



“[Makes] the very convincing case that, until and unless there is a full accounting for what happened with Donald Trump, 2020 is not over and never will be.” —*The New Yorker*

“Riveting...we can never be reminded too often to never forget.” —*The Wall Street Journal*

Journalist Géraldine Schwarz’s astonishing memoir of her German and French grandparents’ lives during World War II “also serves as a perceptive look at the current rise of far-right nationalism throughout Europe and the US” (*Publishers Weekly*).

During World War II, Géraldine Schwarz’s German grandparents were neither heroes nor villains; they were merely *Mitläufer*—those who followed the current. Once the war ended, they wanted to bury the past under the wreckage of the Third Reich.

Decades later, while delving through filing cabinets in the basement of their apartment building in Mannheim, Schwarz discovers that in 1938, her paternal grandfather Karl took advantage of Nazi policies to buy a business from a Jewish family for a low price. She finds letters from the only survivor of this family (all the others perished in Auschwitz), demanding reparations. But Karl Schwarz refused to acknowledge his responsibility. Géraldine starts to question the past: How guilty were her grandparents? What makes us complicit? On her mother’s side, she investigates the role of her French grandfather, a policeman in Vichy.

Weaving together the threads of three generations of her family story with Europe’s process of post-war reckoning, Schwarz explores how millions were seduced by ideology, overcome by a fog of denial after the war, and, in Germany at least, eventually managed to transform collective guilt into democratic responsibility. She asks: How can nations learn from history? And she observes that countries that avoid confronting the past are especially vulnerable to extremism. Searing and unforgettable, *Those Who Forget* “deserves to be read and discussed widely...this is Schwarz’s invaluable warning” (*The Washington Post Book Review*).

EXTRACT:

Chapter I: To Be or Not to Be a Nazi | To Be or Not to Be a Nazi

I wasn't particularly destined to take an interest in Nazis. My father's parents were neither on the victims' nor the executioners' side. They didn't distinguish themselves with acts of bravery, but neither did they commit the sin of excess zeal. They were simply *Mitläufer*, people who "followed the current." Simply, in the sense that their attitude was shared by the majority of the German people, an accumulation of little blindnesses and small acts of cowardice that, when combined, created the necessary conditions for the worst state-orchestrated crimes known to humanity. For many years after the defeat, my grandparents, like most Germans, lacked the hindsight to realize that though the impact of each *Mitläufer* was tiny on an individual level, it had a cumulative effect, since without their participation, Hitler would not have been able to commit crimes of such magnitude. The Führer himself sensed this and regularly took the measure of his people to see how far he could go, all the while inundating them with Nazi and anti-Semitic propaganda. The first massive deportation of Jews in Germany, which would test the general population's threshold of acceptance, took place in the exact same region where my grandparents lived. In October 1940, more than 6,500 Jews from the southwest of the country were deported to the Gurs camp in the south of France. To accustom their citizens to such a spectacle, German forces of law and order attempted to save face by avoiding violence and commissioning passenger cars—not the freight trains that were later used. But the Nazis wanted to know how much the people would be able to stomach. They didn't hesitate to operate in broad daylight, herding hundreds of Jews through the city center to reach the train station, with their heavy suitcases, their children in tears, and their exhausted elderly—all of this right before the eyes of apathetic citizens who were incapable of exercising their humanity. The next day, the *Gauleiter* (district chiefs) proudly announced to Berlin that their region was the first in Germany to be *judenrein* (purified of Jews). The Führer must have rejoiced to be so well understood by his people: the time was ripe for "following."

One episode, unfortunately one of the few, proved that the population had not been as powerless as it hoped to appear after the war. In 1941, protests by citizens and Catholic and Protestant bishops across Germany succeeded in disrupting the planned extermination of physically and mentally disabled people, or those judged as such, that had been ordered by Adolf Hitler in an effort to purge the Aryan race of "life unworthy of life." Although this secret operation, called Aktion T4, was in full swing, having already gassed 70,000 people in specialized centers in Germany and Austria, Hitler relented in the face of public indignation and called off his plan before it could be completed. The Führer understood the risk he would run if the population perceived him as too overtly cruel. This was also one of the reasons the Third Reich expended an insane amount of energy organizing an extremely complex and expensive system to transport Jews from all over Europe to isolated camps in Poland, where they were murdered far from the eyes of their fellow citizens.

