984: “The people must see themselves as the builders of the state. Present this socialist state in the manner it deserves. During this period, no one may spout off about things he does not like.” While identification with the state and its achievements were central goals of the events, however, in a small nod to the ever more obviously poor

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305 Quoted in Bytwerk, *Bending Spines*, 94.
conditions in East Germany, the SED acknowledged that the best they might be able to achieve during these events was mere compliance from the general populace. At the events themselves, Honecker reminded the youth of the role they played in building the free socialist state in the GDR and the proud heritage of which they were a part, arguing that they were “continuing the work of such revolutionary predecessors as Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, Ernst Thälmann and Wilhelm Pieck.”306 According to the SED, the GDR and its citizens were the inheritors of the legacies of the great Germans, and were proud and active promoters of this inheritance. The repetitive and progressively more desperate assertions of this foundational myth were beginning to appear somewhat worse for wear, especially given the growing exposure of East Germans to western ideas and standards of living.

The fortieth anniversary of the foundation of the GDR elaborated even further on these same themes. Honecker spoke of the differences between the two Germanys:

In the West, … a separate state was established without asking the people. There, the process of restoring the old society was started, as were the preparations to establish a new Wehrmacht for NATO using the former [Hitler] generals. They did not confront the past. Today it is clearer than ever before: The founding of the German Democratic Republic, which came about through a popular movement for unity and a just peace, and whose draft constitution had already been discussed by a broad base in all the zones, was virtually a historical necessity.  

While this assertion may have carried quite a bit of weight in the early years of the GDR, by 1989 the FRG had a well-developed public discourse on the Second World War and the Holocaust, political leaders like Chancellor Brandt – who fell to his knees before the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial – and a forty-year long history as a liberal democratic state. Pointing accusatory fingers at the “fascists” over the Wall no longer had the same emotional resonance and no longer served to distract the public from the blatant failures and excesses of the East German system. Despite that, Honecker continued to portray the GDR as both the result of antifascism and anti-imperialism and as the contemporary cure for these lingering evils existing in the FRG.

Furthermore, the only foundational myth that still resonated with East Germans – the legitimating antifascist past of the SED and its leaders – was repeatedly called upon, culminating in Honecker’s invocation of his own antifascist history in comparison to the Nazi past of some FRG leaders:

In sharp contrast to our politics stand the revanchist demands of FRG politicians, spurring concern and protest throughout the world. … The post-war settlements are being questioned, the theory of the supposedly open German question is stated more loudly than it has been previously. The

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revival of the claim of sole representation, from the 1950s and 1960s, has culminated in a claim to so-called responsibility for all Germans. In this regard, there is obviously a considerable amount of common ground between revanchist politicians in Bonn and the increasingly strong neo-Nazis. The emergence of neo-Nazis on the political stage in the FRG is food for thought. In light of the fact that attempts are being made to deny or downplay the existence of neo-Nazism, I would like to remind you that during the Nazi regime, two other comrades and I were turned over to the prison of Hitler’s personal guards for ‘treatment,’ at the same time as the present head of the Republikaner was active there as an SS leader.\(^{308}\)

By the time of the fortieth anniversary celebrations in 1989, the GDR’s antifascism had decayed from a legitimate to a purely legitimating antifascism.

The reason for this conscious effort to legitimize the GDR historically was that not many East Germans seemed to believe in the GDR anymore. An SED report on the upcoming October 7\(^{th}\) celebration of the GDR’s fortieth anniversary warned that “political vigilance must be increased. It must be taken more seriously that hostile forces will be taking the opportunity to abuse cultural gatherings, historical dates and social events.”\(^{309}\) This warning was proven correct when spectators and even participants at the event joined a growing protest march that had formed parallel to the commemorative celebrations. Shouting “Gorby, Gorby,” – referring to Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the USSR and a speaker at the anniversary – the marchers were met by army troops and police forces that used batons and dogs to break up the demonstration, turning their cries to “Gorby, help us!”\(^{310}\) Many were injured and hundreds of arrests were made before order was restored, discrediting


Honecker and his government and turning the celebration of the GDR’s fortieth anniversary into an embarrassing disaster for the SED. The protests changed the event from an opportunity to defend and promote the virtues and achievements of socialism in the GDR into one that criticized the regime. Intended as a legitimizing display of the unity of the GDR’s party and citizenry, the celebrations became a spontaneous demonstration of popular unrest. The anniversary celebrations were observed in a way that was aloof and unresponsive to the needs of East Germans and forced a confrontation with the fact that the regime had yet to solve many fundamental problems. The rapid collapse of the GDR in the weeks after the October anniversary celebrations demonstrates how the SED’s legitimizing discourse no longer resonated with the people of the GDR. The idealism of the immediate post-war period was quickly quashed, and while antifascism legitimated SED rule – or at least shamed East Germans into silence – eventually the image that the GDR presented of itself became utterly disconnected from reality.

