



Germany

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Although Germany did not formally become a nation until 1871, German culture and homosexuality have a long and significant history. Indeed the very word, "homosexual" was coined in what would later become Germany. While Germany, until recently, never officially accepted or welcomed members of the glbtq community, numerous homosexual men, often very highly-placed, managed to thrive in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Germany.

Furthermore, between the two World Wars, Germany became home to one of the most vibrant--even flagrant--glbtq communities ever seen before Stonewall. While that brief flowering unfortunately fell prey to the rise of Hitler and his henchmen, beginning in the 1980s and 1990s there was a significant resurgence of glbtq culture in Germany and an improvement of conditions for gay men and lesbians.

Germany's relationship with its glbtq citizens has been ambivalent. One might characterize it as an early manifestation of a "Don't ask, don't tell" policy wherein much latitude was afforded as long as no one talked too much about it or no one forced officials to take action against it. Other than during the overtly repressive Nazi regime, Germans have seemed content to turn a blind eye to consensual sexual behavior, while simultaneously maintaining rigorously anti-homosexual laws that were occasionally, and arbitrarily, enforced.

German Sodomy Laws

The term homosexuality (*homosexualität*) first appeared in 1869 in a pamphlet by Károly Mária Kertbeny that argued for the decriminalization of sexual activity between men. As in most of Western Europe, sodomy had been a crime since the Middle Ages. Courts interpreted sodomy as same-sex sexual activity, usually anal intercourse, between men. Although women had occasionally been subject to prosecution under sodomy charges, they were usually ignored by the law; an 1851 reform to the Prussian legal code formally exempted them from prosecution.

In general, German sodomy laws tended to be honored more in the breach than in the observance. After the French Revolution of 1789 and the subsequent wars between France and the various German states, much of what became Germany fell under the rule of France, which extended its revolutionary legalization of consensual same-sex sexual activity to the German states it occupied. However, Prussia, the largest and most powerful German state, was never entirely dominated by France. Notwithstanding the fact that its greatest eighteenth-century ruler, Frederick the Great (1712-1786), was widely known for his same-sex affairs, Prussia never repealed its sodomy law.

After the final defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815, a German Federation emerged to replace the old Holy Roman Empire. Nominally, Austria headed this Federation; however, Prussia, a militaristic,



Top: Germany and neighboring countries in 2004.

Center: A uniform bearing a pink triangle that was worn by a prisoner at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Above: Revelers celebrate Christopher Street Day in Berlin in 2004. Photo by Lienhard Schulz.

The image of Christopher Street Day celebrants appears under the GNU Free Documentation License.

industrialized state with a dynamic and growing population, would not long play second fiddle to the tottering empire of the Austrian Hapsburgs. After Napoleon's fall the history of Germany is the story of the virtually uninterrupted growth of Prussian hegemony at the expense of Austrian influence.

From the nearly one hundred separate German states that existed before Napoleon, reorganization, consolidation, and conquest had left only thirty-odd states by the early 1800s. Besides Prussia, medium-sized states such as Bavaria, Württemberg, Saxony, Hesse, Baden, and Hanover were major players. Of these, Bavaria and Hanover had decriminalized consensual sexual activity between males. Unfortunately for gay men, Otto von Bismarck guided Prussia through several aggressive wars, culminating in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, at the end of which King Wilhelm of Prussia became Emperor of the newly created German Empire.

Although, the lesser states retained some nominal sovereignty, for all practical purposes they were absorbed by Prussia. The freshly written German legal code virtually copied the Prussian model, thereby extending the prohibition of sexual relations between men throughout Germany. This section of the German legal code was the infamous Paragraph 175.

The Rise of Sexology

During this period of the expansion of Prussia and consolidation of the German Empire (*das Deutsche Reich*), sexuality emerged as an area of study. Research on sexuality became increasingly popular in Western Europe and the United States, but especially in Germany, which became a leader in the developing field, as sexologists began cataloguing and describing various "types" of men with sexual interests outside the normal. It is no exaggeration to say that homosexuality, as a named category and the subject of scientific scrutiny, was constructed in nineteenth-century Germany.

Karl Westphal used the phrase "contrary sexual feeling" (*conträre Sexualempfindung*) to describe a patient's same-sex sexual desires. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895) postulated a "third sex." Ulrichs believed that homosexuality did not constitute a mere inversion of the sexual interest, but also an inversion of gender traits as well. Ulrichs held that since homosexuality was an innate condition, homosexuals should neither be criminalized nor stigmatized as sinful.

Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902), while accepting the concept of homosexuality as innate, believed that the condition reflected a state of degeneracy and inferiority, though he later modified these views. Still later, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) argued for a combination of nature and nurture as cause of the homosexual condition. Freud posited that all people possessed some potential for homosexual feelings and that adult homosexuals were individuals whose development into heterosexuality became arrested in a phase of same-sex orientation.

Wilhelmine Germany

Wilhelmine Germany (1870-1918) witnessed the development of homosexual relationships in a hothouse atmosphere of militaristic masculinity. The homoerotic relationships of many prominent men of influence in the German Empire combined adherence to the outward trappings of militarism, marriage, and manhood with refined, aristocratic sensibilities. These men included Friedrich Krupp, the richest industrialist in Germany, General Count Kuno von Moltke, military commandant of Berlin, and Prince Philip zu Eulenburg, ambassador to Vienna and the "bosom friend" of Kaiser Wilhelm.

Homosexuality extended to royalty as well. The Kaiser's second son, Eitel Fritz, even after his marriage to a Danish Princess, never foreswore his love of handsome soldiers. Flamboyant King Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845-1886), whose sponsorship of Richard Wagner and expensive castle-building campaign left Germany richer in music and architecture, also indulged his predilection for working-class men to the immense discomfort of his royal court. The scandals following the exposure of Krupp, Eulenburg, Moltke, and others

in the early twentieth century prompted Kaiser Wilhelm's government to enforce Paragraph 175 more stringently.

With many of his closest advisors discredited by accusations of homosexuality, the Kaiser came to rely more on his military leaders. Prussian militarism culminated in Germany's involvement in a disastrous war in which over 3 million German men were killed and an additional 4 million wounded.

The Weimar Republic

Adolf Brand (1874-1945) and Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), two pioneers in the movement to repeal Paragraph 175, suffered serious setbacks in the wake of the von Moltke and Eulenburg scandals and renewed governmental pressure. They persisted, however, even during World War I. Indeed, the day before Germany surrendered and the Kaiser abdicated, Hirschfeld appeared with other speakers before a crowd of five thousand in the heart of Berlin to demand governmental reform.

The Weimar Republic (1918-1933), which replaced the monarchy, initially appeared to foster better conditions for Germany's glbtq community. Berlin soon gained a reputation as one of the "gayest" cities in Europe.

Publications oriented to the glbtq community proliferated, thanks to the greater freedom of expression the press enjoyed. Gay theater and film developed. Dance halls, nightclubs, bars, and cabarets flourished in the heady atmosphere of newly acquired freedom. The movement to repeal Paragraph 175 gained momentum. Although the emancipation movement was dominated by men, at least two women were prominent in it, Anna Rüling and Johanna Elberskirchen, both of whom were associated with Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science. Established in 1919, the Institute became an important center for the study of sexuality and amassed an impressive library.

The Weimar Republic may be the first period in which a visible lesbian culture was developed. In specialized bars and other gathering places, and through a number of publications and organizations, lesbians created a thriving subculture, especially in Berlin, but in other German cities as well.

In his novels, memoirs, and diaries, Christopher Isherwood masterfully conveys the giddy mood of interwar Berlin, but also suggests the shadow of doom that tinged the city's gaiety.

Indeed, the period of freedom proved to be all too brief. Despite the government's apparent willingness to forego its enforcement, Paragraph 175 remained on the books. In the tumultuous atmosphere of the following decades, after Hitler came to power, this law would prove to be disastrous for Germany's glbtq citizens.

In addition to its flowering of gay and lesbian culture, the Weimar Republic witnessed other remarkable transformations. Stripped of all colonies and even a significant portion of her lands in Europe, Germany bore the weight of immense war reparations. Germany's new government could not control the inflation of its currency; from January 1918 when the U.S. dollar purchased 5.21 marks, the currency devalued in 1923 to the point where a U.S. dollar purchased 4,200,000,000,000.00 marks. The economic chaos added to the humiliation and disillusionment that the country felt as a result of the loss of World War I.

Weimar Germany experienced a polarization between liberals who pushed ahead without offering solid plans or explanations of Germany's problems and conservatives who appealed to strong emotions in calling for a return to Germany's former glory. The latter emphasized nationalism and sought scapegoats to explain Germany's humiliating losses.