But in the aftermath of the war, no one, or almost no one, in Germany asked themselves what might have happened if the majority of citizens had not followed the current, but instead turned *against* a politics that had revealed relatively early its intention to crush human dignity under its heel. Going along with these politics, like my grandpa, my *opa* did, was so widespread that this crime was mitigated by its banality, even in the eyes of the Allied forces who got it into their heads to denazify Germany. After their victory, Americans, French, British, and Soviets divided the country and Berlin into four zones of occupation where each engaged in eradicating the Nazi elements of society with the help of German arbitration hearings.

They determined four degrees of implication in Nazi crimes, the first three of which theoretically justified the opening of a judicial investigation: the “major offenders” (*Hauptschuldige*); the “offenders” (*Belastete*); the “lesser offenders” (*Minderbelastete*); and the “followers” (*Mitläufer*). According to the official definition, this last term designated “those who did not participate more than nominally in National Socialism,” in particular “the members of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP)... who only went so far as to pay membership fees and attend required meetings.”

In reality, among the 69 million inhabitants who lived within the borders of the Reich in 1937, the number of *Mitläufer* surpassed the 8 million members of the NSDAP. Millions of others had joined affiliated organizations, and still more had cheered National Socialism without belonging to a Nazi organization. For example, my grandmother, who was not an NSDAP member, was more devoted to Adolf Hitler than my grandfather, who was an official party member. But the Allies didn’t have time to examine such nuances. They already had enough to handle with the offenders, both major and lesser: the multitude of high-level officials who had given criminal orders within the bureaucratic labyrinth of the Third Reich, and the many who had executed those orders, oftentimes with an infamous zeal.

People like my grandfather who were members of the Nazi Party emerged almost unscathed. His only punishment was to lose control of his small petroleum products business, Mineralölgesellschaft Schwarz & Co., which was consigned for several years to an administrator appointed by the Allied authorities. He would probably have also found it difficult to get a job as a civil servant if he had wanted one. His daughter, my aunt Ingrid, thinks she remembers him being condemned to “break stones,” but strangely, my father has no memory of this and is sure that, in the unlikely event of such a verdict, my grandfather, “clever as he was,” would have arranged to spare himself the task. He mainly remembers that his father’s business was never better than during that period of forced unemployment, as he turned out to be a much more resourceful businessman on the black market than on the regular one. He remembers that there was always wine on the Schwarz table, as well as meat, eggs, and apples—while many forgot the taste of these products in the ruins of Germany after the war. This discrepancy between the memories of Karl Schwarz’s two children reflects the fact that one was as devoted to her father as the other was estranged from him.

Of course, the Allies couldn’t throw all 8 million members of the NSDAP in prison, largely because there wasn’t enough space behind bars. From spring 1945 on, the Allies moved forward with massive arrests of former party officials and members of the SS, sending about 300,000 of them to prison. Among the Allies, the Americans were by far the strictest in carrying out the denazification of their zone, at least at the beginning. As one of the largest cities of Baden-Württemberg, Mannheim, where my grandparents lived, was just inside the southwestern American zone, which included the north of Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, and Hesse, along with the southwest of Berlin and Bremerhaven to the north, with its precious strategic location on the North Sea. The Americans had a good reputation, and my aunt Ingrid remembers them “always with a smile, healthy at the wheels of their Jeeps, adding a bit of cheerfulness” to the funerary atmosphere of postwar Germany. However, their commander, the future president of the United States Dwight D. Eisenhower, was quite pessimistic, estimating that it would take at least fifty years of intensive reeducation to mold Germans to democratic principles. The Americans were especially dependent on the media, which was under their control, to make the population feel the effects of crimes committed under the Third Reich and to convince the German people of democracy’s charms. But above all, they had the titanic ambition to delve into the pasts of all Germans over eighteen by having them fill out questionnaires, each with about 130 questions designed to indicate their degree of complicity with the regime and their level of ideological indoctrination. With highly bureaucratic rigor, the Americans began to sift through the

millions of forms on their desks, in the interest of punishing the guilty and removing the elements of society most deeply imbued with Nazism. They fired all the officials who had joined the NSDAP before May 1, 1937, and who were therefore suspected of belonging out of conviction. At the end of winter 1945–46, more than 40 percent of government officials in the American zone had been let go.