**Monuments**

Aside from commemorative events and anniversaries, the SED attempted to stabilize its rule through the use of a historical narrative expressed physically within the memorial landscape and – like the commemorations – many memorials did not resonate with the population and failed in their legitimizing goal. Two monuments that were ignored by the populace except during official ceremonies were Nikolai Tomsky’s sixty-three foot tall red granite statue of Lenin in Berlin’s Leninplatz, dedicated by Walter Ulbricht in 1970 on the one hundredth anniversary of Lenin’s birth, and the massive, forty-three foot high bronze bust of Ernst Thälmann by Soviet
sculptor Lev Kerbel erected in Thälmannplatz in 1986. Both statues were in the ostentatious, heroic style of socialist realism. Like most major GDR monuments, they dominated a large paved square used for official ceremonies. The very form of the Lenin monument was meant to communicate to all who looked upon it that the GDR was the heroic defender of Marxism-Leninism, humanism, and the worker. Professor Nikolai Tomsky, president of the Soviet Academy of Arts and sculptor of the Lenin monument, elaborated on the ways in which the aesthetics of the monument contributed to this effect: “with its appearance the monument represents on the one hand to be sure a portrait, but simultaneously not only the figure of a single person, but rather a symbol for the deeds of many persons. … Monumentality is understood

not only in large dimensions. A work is monumental if it embodies a great idea.”

While this Soviet sculptor created a grandiose monument in the hopes of inspiring visitors with a vision of socialism triumphant, in reality the anachronistic form of the statue – a style not seen in the West after 1945 – failed to connect emotionally or intellectually with the viewer, contributing to the Lenin monument’s removal after unification. The Thälmann monument played a similar legitimating role in the memory landscape of East Germany. The GDR’s leadership maintained that “the

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Thälmann monument itself in form should be designed so as to be more demonstrative to the workers.”

However, the superhuman figures of these monuments had little to do with the men they claimed to represent and a great deal to do with the image cultivated by the SED. They desired a Thälmann and Lenin who would serve as heroes whose prestige and authority they could inherit, and whose legacy they could exploit to their advantage. This historical distortion was particularly pronounced in the presentation of Thälmann: the monument does not commemorate a suffering concentration camp inmate, but a heroic antifascist fighter. As Brian Ladd has observed, this “combination of historical falsification, authoritarian gesture, and bombastic design made the statue[s] unpopular” among the GDR population.

In contrast to the alienating bombastic styles of the Lenin and Thälmann memorials, the central memorial to Marx and Engels in the Marx-Engels-Forum off Alexanderplatz in East Berlin had a simpler, more accessible aesthetic. The Marx-Engels-Forum is composed of an ensemble of sculptures by several artists intended to illustrate the triumph of Marx and Engels’s theory of socialism. Historical progress is arranged in a semi-circle beginning on the western and ending in the eastern side. At the western end, a white marble wall is covered in reliefs showing the suffering of the oppressed under capitalism. The eastern end has bronze reliefs intended to illustrate the happiness of life under socialism in the GDR. East German artist Ludwig Engelhardt’s central statue of Marx and Engels stands at the apex of the semicircle, marking the passage from the misery of capitalism to the joys of socialism and

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representing the bridge between the two. The SED hoped to emphasize this point, arguing that “the monument’s construction in this historic phase of the GDR’s formation as the socialist German state is the representational fusion of place – therefore also the national reality of the GDR… – with the ideal foundations of this country, performed through works of art.” Like the Lenin and Thälmann memorials, the Marx-Engels Forum was to serve an educational and legitimizing purpose: “The central Marx-Engels Memorial (ZMED) is the most significant appreciation of Marx and Engels in the first socialist German nation. It should vivify the intellectual size of the creator of Marxism in that it shows the world-changing power of the idea of Marxism-Leninism and illustrates its effect on German and

