

History homework

Recovery: Art and Culture

1.

Gustav Stresemann, the most influential German politician from 1923-1929 helped Germany, in many ways recover in the years he was in power.

Stresemann was a more skilful politician than Ebert, and, as a right-winger, he had wider support. He was also helped by the fact that through the 1920's the rest of Europe was gradually coming out of its post war depression. Slowly but surely, he built up Germany's prosperity again.

Firstly, Stresemann called off the passive resistance (striking) in the Ruhr. He then helped Germany's economic situation by calling in the worthless marks and burning them, replacing them with a new currency called the Rentenmark. Stresemann then began negotiations to receive American loans under the Dawes Plan. He even negotiated reparations payments.

Under the Dawes Plan reparations payments were spread over a longer period, and the loans from the USA poured into German industry. By 1927 German industry seemed to have recovered very well, and exports were on the increase. There was also an increase in cultural achievement in Germany. Artists, writers and poets flourished, especially in Berlin, and produced powerful paintings such as source A.

Stresemann also showed great skill in foreign policy. In 1925 he signed the Locarno Treaties, guaranteeing not to change Germany's Western borders with France and Belgium. As a result, in 1926 Germany was accepted into the League of Nations. Here he began to work, quietly but steadily, on reversing some of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, particularly those concerning reparations and German's eastern frontiers. By the time he died in 1929, Stresemann had negotiated the Young Plan, which further lightened the reparations burden on Germany and led to the evacuation of the Rhineland by British, French and Belgium troops.

There were problems too during this period and Stresemann's foreign policy (joining the League of Nations) upset right-wing extremists such as the Nazis.

However, it is clear that Stresemann certainly eased Germany's situation and helped the country in some ways recover in the years 1923-1929.

2.

The 1920's saw a huge cultural revival in Germany. These years have been seen as a greatest period of experimentation in the whole of Germany's history. As things settled down politically, writers and artists had more of a chance to try out new ideas. The results were impressive and spread across all areas of the arts.

A variety of ideas and techniques were produced by the key painters of the time. For example, some artists like George Grosz, used art to criticize society. One of his paintings, *Grey Day*, was a comment on the boredom experienced by most people in their every day lives.

Alternatively, some artists, such as Hannah Hoeh were members of new movements. She was a member of a group, which believed that the absurd should be considered normal, much of her work was in the form of collage, assembled from smaller parts, including photographs.

This new approach to art was given the name "Neue Sachlichkeit" or "new objectivity" because artists tried to portray society in an objective way. New objectivity was particularly associated with painters such as George Grosz and Otto Dix.

Germany also became the center for new plays and operas. The most famous playwright of the time was Bertolt Brecht, whose *Three-penny Opera* was an enormous success. The cinema also took huge strides. One film, the *Cabinet of Dr Calgari* conveyed a message of anti-military and anti-war. Also, in literature Erich Remarque wrote the celebrated war novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. This novel described the horrors and destruction of the First World War and within three months of its publication in 1929, it had sold 500,000 copies. Later, it was dramatized and made into a highly successful film.

Finally, architecture took a big leap due to Walter Gropius, who, after the First World War became the most influential of all the leaders of the fine arts. He developed a new form, known as Bauhaus, which applied especially to buildings and furniture. He used bold designs and unusual materials. He had many critics within Germany and when Hitler came to power his works were declared degenerate. He was later forced to leave Germany in 1934 but went on to carry on with architecture at Harvard, the USA's leading university, where he became professor of architecture.

Due to this explosion in culture, lively debate flourished in the atmosphere of completely free expression allowed by the republic. At the center of this hectic activity was Berlin, with its 120 newspapers and periodicals (magazines) and 40 theaters. One German writer, Thomas Mann, claimed that Germany had replaced France as a cultural center of Europe.

However, there was opposition to these changes in culture. People on the far right including the Nazis criticized the new culture and people on the far left wing, especially the communists, felt that experimentation was a luxury and did not reflect the real needs of the working class. Moreover, there were many ordinary people in Germany who were confused by the rapid changes in culture and were not impressed when they saw the paintings of Grosz, or the new buildings or furniture of Gropius.