I couldn't find a copy of my grandfather's denazification questionnaire, but he must have filled one out, because a letter from the occupation authorities indicates that they knew very quickly of his party affiliation. After Karl Schwarz died in 1970, my father looked everywhere in his papers for traces of the card or for party insignia, without success. As soon as the Allies announced their entrance into Mannheim in March 1945, my grandfather, like many of his compatriots, must have thrown any compromising proof into the kitchen stove along with the Nazi flags that were flown from balconies on national holidays. Who knows, he may have even burned a portrait of the Führer that had once hung, as a safeguard, in his office, or destroyed one that my grandmother had saved in a drawer out of attachment. It was a wasted effort, since the local chiefs of the NSDAP fled the city without even a half-hearted attempt to destroy the registry of Mannheim party members, which the Americans found intact when they arrived.

But Karl didn't clear away his Nazi past completely. In Opa's papers, my father found a very strange heraldic drawing: a knight's helmet on a background of black and gold plants partly shielding an imaginary creature—a cross between a goat and a deer with red horns and hooves, whose neck is pierced by a red arrow. Beneath it, the name Schwarz is written in complex calligraphy, with the date 1612 and this text: "The origins of this bourgeois family whose lines flourish in Swabia and Franconia are to be found in Rothenberg." Under National Socialism, genealogy was very much in vogue and even achieved quasi-official status in the service of the regime, which needed to lend its muddy theories of race a credibility that no serious science could provide. This drawing would have had only decorative value, since joining the Nazi party required a document that was more complicated to establish: a certificate of Aryanism, requiring an extensive number of detailed justifications proving the Aryan origins of the applicant and his or her spouse, at least as far back as 1800. It perplexes me that Karl Schwarz also had this nonrequired crest done in watercolor and ink. By all accounts, my grandfather was not a hardline National Socialist—he was too smitten with liberty. "He might have hung it in the offices of his company, so that whenever a Nazi client or official passed through, they would ask fewer questions and leave him alone," my father said. In the thirties, rumors circulated in Germany about business owners suspected of hiding their Jewish origins, which contributed to an atmosphere of paranoia and accusation so intense that some people even published announcements in the newspapers denying any link to Judaism. Opa destroyed his certificate of Aryanism, but strangely, he spared his watercolor, and kept it until his death. According to my father, "he liked the drawing because it gave the illusion of a glorious ancestry. And my father sometimes had dreams of grandeur." In some ways, Karl Schwarz was a man of his time.

As they faced the scope of the task they'd given themselves, the Americans quickly decided to integrate the German justice system into the process of denazification. After the questionnaires were examined, the people suspected of being implicated were sent to one of a few hundred German arbitration chambers in the American zone. In Mannheim, they sifted through 202,070 forms, 169,747 of which were considered "not implicated." Of the 8,823 Mannheim citizens judged at the German hearings, 18 were classified as major offenders, 257 as offenders, 1,263 as lesser offenders, 7,163 as *Mitläufer*, and 122 were exonerated. I doubt my grandfather had a hearing. Either way, since the Americans struggled to find "clean" German judges due to the high degree of complicity with National Socialism among legal professionals, and had to resign themselves to recruiting among the old guard, Karl Schwarz wouldn't have had much to fear. Even

less so once the occupiers could no longer afford to appear uncompromising while German personnel were urgently needed to deal with the numerous problems confronting their own society: malnutrition, a housing crisis, the lack of coal for heat.... Furthermore, American attention soon turned from former Nazis to focus on a new enemy—the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc. A rigorous start was followed by bungled measures, as the Americans attempted to wrap up the denazification process as quickly as possible in order to accelerate the reconstruction of western Germany, which was on the edge of Communist enemy territory.

Unlike the Americans, the British were much less interested in denazification based on sanctions in their northwestern zone, which included Hamburg, Lower Saxony, North Rhine–Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein, and the western sector of Berlin. Above all, they aimed for reeducation through newly created media outlets in the region. Sometimes democratization was imposed with an iron fist, as in the case of a British commander in the small town of Steinfurt, who forced the inhabitants to watch a film made during the liberation about concentration-camp victims. The relationship between the local population and their occupiers was much more distant than in the American zone, and the British were often regarded as a kind of colonial invader, particularly when they commandeered apartments in towns that were already suffering from an acute lack of housing after the bombardments. In truth, the British didn't always have a choice about requisitioning, since they were very much weakened economically by the war and had difficulties financing the costs of the occupation. For the most part, they lived in parallel worlds. The British reserved a certain number of train cars, trolleys, businesses, and cinemas for themselves, with signs posted that read "Keep Out" or "No Germans." They also reproduced their model of clubs, and though they occasionally allowed some Germans entry, this mingling was rare. The British quickly abandoned the idea of decontaminating German society and merely focused on banning former Nazis from applying for the most senior civil service positions and catching the biggest fish. They were so indulgent toward wartime complicity that some Nazis under American occupation hurried to reach their zone.