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315 SAPMO BArch DY 30/23035.  
316 SAPMO BArch DY 30/18954.
international history and the struggle of the working class.” However, the Marx-Engels monument was imagined in a dramatically different style than the Lenin and Thälmann monuments, even though they were constructed in the same period. Marx and Engels are larger than life, but not extraordinarily so. They take no triumphant poses or expressions, instead standing or sitting rather dispassionately. The soft, rounded forms of Marx and Engels create a dramatically different impression than do the rugged, chiseled features of Lenin and Thälmann: whereas the latter are hard-edged and noble, the almost featureless ZMED can most easily be described as endearing. The utterly undemonstrative and unheroic design of the monument encouraged East Berliners to nickname the figures “the Pensioners,” as well as to describe Marx and Engels as sitting on their suitcases while waiting for permission to immigrate to West Germany. This monument was accessible in a way that more bombastic memorials were not. The SED observed that the monument “sinks easily into the level of Marx-Engels Square and finds itself in the direct experience of the passerby.” While the monument may or may not have communicated the greatness of the GDR in embodying the traditions and ideals of socialism, the monument certainly resonated with the population. That the Marx-Engels memorial was fairly unique in form while monuments like the Lenin and Thälmann memorials proliferated demonstrates how the SED was largely oblivious to the needs and concerns of its people. The GDR’s leadership had to turn to Soviet sculptors to create the heroic and grandiose Lenin and Thälmann monuments, while an East German

317 “Konzeption zur bildkuenstlerischen Gestaltung Palast der Republik / Marx-Engels-Platz,” SAPMO BArch DH 1/28 (1).
318 Ladd, The Ghosts of Berlin, 204.
319 “Konzeption zur bildkuenstlerischen Gestaltung Palast der Republik / Marx-Engels-Platz.”
artist created the Marx-Engels monument in a completely different style. These conflicts in aesthetic self-representation demonstrate how the image that the SED sought to present was not one with which GDR citizens could identify.

**Landscape**

The increasing attention being paid to the Jewish citizens of the GDR was not limited to commemorative events, but was also expressed in the memory landscape. The SED bragged that there were eight Jewish communities organized in the Union of Jewish Communities in the GDR, whose “synagogues and houses of prayer which, having been destroyed during the time of fascism, were rebuilt from government funds and consecrated. The same can be said of the 125 Jewish cemeteries.”\(^{320}\) This claim of GDR support for the Jewish communities in East Germany was somewhat exaggerated, especially as regards Jewish property. In the late 1980s, there were only about 350 Jews belonging to Jewish Communities in the GDR.\(^{321}\) This tiny group did not have the resources to advocate for the protection and restoration of the properties that had formerly belonged to it. While as part of the GDR’s elaborate, state-sponsored commemoration of Reichskristallnacht, Potsdam city officials allowed members of the FDJ to perform minor repairs at the Jewish cemetery, this occurred only after almost forty years of neglect.\(^{322}\) In the words of one Potsdam citizen, the terrible physical state of the cemetery revealed the true intentions of the city: “It is a disgrace for the city of Potsdam that the only living Jew in Potsdam, who is seventy-eight years old, must see to the maintenance of the cemetery. There are overturned

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\(^{321}\) Fox, *Stated Memory*, 80.

\(^{322}\) Meng, “East Germany's Jewish Question,” 631.
tombstones. … Rain comes through the roof of the mortuary. As a citizen of the GDR, it is shameful that the state has not given more support to the cemetery.”

Other Jewish sites in Potsdam were also treated in a haphazard and negligent manner. On November 9, 1979, city officials gathered in front of the site where the synagogue once stood and dedicated a plaque in remembrance of Reichskristallnacht that read, “Here stood the synagogue of Potsdam's Jewish Community. During the nights of November 9 and 10, 1938, this synagogue was plundered and destroyed by the fascists.” In fact, the war and ultimately a wrecking ball in 1958 had caused the destruction of Potsdam’s synagogue.