The 1920's were a time of turmoil and anxiety for many Germans. However, out of this time came some of the most innovative and exciting art and culture in Europe. The strict pre-war *censorship* was removed and throughout the 1920's Berlin challenged Paris as cultural capital of Europe, with new and significant developments in painting, cinema, architecture, design, the theatre and other fields.

3.

In many ways the years 1923-1929 were years of recovery for certain elements in Germany. Elements such as the economic crisis, helped by the introduction of the Rentenmark and backed up by the Dawes Plan, Germany's foreign affairs, in which Germany were accepted into the League of Nations due to the signing of the Locarno Treaties, thanks to Stresemann's skill in foreign policy, here Stresemann began work on reversing some of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, and the situation of some areas back home was improved, for example the revival of art and culture in Berlin.

Indeed, Stresemann's government certainly succeeded in stabilizing Germany.

However, criticism and opposition to the changes in Germany came from several quarters including the Communists on the far left wing and the Nazi Party on the far right. By 1930 this resulted in many of the key artists and painters of the time fleeing from Germany, despised or threatened by the Nazis. Additionally, tension and conflict beckoned as extremists opponents of the Weimar government were just below the surface and through the 1920's they were organizing and regrouping, waiting for the chance to win power.

One of the most important of these extremists groups was the Nazi Party and the culture of the Weimar Republic later became a target for the Nazis during the period of the Third Reich. They attacked it as "degenerate" and "un-German". Additionally, the Nazi Party tried to seize power in Germany by holding the government members at gun point in the Munich Putsch in 1923, they failed in their attempt however, it was a sign of things to come throughout the 1920's in what would be a time of tense and turbulent political problems.

To conclude, on the whole, the darling lifestyle and ideas which characterised 1920's Berlin were not to be found in other parts of Germany where people were shocked by the liberal attitudes, to them and many others Berlin was seen as sleazy, corrupt and sex-obsessed. In reality, back home not much of a recovery had been made what so ever and things seemed to have gone from bad to worse between the years of 1923-1929.

What can you tell about Weimar Germany from its culture?

Painting

1.

Source 1 is a painting called Grey Day, painted by George Grosz in 1921. Grosz had been wounded in the war and often shows war disabled in his paintings, along with robot-or doll like figures who seemed to have no control over their lives, such as the figures painted in source 1. Also, just like source 1, his characters are placed in hectic and depressing cities.

In the picture there are three symbolic characters who each represent an area of German society.

The character in the background represents a working class person, the man in the foreground represents an upper-class person who is wearing a badge that shows he supports the monarchy instead of the Republic, and the man in the middle of the picture looks like he has dueling scars, which would make him a member of the military class.

2.

Source 2 is a collection of three paintings called *Big City*, painted by the artist Otto Dix in 1927-1928. He searched for personalities he could include in his paintings to show the uglier side of human nature. He said it was his wartime experiences, which had made him aware of this.

Using source 2 Otto Dix implies that the urban middle-class are out of touch with the realities of life. For example, the centre panel shows a nightclub with a jazz band playing to fashionably dressed, middle-class urban people. Then the other two panels show the revelers on their way home, confronted by the other side of city life, which in one picture shows the revelers dressed in fur coats walking passed a beggar with no legs and a hat in which he hopes someone will spare him some money, and in the other picture is a same scenario but in a dark entry where there is a man with one leg missing and he is using crutches, trying to walk up the cobbled entry.

3.

Firstly, sources 1 and 2 are paintings, which have both been drawn in the same time era, the 1920's and have been drawn by men who fought in the war. In both cases the painters' wartime experiences have influenced the paintings, which both show war disabled in them in some way. For example, both the sources show people who have suffered in the war and have no control over their lives, such as the beggars in source 2 and the working-class person and the ex-soldier in source 1.

Cinema

4.

Source 3 is a poster for the film *The Blue Angel*, starring Marlene Dietrich. The story, which depicts better times is set before the war and this was a time when Germany was wealthy and prosperous, - the total opposite of Germany after the war.

I think the film shown in source 3 would appeal to both men and women in Weimar Germany.

