HANDOUT 3.5.1

NOVEMBER 9 IN GERMAN HISTORY

November 9, 1918

On November 9, 1918, the German monarchy of Kaiser Wilhelm II, often referred to as the Second Reich, ended with the abdication (or resignation) of the Kaiser and his flight to the Netherlands. This shift was triggered by a mutiny staged a few days earlier by sailors of the German Imperial Navy who were weary of battle. By this time, the German army had all but lost World War I. Within hours of the Kaiser's abdication, the SPD (or Social Democrat) politician Philipp Scheidemann stepped out onto a balcony of the Reichstag building in Berlin and proclaimed a republic. Scheidemann, however, wasn't the only one to proclaim a republic that day; later in the afternoon, the communist politician Karl Liebknecht attempted to establish a Free Socialist Republic of Germany. Ultimately, it was the Weimar Republic that won favor, and Germany signed a ceasefire agreement with the Allied powers on November 11.

November 9, 1923

From its creation, Germany's Weimar Republic, which was established at the close of World War I, suffered. The new government's inexperience with democracy coupled with its consent to the Treaty of Versailles left the new republic unpopular. Germany had been forced by the Allied forces to accept Article 231 (the so-called "War Guilt Clause") that in turn demanded massive reparations. The Weimar government's efforts to comply with the treaty crippled the German economy and led to severe inflation. Between 1914 and 1923, the worth of the American dollar went from 4.20 marks to 4.2 trillion marks.[1] Radical groups from both the left (i.e., communists) and the right (i.e., National Socialists, called "Nazis") blamed the Weimar Republic for the country's political and economic upheaval. On November 9, 1923, Adolf Hitler, leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, staged an unsuccessful coup d'état against the Bavarian government. Hitler's plan was to take over the southern state, draw the German army to his side, and then overthrow the government in Weimar.[2] Instead, Hitler was arrested, convicted of treason, and sentenced to five years in prison. (His sentence was later commuted to 9 months). In prison, Hitler composed *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), which describes his youth and his work for the Nazi party as well as his views on politics, race, and the future of Germany.

November 9, 1938

The chain of events leading up to an organized destruction of Jewish homes and businesses on this day was unknowingly set off by the 17-year-old Jew Herschel Grynszpan. After learning that the Nazis had deported his family to Poland, Grynszpan, who had been living in France, went to the German embassy in Paris and fatally shot the civil servant Ernst vom Rath. Nazi leaders exploited this act of personal revenge to launch a nationwide attack against Jews and their property. By the time the violence ended, 7,500 Jewish businesses had been vandalized and almost all Jewish houses of worship had been burned down or otherwise demolished. Hundreds of Jews died, and an estimated 30,000 Jewish men were transferred to concentration camps.[3] After November 9, 1938, Nazi persecution of the Jews intensified, and the National Socialists no longer made an effort to give their acts of discrimination a legal facade. This event in German history came to be known as *Kristallnacht*, or the Night of Broken Glass, which evokes the broken windows of synagogues, homes, and Jewish-owned businesses.

1 Jung, A. (2008, August 14). Millions, billions, trillions: Germany in the era of hyperinflation. *Spiegel Online International*. Retrieved from http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,641758,00.html

2 History Place. (1996). The Beer Hall Putsch. *The rise of Adolf Hitler*. Retrieved from http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/riseofhitler/putsch.htm

3 Benz, W. (1997). *Der Holocaust*. Munich: Beck.

November 9, 1989

This day in German history marks the fall of the Berlin Wall, an event that precipitated the reunification of Germany and the end of the Cold War. For several months prior, tens of thousands of East Germans had been holding public demonstrations for political reform. Fueling their hope was a series of changes that General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev had made in the Soviet Union starting in 1985. Erich Honecker, head of the East German state, remained committed to upholding the status quo, however. The people continued to protest. Five days before the Wall fell, half a million citizens repeated their demand for reform at Berlin's Alexanderplatz.[4] Yielding to pressure, the East German government sent GDR central committee spokesman Günter Schabowski to an international press conference. Caught off guard by a question as to when East Germans would be allowed to travel freely between the East and West, Schabowski announced that the border was open, effective immediately. This news sent thousands of people to the Wall. For the first time since 1961, East Germans enjoyed the freedom of movement.

4 von Hellfeld, M. (2009, August 11). *November 9, 1989: The day that changed European history.* Retrieved from http://dw.de/November-9-1989-the-day-that-changed-european-history/a-4867139