The treatment of Jewish sites in Potsdam was a microcosm of a wider trend of long-running abandonment and inattention suddenly transformed in the late 1970s into concern and aid because of attempts to gain Western favor and funds. For example, in 1988 the question of returning Jewish property arose once again in response to the city’s plan to build a highway through the Weissensee Jewish cemetery. The city of Berlin had purchased an unused section of the cemetery from the Jewish community in 1921 to construct a new street. An enormous protest from the community, ordinary citizens, and West German journalists forced the SED to cancel the project. Another cemetery in Berlin belonging to the orthodox group Adass Israel had fallen into extreme disrepair by the 1980s. A member of Adass Israel wrote to Honecker complaining about the state of the cemetery and demanded that it be repaired. Surprisingly, Honecker immediately ordered the repairs, and he

323 Quoted in Ibid.
324 Quoted in Ibid.
325 “Memo on the Building of the Highway in the Weiβensee Jewish Cemetery,” SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV/B2/14, Nr. 176.
326 Meng, “East Germany's Jewish Question,” 633.
also called for reconstruction projects on the three other major Jewish cemeteries in East Berlin – the Große Hamburgerstraße, Schönhauser Allee, and Weissensee cemeteries. However, in 1988 Honecker made another dramatic concession to the Jewish community with the eighty-five million mark restoration of the Neue Synagoge in East Berlin. A Jewish site that had been repeatedly rejected for repair as late as 1981 had now suddenly become a place of immense symbolic meaning for the GDR and the SED.\textsuperscript{327} The GDR’s leadership hoped to legitimate its claim to have eliminated anti-Semitism within its borders, thereby hopefully adding additional authority to its self-description as a better Germany. Attempting to pander to the Western emphasis on Jewish suffering, the party proclaimed that “during the years that the so-called final solution to the Jewish question was prepared, this building became throughout Berlin and Europe a symbol of Jewish life, of Jewish solidarity, but also of the brutality of the Nazi annihilation of the Jews.”\textsuperscript{328}

While the reconstruction of Jewish sites might have been targeted at an international audience, the construction of the Palace of the Republic (PdR) in East Berlin was meant for the citizens of the GDR. It was primarily the desire of the GDR leadership to create a vast square for mass demonstrations in East Berlin that impelled them to demolish the heavily damaged imperial palace in 1950.\textsuperscript{329} The Palace of the Republic was constructed in 1976 at the site of the former Hohenzollern palace (\textit{Stadtschloß}), ostensibly to replace an imperialist prince’s palace with a socialist people’s palace. In an effort to legitimate its claims of being the party representing

\textsuperscript{327} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{328} LAB, C Rep. 104, Nr. 601, Conception for the rebuilding of the New Synagogue in Berlin, December 1, 1986. Quoted in Ibid., 632f.
\textsuperscript{329} “Letter to SED Leadership from Abteilung Wirtschaftspolitik,” August 14, 1950, SAPMO BArch NY 4036/686, Bl. 197.
workers and peasants, the SED built the Palace of the Republic as a sort of monument to its own humanism and to the achievements of socialism. The SED asserted that the presence “of the Peoples’ Chamber as well as the central organizations of the party and country leadership” alongside restaurants, public facilities and cultural events made the PdR into a “house of the people.”\textsuperscript{330} The SED claimed that only in a historically advanced society like the GDR could such a place be possible.\textsuperscript{331} For as a house of the people, “the Palace of the Republic is a culmination point of the struggle of the German revolutionary working classes.”\textsuperscript{332}

The role of the Palace of the Republic as a peoples’ palace was emphasized in the GDR’s newspapers. One article described a visit to the Palace of the Republic:

\textsuperscript{330} “Erfahrungen bei der Vorbereitung und Durchführung des Bauvorhabens „Palast der Republik,” February 25, 1976, SAPMO BArch DH 1/28 (2).
\textsuperscript{331} “Konzeption für Bildband „Palast der Republik,” August 4, 1974, SAPMO BArch DH 1/28 (2).
\textsuperscript{332} Ibid.
“Four mothers parked their baby carriages in front of the glass façade of the Palace of the Republic on the Berlin Marx-Engels-Square. The friendly greeter tells me: ‘yet very often even more are parked there. The whole kit and caboodle; mothers with babies, workers, farmers, children’s vacation groups, pensioners, everyone streams into our house. And that is good. After all, it was constructed for the people.’”