More than anything, the British were eager to rebuild the economic power of Germany, in which they had their own vested interests. And so they proved to be accommodating if the accused were part of the Reich's economic elite, as was the case with Günther Quandt. He was not a hardline National Socialist, but an opportunist who waited until Adolf Hitler came to power in January 1933 to finance and then join his party. A familial tie reinforced this financial proximity, since the industrialist's second wife, Magda Ritschel, whom he had divorced, had gone on to marry Joseph Goebbels, the future minister of propaganda, in December 1931, with the Führer himself as best man. Despite the fact that he was in conflict with Goebbels over the custody of his son, Quandt's loyalty to Hitler paid off, as he amassed a colossal fortune and became one of the Nazis' largest military suppliers. During the massive labor shortage caused by the mobilization of men to the front, Quandt exploited some 50,000 forced laborers—prisoners of war and detainees in concentration camps, who were "loaned" by the Reich at low cost. In 1946, the Americans arrested Quandt, but he escaped the Nuremberg Trials thanks to the British, who "overlooked" the documents concerning his case and didn't send them to the Americans, then continued the farce by officially classifying him as a *Mitläufer*. In January 1948, the Americans, for their part, refrained from investigating further and liberated him. Soon after, the British army rushed to do business with this weapons specialist.

Quandt was a rare specimen. He made equipment that the whole world wanted, in particular, the battery for the "magic weapon" the Nazis developed during the war—the V2, the first operational ballistic missile and the precursor of intercontinental missiles and space flight. After the war, the Quandt family, which is

now a major shareholder in BMW and other high-profile companies, was steeped in denial about the suspect origins of their fortune until a 2007 television documentary called *The Silence of the Quandts* forced them to acknowledge their past.

As for the French, whose zone was the smallest—it included only a little strip of land at the French border and the northwest of Berlin—they also quickly realized the advantages of being lenient toward industrialists who, in return for this generosity, offered promising business opportunities. In general, the French acquired a reputation as the occupying force least interested in denazification. They preferred to accuse the Germans as a whole, without differentiating individuals by their degree of culpability or hoping to reeducate them. The feeble number of judicial procedures they undertook was in part due to the fact that France itself, having closely cooperated with the Third Reich, had a postwar administration rife with former Vichy collaborators who feared that accusations against the Nazis would return to haunt them. Among the Allies, General de Gaulle, who governed France after the war, was most in favor of policies that would weaken Germany, hoping for it to be permanently divided and to pay maximum reparations. This stance was apparent in the occupiers' vindictive attitude toward the local population, who feared the French agenda. Though the French were only invited to the victors' table at the last minute because of their collaboration with the Reich, they acted like a true occupying force—confiscating apartments to house their own teachers, engineers, and officials, exploiting German labor, and requisitioning food in abundance, while many Germans were living in basements, hungry and cold, with no fuel to warm themselves. There was even a series of rapes.

In the Soviet zone, which spread across the five easternmost *Länder*—Thuringia, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony, Brandenburg, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, as well as eastern Berlin—the denazification measures were applied not only to the Nazis, but also to “undesirables” whom the Soviets wished to get rid of. These so-called Class Enemies included the Junkers, who were the largest landowners, as well as members of the economic elite, social democrats, and other detractors of the new Communist regime, which the occupying authorities quickly tried to put in place following the Moscow model. The Soviets also left the *Mitläufer* in peace, perhaps because they recognized the opportunity to recycle them into good Communists. However, the more heavily implicated Nazis had more to fear in this zone than in the others, since they could not claim, with the Soviets, to have become Nazi party members to oppose Bolshevism, an argument that carried a certain weight in the West. As a result, many Germans preferred to flee the East, especially because of its infamous prison conditions. Thousands of presumed Nazis and “undesirables” languished in former concentration camps, where at least 12,000 perished. Thousands of others were deported to the Soviet Union, where many of them also died.

In March 1948, the Soviets had already chased more than 520,000 former members of the NSDAP from civil service, particularly from the administration and the judiciary, where they quickly replaced them with “loyal” Communists. In less than a year, these new judges and prosecutors had been “trained,” and by 1950 they took on a series of expedited trials called the *Waldheimer Prozesse*, backed by the authority of the newborn German Democratic Republic (GDR). In two months, approximately 3,400 people accused of committing Nazi crimes were tried, without witnesses and without legal assistance, before these inexperienced judges and prosecutors. Their judgments were determined in advance to obtain the maximum penalty, without distinguishing among *Mitläufer*, true offenders, or enemies of communism. These phony trials were above all designed to legitimize, after the fact, the internment of thousands of people in special camps. More than half of the accused were given sentences of up to fifteen to twenty-five years in prison; twenty-four of them were executed. Then the GDR decided that the era of denazification

was over and threw itself into a long denial of its historical responsibilities in regards to the crimes of the Third Reich, designating the Western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) as the sole heir to that somber past.

