History of the German Flag, Coat of Arms and the National Anthem

The Flag

Black, red and gold in three horizontal stripes are the colors of the flag of the Federal Republic of Germany. These bright colors date back to the emperors of the Middle Ages when flags were supposed to be seen from far distances and as identification marks for the soldiers and knights who were all wearing armors that hid their faces. The colors were painted on the shields and helmets of soldiers of the same party. Black, red and gold are part of the only six colors, which are gold, silver, black, red, blue, and green, that are used for flags or coats of arms. Bright colors are usually put next to darker ones and non-metallic colors next to the metallic colors gold and silver.

The colors black, red and gold appeared again in the first attempts to create a democratic and unified Germany when the leaders of the 1848 Revolution adopted the tricolor flag in the National Assembly or the so called Frankfurt Parliament.

The flag was not actually used until 1918 when the German National Assembly of the democratic Weimar Republic adopted it officially. When Hitler came to power in 1933, he abolished the tricolor flag. In 1949, the flag was reintroduced by the German Parliament as the official symbol for the Federal Republic of Germany.

The top bar is black, the center bar is red, and the bottom bar is gold (yellow).

The Coat of Arms

A black eagle with red beak and talons on a gold field is the coat of arms of the Federal Republic of Germany. The eagle, as the king of the birds, is one of the oldest national symbols in the world and the oldest existing national symbol in Europe, today.

The eagle appeared in antiquity adorning the guard of the first Roman Emperor, Augustus. Thereafter, it became symbol of the dominion of all Roman Emperors. After the decline of Rome, the eagle reappeared on shields of the kings who dominated Europe in the Middle Ages. Charlemagne, the first Frankish king to gather the Germanic peoples along with other tribes into his vast empire, had the statue of an eagle placed on top of his palace in Aachen. Subsequently, after the empire was divided into France and the so-called *Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation* – which included all the German territories with their different princely or ducal leaders – a black, double-headed eagle on a gold escutcheon remained the seal of the Emperors.

After the collapse of the *Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation* in 1804 the double-headed eagle became the Coat of Arms of the Austrian monarchy. For this reason it could not be re-established after Germany's unification in 1871. This unification included all the former states of the *Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation* except Austria with Hungary. As the eagle had always been used as the most important German national symbol, it reappeared with a single head.

In 1919 the eagle became the motif of the seal of the Weimar Republic and in 1948, it was restored by the Federal Republic of Germany as a symbol of German history and tradition.

The National Anthem

Germany's National Anthem is taken from the third stanza of a poem by August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben in 1841. The melody was written by Joseph Haydn (1732-1809). The anthem was banned after World War II, because of the critical content of its first two stanzas. From 1951 on, the third stanza was sung as the national anthem, but never officially declared to actually have this status legally. Only in 1991, it was decided to adopt the third stanza of Hoffmann von Fallersleben's as the German national anthem.