The fundamental reason for the existence of a socialist state according to the tenants of Marxism-Leninism is its role in liberating the masses from ignorance, oppression, and misery: to be a nation for and by the workers and peasants rather than a nation which exploited them. Part of the appeal of the GDR, especially in the early years, was the genuine idealism and belief in the socialist project felt by many people. The construction of the Palace of the Republic and its casting as a people’s palace were attempts by an increasingly discredited GDR leadership to appeal to the vestiges of that initial idealism and to prove to the East German citizenry that the GDR was a nation which took the well-being of its citizens seriously.

By 1989, the methods by which the SED sought to historically legitimate its rule were noteworthy for how haphazard, cynical, and contradictory they were. In contrast to the enthusiasm and idealism that characterized the first two decades of the GDR, the memory landscape of this period had deteriorated into self-referential and irrelevant political posturing that rang increasingly hollow. The monuments and commemorations of the GDR’s final years served only to underscore how out of touch the SED leadership had become with the needs of its people.

Conclusion

Only those who still believe in objectivity and truth, who are entirely free of doubt, need defend themselves against Lenin statues.

– Annette Tietenberg

On October 3, 1990, the German Democratic Republic was absorbed into the Federal Republic of Germany, disappearing almost entirely. The dream of a German road to socialism held by many leftist thinkers in 1945 was officially over, and the GDR was relegated to the dustbin of history. The national myths forty-four years in the making collapsed like a house of cards under the pressure for reform. The GDR created national myths and a memory landscape that clashed too strongly with the individual memories and experiences of the citizenry to form a solid foundation for an East German national identity. The SED quashed the more pluralistic discourse that followed the “Zero Hour” and replaced it with a hegemonic official narrative of Communist sacrifice, Soviet friendship, and an inconsistent pastiche of German nationalist traditions. The SED presented a legitimating historical narrative via the memory landscape in an attempt to create at least the illusion of a popular mandate. This narrative changed dramatically over time as the SED strove to solidify its position vis-à-vis the population and to gain some semblance of popular support. If “the Party is always right,” it can also never be wrong, and to many SED members, reform basically amounted to a declaration that the party had made a mistake.

335 Official SED anthem, written by the Party poet Louis Fürnberg: “The Party, the Party, the Party is always right./And, comrades, it will stay that way./For who fights for what’s right is always right./Against lies and exploitation.” Louis Fürnberg, “Die Partei hat immer recht,” quoted in Nothnagle, Building the East German Myth, 17.
Without real reform, however, these superficial attempts to woo the East German citizenry ultimately destabilized the state.

The SED’s national rhetoric changed far more over time and was less uniform throughout the period than has been previously argued. This changing discourse demonstrates how public opinion and a popular mandate are central aspects of a state’s perceived legitimacy, even in a non-democratic nation. The SED attempted to adapt its narrative to fit the needs and demands of the GDR’s citizens, but its unwillingness to truly respond to the desires of the population doomed these efforts. Changes in the narrative were ultimately determined more by competition with West Germany and the SED’s perception of what the people needed rather than by what the people declared they wanted. The Lutheran Church is an excellent example: by the 1980s the church had become a center of anti-regime agitation. The SED aimed to neutralize the threat of the Lutherans by bringing the church back into the ideological fold. Instead of addressing the issues and concerns of the Lutheran protest groups, the SED tried to co-opt the legacy of Martin Luther in the vain hope that this would increase Lutherans’ support for the regime. Empty political posturing was the regime’s only option given the severe legitimacy crisis it was facing and its fundamental inability to reform.

The changing discourse in the GDR also demonstrates that successful myth-building was intertwined intimately with individual memories. A successful national historical narrative meshes with the experiences and beliefs of most – or at least of a substantial portion – of the population. An analysis of the memory landscape in the SBZ and GDR aids in understanding what happens to public memory when the
officially sanctioned memory sets itself determinedly against the diversity and ambiguity of the population’s memories and lived historical experiences. Public memory in the SBZ and the GDR was not always defined by this tension between official and individual memory. Initially they were tightly connected, but the post-war period saw an increasing separation between the two which was never reversed during the existence of the GDR. This descent into vacuous political posturing and an ever more shallow memory landscape was disillusioning for many. The tension between official and individual memory was a fundamental aspect of the GDR and shaped the ways in which the SED presented itself and the state’s relationship to history. The memory landscape of the GDR not only made the past bearable again, it also made it usable in the present and applicable to the future. All the death and suffering that the memory landscape represented was ostensibly an inexhaustible reservoir of legitimacy, and the falsehoods that characterized the invented traditions that their creators sought to legitimate seemed to matter little in the end. The puzzling and contradictory elements of the GDR resulted in a memory landscape that was torn between idealism and cynicism, confidence and insecurity, an imagined past and an expected future. The remaining traces of a disappeared state stand as some of the last witnesses to its complex memory politics and myth-building.