Germans did not support denazification of the population as a whole, which was perceived as an unbearable humiliation, a *Siegerjustiz*—a conqueror's justice designed to take revenge. But they were largely in agreement with the idea of prosecuting the authorities of the regime.

In November 1945, at the behest of the Americans, a trial opened in Nuremberg against twenty-four high officials from the Third Reich, before an international military tribunal under the authority of the four Allied powers. Treating "the war and the atrocities committed in its name not as politics by other means, but as a crime for which high-ranking politicians and military officers could be held responsible as they could for any other crime" was unprecedented, argues the lawyer Thomas Darnstädt in his 2015 book, *Nuremberg: Bringing Crimes Against Humanity to Justice in 1945*. The major points were developed in advance in Washington under the direction of Justice Robert H. Jackson. The Soviets, who were afraid of being accused of crimes themselves for the abuses of the Red Army and the nonaggression pact they signed with Hitler in 1939, asked that the international criminal jurisdiction accorded at Nuremberg only apply to Allied powers. Judge Jackson refused: "We are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against others which we would not be willing to have invoked against us." The British, who had their own intensive bombardments of German civilian populations in mind, negotiated a compromise: the rules of criminal conduct would be applied to everyone, but the Nuremberg trials would only be responsible for Nazi crimes. More than two thousand people were mobilized to prepare for the trial, sifting through at least part of the miles of archives left by the ultra-bureaucratic regime.

A year after the Nuremberg trial opened, the verdict came down: twelve of the accused were condemned to death by hanging, including Hermann Göring, the Reich's second in command; Joachim von Ribbentrop, the minister of foreign affairs; Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the last head of the powerful Reich Main Security Office (RSHA); Wilhelm Keitel, the head of the armed forces high command; Julius Streicher, the founder of the anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*; and Alfred Rosenberg, ideologue of the Nazi Party and minister of occupied territories in the East. Three were condemned to life in prison, including Rudolf Hess, Hitler's former deputy. Two others—Albert Speer, architect and minister of armament, and Baldur von Schirach, head of the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth)—received a twenty-year sentence. Four organizations—the NSDAP, the Gestapo, the SS, and the SD (Security Services)—were classified as "criminal organizations." The judges decided against a petition by the prosecution to include the German General Staff and the Supreme High Command of the Wehrmacht (OKW) on that list.

The trials demonstrated a resolve, on the part of the Allies, and especially of the Americans, not to let Nazi crimes go unpunished. They defined a new category of wrongdoing: crimes against humanity. But in the short term, these measures didn't have the desired results. Justice Jackson stressed the prosecution of "crimes against the peace of the world" and "conspiracy." This approach reinforced a myth that would take a long time to dismantle: that the Nazi crimes were the result of a secret plan developed by a small group of commanders surrounding Hitler that gave orders to people who were for the most part ignorant that they were participating in a criminal enterprise. Another problem jurists emphasized during the Nuremberg trials was the idea of a tribunal where the victors judged the defeated, imposing silence on the Allied war crimes: the Vichy collaboration; the massive American and British bombardments against German civilians; the atrocities committed by the Red Army in the Reich's eastern territories; the atomic bombs dropped by

the United States on Japan. But one of the greatest failures of the trials was to neglect the genocide of the Jews, as this offense did not yet exist. According to Thomas Darnstädt, “even in the face of this incomparable Nazi crime, there was still a taboo in international law against interfering in the ‘internal affairs’ of a sovereign state,” or so the crimes against German Jews were considered. Only crimes against foreign Jews were taken into account, and just after the war, many aspects of the Reich were still poorly understood. Experts had not yet analyzed the proceedings of the 1942 Wannsee Conference, where the Nazi commanders developed their plans for the Holocaust, which by then had already begun.