National Socialism and the Third Reich

The National Socialist Party, the Nazis, explained Germany's problems in terms of betrayal. Good Germans, they contended, could have defeated the Allied armies if only they had not been betrayed by subversives. Chief among the subversives identified by the Nazis were the Jews. But Nazis also targeted Communists, Jehovah's Witnesses, gypsies, and homosexuals. Using highly inflammatory rhetoric, Hitler, Goebbels, and other Nazi propagandists employed their demagogic skills to incite crowds to frenzies of nationalistic and racial fervor.

It did not matter that the "facts" did not bear out the wild claims of betrayal, conspiracy, and subterfuge proclaimed by rabid Nazi rhetoricians to throngs of eager listeners. If one did not look too closely or question too deeply, Hitler and his gang seemed to offer viable solutions to many of Germany's problems. With Nazism came better economic conditions, better housing, and a restoration of national dignity and honor. The purely emotional, irrational appeal characteristic of a high-school pep rally swept most of the nation to the point where otherwise good people became blind to hatred, intolerance, cruelty, and murder in their midst.

Beyond any political or ideological reason, the Nazi Party, with its appeal to hyper-masculinity and manly beauty, attracted a considerable number of homosexual members, including Ernst Röhm (1887-1934), Hitler's second in command and the only one he addressed with the familiar "*du*." Röhm, head of the *Sturm Abteilung*, or SA, also known as the Brown Shirts, was indispensable to Hitler's rise to power. Soon, however, Hitler came to regard Röhm as more of a liability than an asset.

During the "night of the long knives," June 30, 1934, Hitler purged the party of Röhm and some 300 other members of the SA. But even before this internal purge, the Nazis had begun the persecution of homosexuals throughout the country.

Bars and clubs that catered to glbtq customers were closed down beginning in 1933. Nazis requested and received lists of known homosexuals from police. Citizens were encouraged to denounce people they suspected of homosexuality. In May of 1933, Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science was raided by troops who entered the building to the accompaniment of a brass band. The Nazis destroyed the Institute's collection of books and photographs in a public burning before the Opera House.

In addition, Nazis rewrote and reinterpreted Paragraph 175, which had previously referred specifically to anal intercourse, to prohibit any homosexual activity, including all "lewd and lascivious acts"; even homosexual intent fell under the new interpretation. In excess of 100,000 men were arrested under the provisions of Paragraph 175 during the Nazi years; of these approximately 50,000 served time in regular prison and perhaps as many as 15,000 were incarcerated in concentration camps, where most of them were literally worked to death.

Nazis regarded homosexuals as decadent, depraved, and harmful to Germany, believing them to sap the country of its virile men, thereby weakening the family and inhibiting population growth. Clearly accepting Krafft-Ebing's early interpretation of homosexuality as mentally and physically degenerate, Nazis wished to eradicate this blight on German manhood.

The Nazi persecution of homosexuals focused almost exclusively on men. Lesbians did not threaten Nazi ideology in ways that gay men did. Moreover, following World War I and the loss of so many young men, Germany, like France, Great Britain, and Russia, suffered an imbalance in the number of men and women of a marriageable age. One of Hitler's 1932 campaign promises had been, "In the Third Reich every German girl will find a husband." The lesbian subculture that thrived during the Weimar period was effectively dismantled by the Nazis.

In the Nazi concentration camps homosexuals faced harsh regimens of work and/or medical treatments that ostensibly were designed to "cure" them of their obstinate affliction. Although Nazis believed homosexuals were biologically degenerate, they also believed that, unlike Jews or gypsies, some homosexuals could

possibly be recovered by grudgingly hard work, forced visits to brothels, hormone treatments, castration, and other medical experiments.

In the camps, pink triangles identified homosexual inmates. Men of the pink triangle died at a rate disproportionate to other non-Jewish groups confined to the concentration camps. Although Nazis sent some lesbians to the concentration camps as "asocials" or prostitutes, gay men were always the primary focus of their efforts to exterminate or reform homosexuals.

Post-War Germany

Upon the collapse of the Third Reich, Germany's glbtq community did not enjoy an immediate resurgence of freedom. Nor was any compensation offered for the sufferings they experienced during the dark days of the Nazi era. Indeed, many who were convicted under Paragraph 175 remained incarcerated since the Allies argued that these men were truly criminals and therefore legitimately held. To make matters even worse, someone sentenced for eight years of imprisonment under Paragraph 175, who had served three years in jail and then five years in a concentration camp, was still liable to serve five more years in jail since, the Allies contended, the concentration camps were not prisons.