This thesis has significance for understanding not only German identity during the time of division, but national identity construction in general. It has implications as well for the process of nation building, as it demonstrates the importance of at least the illusion of a popular mandate even for authoritarian states, and perhaps even more so for regimes put into place by a foreign military power. This work highlights the
legitimacy crisis faced by governments that lack both a historical narrative supporting their rise to power and who lack a popular mandate. The GDR was fairly unique in its utter artificialness and arbitrariness, but even states with well-established national identities and borders need the legitimation offered by a historical narrative and popular support in order to rule without excessive amounts of coercion.

Although the GDR is gone, remnants remain in the memories and experiences of its former citizens. While the SED irrefutably failed to stabilize the GDR, it did not entirely fail in creating an East German identity. The memory landscape itself attests to the longevity of some of the GDR’s icons: Marx and Engels still sit quietly by the Spree, often visited by tourists who take photos in Marx’s lap. The removal of other GDR monuments and buildings were characterized by intense protests, including the hotly contested destruction of the Palace of the Republic. Even the Jugendweihe is still observed by some in the former East Germany. This raises interesting areas of future research, including the perplexing stability of the GDR nearly right up to the moment of its utter collapse and the phenomenon of Ostologie, nostalgia for the former East German way of life. Obviously the GDR’s myth-building cannot be said to be entirely a failure, as some parts of the memory landscape continue to resonate with the population. This seeming contradiction between sudden collapse and continuing identification raises further questions about the historical narratives of the GDR.
Appendix

Sarcophagus inscriptions attributed to Joseph W. Stalin, on the Soviet War Memorial in Treptow, Berlin. English translations from the German by the author.

Sarcophagus 1:

For two decades the Red Army protected the peaceful development work of the Soviet people. However, in June 1941 Hitler's Germany (Hitlerdeutschland) broke its word and invaded our land, brutally and maliciously breaking the nonaggression pact, and the Red Army was compelled to go into battle to defend its home.

Figure A.1: Bas-relief on the western side of the first sarcophagus. Photo: Heather Stanton, June 2009.

Sarcophagus 2:

Hitler's Rogues... have set as their goal the enslavement or eradication of the population of the Ukraine, Belorussia, the Baltic States, Crimea, and the Caucasus. Our goal is clear and noble. We want to liberate our Soviet soil.

Sarcophagus 3:

The success of the Red Army would have been impossible without the support of the people, without the self-sacrificing work of the Soviet people in firms, in mines and coal pits, in transportation, and in agriculture.

Sarcophagus 4:

A great mission of liberation has been conferred upon you. May you be inspired by the heroic model of your great forefathers: Alexander Newski, Dmitri Donskoii, Kusma Minin, Dimitri Posharski, Alexander Suworow, Micheal Kutusow! May the victorious banner of the great Lenin give you strength!
Figure A.2: Bas-relief on the western side of the fourth sarcophagus. Photo: Heather Stanton, June 2009.

Sarcophagus 5:

The heroic defenders of Moscow and Tula, of Odessa and Sevastopol, of Leningrad and Stalingrad have given examples of boundless bravery, iron discipline, steadfastness, and skill to achieve victory. Our entire Red Army orients itself toward those heroes.

Sarcophagus 6:

The Red Army has its noble and solemn purpose for the war, encouraging them to heroic deeds. Therefore it is also clear why the Patriotic war has brought thousands of heroes and heroines forward, who are prepared to go to their deaths for the freedom of their homeland.

Sarcophagus 7:

The ideology anchored in our land, the ideology of equal rights for all races and nations and of international friendship, has achieved total victory over the Hitler-fascist ideology of bestial nationalism and racial hatred.

Sarcophagus 8:

Eternal flame to the heroes, who have fallen in the battle for the freedom and independence of our homeland.
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