Between 1946 and 1949, in keeping with the aims of Nuremberg, the Americans organized twelve more trials in their zone in three years, held under their sole authority—bringing more than 185 doctors, generals, economic leaders, jurists, high-ranking bureaucrats, and commanders of the Einsatzgruppen into court. Twenty-four were condemned to death, thirteen death sentences were carried out, and most of the rest received long prison sentences. At the same time, American public indignation in response to the images of concentration camps that had begun to circulate in the press led the United States to create a military tribunal on the grounds of the Dachau camp, to try the personnel of the six camps situated in the American zone. Approximately 1,600 of the accused were condemned, and 268 of the 426 death sentences were carried out.

In the three Allied zones in the West, approximately 10,000 Nazis in total were condemned by German and Allied tribunals. Of those, 806 were condemned to death, and a third of them were executed. These figures reveal a certain effectiveness, considering the amount of time they had. However, many people who deserved imprisonment for their crimes during the Reich succeeded in slipping through the wide loopholes in the net cast by the Allies. To escape, you had only to pass as a *Mitläufer* by falsifying a few papers and paying one of the *Persilschein*, those false witnesses to “innocence” or “cleanliness,” who were named after Persil washing powder. These witnesses were rarely verified by the occupiers, partly because they were overwhelmed by the scale of the task, and also because their motivation quickly began to flag in the context of the Cold War.

One of the largest discredits to the Allied cause was their own conduct in profiting from their position of strength by stealing German technological knowledge. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the spectacular achievements of German scientists were envied the world over. Between 1900 and 1939, thirty-four were awarded a Nobel Prize (fifteen in Chemistry, eleven in Physics, and eight in Physiology or Medicine), a quarter of them to Jewish Germans. During the same period, fourteen French scientists got the prestigious prize, twenty-two British, and seventeen Americans. The Reich’s defeat was the chance for these countries to help themselves to the kind of technological expertise they lacked, expertise that was especially important in the context of the Cold War. Through an American operation called Paperclip, scientists were discreetly taken out of Germany en masse and installed in positions at American companies and universities, so that those who had collaborated with the Nazi regime (such as Wernher von Braun, the father of the V2 ballistic missile, member of the NSDAP and the SS) wouldn’t fall into the hands of international justice. It was partly thanks to the breakthroughs of these experts in chemical weapons, space exploration, ballistic missiles, and jets that the United States benefited from a technical advantage during the Cold War. Numerous innovations from other sectors were also stolen, including electron microscopes, cosmetics formulas, recording devices, insecticides, and a machine for distributing paper napkins. The United Kingdom also partook of the feast. The historian John Gimble estimates that the Americans and the British made off with German intellectual property worth \$10 billion at the time, the equivalent of \$100 billion today. The French were much less involved in this siphoning off of German expertise. Unlike the

other Allies, they didn't think it was possible to take German technologies out of their context and apply them at home. Nonetheless, the French military and aeronautics sectors brought several hundred scientists to France, particularly those who had worked on the V2 rocket. Newly transplanted German engineers participated in the development of the first fighter jet engines, the first Airbuses, the first French rockets, submarines, torpedoes, radar, and tank engines, allowing France to make important advances in its military capabilities. As for the Soviets, they put thousands of German experts—including Wernher von Braun's assistant—on trains to the Soviet Union with their families, enlisting them without ever asking their permission. These German scientists opened the way, at least indirectly, for the USSR to launch *Sputnik*, the first man-made satellite, in 1957.

Despite these kinds of conflicts of interest, the Allies at least had the integrity to sanction, sometimes strictly, a number of war criminals and Nazi officials, giving Germans the foundations of a vague understanding of the harm a regime like the Third Reich could enact. Thanks to these efforts, my aunt Ingrid, who was born in 1936, told me that she had known in early adolescence that “the Nazis had committed crimes,” because “it was mentioned in school, and even in the media,” where she had seen photos of concentration camps. I was astonished, since my father, who was born in 1943, had always described a total amnesia after the war. Then I realized that Ingrid had gone to school at the moment when the Americans in Mannheim had begun trying to “reeducate” the people, but by the time my father was educated, the parenthesis of denazification had already closed.

In 1949, the Western occupiers authorized the fusion of their three zones to found a new Federal Republic of Germany and allowed Germany to benefit from the Marshall Plan, a program that offered loans to most states in Western Europe to help with their reconstruction after the war. My father often says, “Germany was lucky to have been treated with such leniency after the crimes it committed.” Without the Cold War, Germany's fortunes might have been very different.

At the end of the 1940s, the Allies withdrew from the vast project of denazification. They lacked hindsight and didn't understand all the complexities of the Nazi regime, but above all, outside forces could not do this work for the Germans. It was up to them to change their mentality and take charge of their own democratic fate. There was reason to be pessimistic.