

Why were Germans proud of their country?

- Between 1870 and 1871 the German states beat the French and Prussia united all of these German States into one German REICH under the KAISER
- German soon became a super-state which dominated Europe with its industrial and military power
- By 1914 it had an Empire, with colonies in Africa and the Pacific – the Bismarck Archipelago and German East Africa and German West Africa
- Most Germans were well educated, had good jobs and a healthy diet, lived in comfortable houses with the best welfare system in Europe.
- This led to patriotism and thus criticism of the countries' leaders was frowned upon and this went hand in hand with the German preference for obedience to authority.
- Kaiser Wilhelm II thought that Germany should be all powerful and concentrated on building up a strong army. His obsessions were war and militarism to prove German superiority.
- Kaiser Wilhelm ran the country with the help of a Chancellor and the Reichstag. However, the power lay with the Kaiser who could dismiss the Chancellor and dissolve the Reichstag at will.

How did WWI change Germany?

- Germany went through the Turnip Winter in 1917 and for a year the people faced starvation and lost support for the Kaiser. The Great Germany had been economically destroyed, some people lost faith in their political system and in some sense German military and cultural superiority.
- This led to the Germany Revolution in 1918 and political extremes. The left wing and republicans wanted to re-create the German political system with a President, Chancellor and Reichstag with no Kaiser and more workers rights.
- The right wing wanted to retain autocracy and militarism

What were the underlying weaknesses of the Weimar Republic, its electoral system and Constitution that would allow it to be taken over by Hitler in the early 30s?

- Firstly the electoral system was Proportional Representation. This is very democratic, fair and representative but it led to short lived coalitions that struggled to always make effective decisions. Right-wingers cared little for how democratic the system was and criticised what they saw as its weak tendency to debate without being decisive. Many preferred the authoritarian approach and yearned for a Kaiser figure. They mostly had the support of senior civil servants, big business, judges and the Army.
- The Weimar Govt. wasn't left wing or right wing enough for the radicals and thus faced opposition which was resisted by the government as they didn't want a revolution or return of the Kaiser.
- Article 48 of the Constitution allowed the President to rule as a dictator, without the Reichstag, if an emergency arose.....

Origins of the Republic 1918 - 1919

How did the end of WWI lead to the collapse of the Empire and the creation of the Weimar Republic?

- On 8th the Battle of Amiens and the 100 days Allied Offensive began under General Rawlinson which pushed the Germans out of France and began a gradual German collapse.
- On 25th October, the Kaiser and the Naval Commanders and at Kiel ordered their ships out in one last suicidal bid for glory in the Channel and North Sea. The sailors mutinied....
- Between 25th October and 6th November, soldiers from the German Imperial Army and then workers joined the demonstrations. Strikes and demonstrations erupted throughout the country and the soldiers' and workers' councils took control of the cities with a General strike in Berlin.
- On 9th November, worried the extremists would take control of the country, Friedrich Ebert, head of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the largest in the Reichstag, announced the abdication of the Kaiser and the establishment of the German Republic, with himself as Chancellor.
- On 10th November the Kaiser abdicated and fled to Holland, ending the German Revolution.
- On 11th November, pacifist Erzberger, Major General Von Winterfeldt and Von Obendorff, signed the Armistice in Compiègne in France with Supreme Commander Foch. This didn't end the demonstrations.
- Demonstrations on the streets involving workers and disillusioned returning soldiers intensified – spurred partly by the continued Allied Naval Blockade of Germany which killed 400,000 Germans by its end in June 1919.
- December 1918 there were clashes in Berlin between the left-wing Spartacists and the SDP. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht formed the German Communist Party (KPD). They then led an attempted left-wing revolution in January 1919 with the Spartacus League. It was crushed by January 15th 1919. This led to further Spartacist inspired revolutions in Berlin in March and Munich in April – also crushed by the Freikorps.
- January 19th the first elections were held to establish a new government that would ease tensions, Ebert became the President and Scheidemann became the Chancellor, the SDP went into coalition with the DDP and ZP.
- The new elected Constituent Assembly moved to Weimar to avoid the troubles. The Weimar National Assembly met for the first time in February 1919. They then wrote the Constitution that went into effect in August 1919.
- The Weimar Republic got off to a difficult start. They were forced to sign the Treaty of Versailles, despite Scheidemann quitting rather than signing it. This enabled the right-wing to call them the November criminals....