I think the film would appeal to men in Weimar Germany because of the sex appeal of the character who Marlene Dietrich plays.

I also think the film would appeal to women in Weimar Germany because of the glamorous nature of the character who Marlene Dietrich plays, this may appeal to many women.

Architecture

1.

Source 5 is a picture of an apartment block designed by Bauhaus architects for a housing estate in Stuttgart.

Using source 5 I would say the ideas in source 4 which have been realised are: "a welcoming attitude to vehicles and machines, avoiding all decoration, using only basic shapes and colours and economy in the use of space, materials, time and simplicity and also possibly money, depending on what materials were used.

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Sources 1-5 give various impressions of life in Weimar Germany in the 1920's. For example, they give me the impression that in the 1920's art and culture in Germany really took off and it was a time of experimentation, such as the Bauhaus designing new and modern, state of the art structures in Germany and

the artists of the time experimenting with different approaches to their paintings, such as commenting on the society of the time, this was given the name “Neue Sachlichkeit”. Also cinema, theatre and literature in Germany took a step forward with epic films such as *Metropolis*, the most technically advanced film of the decade and the celebrated anti-war novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front* that sold 500,000 copies within three months of publication and was made into a highly successful film.

The sources also tell me that the 1920’s were a time of free society and freedom of speech. For example some key painters of the time used art to criticise society (“Neue Sachlichkeit”) and there were significant developments in other fields too which resulted in some of the most innovative and exciting art and culture in Europe. With these significant developments in painting, the cinema, architecture, design, the theatre and other fields, throughout the 1920’s Berlin challenged Paris as cultural capital of Europe.

However, the sources also tell me that there were problems in Germany, Particularly the contrasts between the urban middle-class and the rest of the German society. For example one source implies that the urban middle-class are out of touch with the realities of life because they have so much money which they flaunt and they have no consideration for the less fortunate people in the German society who did not have much money at all. Another source suggests and attacks the boredom experienced by many of the people in German society in their everyday lives in the 1920’s.

Task

- Firstly, I agree with each of the statements, “Weimar Germany was an exciting and creative place” and “The society of Weimar Germany was rotten and corrupt”.

The 1920’s saw a huge cultural revival in Germany, which are years that have been seen as the greatest period of experimentation in the whole of Germany’s history. Within these years art and culture flourished with key painters such as George Grosz using a new ideas and a new approach to art given the name “Neue Sachlichkeit” which was art that commented on the society of the time. In addition, the cinema and literature took huge strides with films such as the *Cabinet of Dr Calari*, which carried a message of anti-military and anti-war, *Metropolis*, the most technically advanced film of the decade and the celebrated anti-war novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front* which sold 500,000 copies within three months of publication and was made into a highly successful film. There were significant developments in other fields too such as architecture, led by the Bauhaus, all of which resulted in some of the most innovative and exciting art and culture in Europe. Indeed, with these significant developments in painting, the cinema, architecture, design, the theatre and other fields, throughout the 1920’s Berlin challenged Paris as cultural capital of Europe, with its vibrant and creative society and famous nightlife.

However, as with so many other features of Weimar Germany, there was tension and conflict just below the surface, this beckoned as extremists opponents of the Weimar government were just below the surface and through the 1920’s they were organizing and regrouping, waiting for the chance to win power. In reality the 1920’s would be a time of tense and dramatic political problems.

In addition, much criticism came to the changes being produced in the Weimar Republic. This criticism came from extremists groups including the Communists on the far left wing and more importantly the Nazi Party on the right and the culture of the Weimar Republic later became a target for them during the period of the Third Reich. Criticism also came from ordinary people in Germany who were not impressed by the results that were being produced. In addition, there was a big contrasting gap in Germany between the people who had money, the upper class and the people who had very little, the working class. Also, the people with money probably had no concerns for the people without. Moreover, the darling lifestyle and ideas which characterised 1920’s Berlin were not to be found in other parts of Germany where people were shocked by the liberal attitudes, to them and many others Berlin was seen as sleazy, corrupt and sex-obsessed. Many people were worried. In reality, in many ways sections of the German society (Nazi Party) were definitely corrupt and others were most certainly rotten.