Paragraph 175 remained in both the East and West German legal codes after World War II. East Germany did not repeal the Nazi version of Paragraph 175 until 1967, while West Germany did not do so until 1969. (Austria followed suit in 1971.) The original version of Paragraph 175 was not repealed in Germany until 1994, four years after the reunification of the country.

After the war, the communist government of East Germany, unlike the West German government, did cease prosecuting men for consensual same-sex sexual acts in private. However, it also absorbed privately owned businesses throughout the country into its own hands, thereby effectively closing the gay and lesbian bars that had reopened after the war.

The West German government, on the other hand, retained an official anti-gay policy, yet generally turned a blind eye to low-profile homosexual activity in private that did not involve the under-aged. Gay and lesbian bars were allowed to operate, and it was through these that a later public glbtq community would materialize.

The gay and lesbian rights movement in West Germany may be dated from the screening of Rosa von Praunheim's film, *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation in der er lebt* (It is not the homosexual who is perverse, but the situation in which he lives), at the Berlin Film Festival in 1971. The controversial film, which attacked gay consumerist culture as well as the homophobia of the larger society, sparked the formation of the Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft (Homosexual Interest Group) and led to an American-style liberation movement. In 1972, West Berlin lesbians formed the "women's section" of the gay and lesbian group, Homosexual Action Westberlin, and in 1973 they organized the first lesbian demonstration in Germany, protesting against a series of articles in a newspaper that defamed lesbians.

In 1973 the Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin applied to meet publicly in East Berlin. Although it was denied permission to do so, an East German movement for gay and lesbian rights slowly came into being, meeting at first primarily in private quarters and churches and, later, under the auspices of the Communist Party, which in 1986 finally reversed policy and attempted to integrate gay men and lesbians into society.

Lesbian and gay groups grew throughout the 1980s in both East and West Germany. Lesbians also became increasingly visible in the feminist movement. At the time of reunification in 1990, nation-wide glbtq groups were already in place.

It was not until 1985, forty years after the end of the war, that the first public commemoration

memorialized the murders of homosexuals by the Nazis. In 1994 the reunified Germany not only abolished the original Paragraph 175, but it also set the age of consent for homosexual relations at sixteen, the same as for heterosexual relations.

Germany Today

Today in Germany, far from being persecuted, the glbtq community is welcomed and celebrated by many. Berlin's annual Christopher Street Day Parade, a celebration of gay pride, draws approximately 400,000 people each year, probably the largest glbtq crowd in Europe. Large parades are also held in Cologne, Hamburg, and other major cities. Both Berlin and Munich have become gay and lesbian tourist destinations. Germany's large cities offer a wide variety of glbtq venues, including coffee houses, bars, bookstores, and community centers.

In the 1980s, Berlin's Schwules Museum opened as a private institution dedicated to preserving, exhibiting, and discovering homosexual history, art, and culture. Reminiscent of Hirschfeld's Institute, the museum houses one of the world's largest collections of historical documents and artifacts pertaining to glbtq history. Not surprisingly, the museum emphasizes the struggles, sufferings, and resistance of homosexuals under the repressive Nazi regime.

"Life Partnerships" were authorized by the German Parliament (*Bundestag*) in November 2000. This action extended to gay and lesbian couples virtually all the rights that heterosexual couples enjoy, including the right to the same surnames, hospital visitation rights, rights as next of kin in medical decisions, some parental rights over the other partner's children, inheritance rights regarding health insurance and pensions, and so on.

In June of 2001, voters of Berlin elected Klaus Wowereit, an openly gay man, as the city's new mayor.

In December of 2003, the *Bundestag* agreed to pay \$610,000 for a building to commemorate homosexual victims of Nazi persecution. The edifice will be placed along the Tiergarten Park, a place of prominence in the heart of Berlin.

A leading member of the European Union (EU), Germany has embraced EU's human rights principles, which (as interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights) forbid discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Along with France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian members, Germany has supported a number of initiatives to bring members of the glbtq community closer to equal citizenship.

Of course, homophobia remains a problem in Germany, as elsewhere. The rise of Neo-Nazis and a revival of radical right-wing political parties pose genuine threats to the freedom of homosexuals, among other groups in German society. It remains to be seen whether the forces of repression will be able to stem the emergent feelings of glbtq pride, awareness, and openness.

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